

REGIONAL REPORT

NEWS & NOTES

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Employee Benefits Pilot Project Update

Some of our customers have advised that any solution East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG) can propose to reduce or contain the escalating cost of employee benefits would be of great value. In response ETCOG began a pilot project with Brinson Benefits; an employee benefits broker out of Dallas. The purpose of the pilot project was to determine if Brinson could help ETCOG reduce the cost of our employee benefits package without an adverse impact on our staff. In addition, we wanted to eliminate wasteful and inefficient practices associated with the administration of the benefits plan. While the pilot project is not totally complete as of this writing, I am pleased to report to you that as a direct result of Brinson's efforts on our behalf, ETCOG will be able to deliver significant premium savings to our staff who insure their dependants. Moreover, ETCOG will reap approximately \$100,000 in net savings during the 2010-2011 plan year. While it is not realistic to expect this kind of return every year, as you might imagine we are thrilled with these stellar results. More details and information concerning the pilot project will be provided for our members when it is complete.



ETCOG Executive Director, David Cleveland

In the meantime, based on our successful experience thus far, we are beginning the negotiation process with Brinson Benefits to bring branded cost containment and reduction services to our dues paying members. In view of the complexities associated with recently enacted national health care legislation, we all may need a little more help in the near future. Stay tuned for more developments!

New Statement of Benefits Report

It is important to me and to the Executive Committee that our dues paying members can see and to the extent possible, calculate the return on investment they receive for their annual dues. I promised some months ago that ETCOG would develop a system to track and report services we deliver for you so you can judge the value of your ETCOG membership for yourself. I am pleased to report that the very first Statement of Benefits report aggregated to the county level, was delivered to your mailbox last month. Please be sure to review the Statement of Benefits carefully, and advise concerning any additions, corrections, or clarifications you would like to see in next years report. By this time next year, we hope to deliver both county and city level reports.

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HOME LOAN PROGRAM

USDA Rural Development announced \$85 million in Section 502 Direct Loan funding remains for fiscal year 2010. Due to an increased level of funding as a result of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, USDA Rural Development in Texas had more than \$130 million in Direct Loan funding available this year to help families achieve the dream of homeownership. Direct loans are available to qualified applicants for purchasing or building a single family home in a rural area.

USDA Rural Development's Direct Loan program provides 100% financing through low-interest, no-down-payment loans to help low to very-low income families and individuals purchase their own home. Eligible homes must be located in a community of 10,000 persons or less and locations not closely associated with urban areas.

To assist East Texas residents interested in applying for 502 Direct Loan funding, ETCOG's housing program, Housing East Texas, has become a certified loan packager through the Texas 502 Consortium with USDA and Texas Community Capital. A nominal fee of \$13 will be charged to cover expenses associated with the loan packaging.

For program eligibility or to complete a Direct Loan application, call 903.984.8641 or visit www.etcog.org/498/Home-Loans.htm.



ETCOG INTRODUCES NEW GOBUS BRAND

Regional Transportation System Gets New Name and Look



ETCOG introduced the new brand for its transportation system formerly known as the Rural Transit District at the May 8th National Train Day celebration in Longview. The new name GOBUS encourages East Texans to "Get on the Go" in the eye-catching purple and green buses. At the celebration ETCOG featured the first bus with the new design (pictured left) and distributed GOBUS calling cards.

Currently, one bus carries the new design, and the remaining 40 will be completed this summer after ETCOG completes the procurement process. You can GOBUS! Just call 1.800.590.3371 to schedule your trip.

Visit www.etcog.org to view GOBUS trip schedules for each county. Twenty-four hour advanced notice is required. Please call before 2:00 PM for next day service.

ETCOG CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROGRAM FUNDING

Through the Criminal Justice Division of the Governor's Office, ETCOG has received allocation amounts for the funding of FY 2011 Criminal Justice projects for the region. Project funding is from September 1, 2010, to August 31, 2011. Allocation amounts are as follows:

General Victim Assistance Direct Services Programs (VOCA)
\$712,913

Criminal Justice Programs (SF421)
\$215,471

General Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Programs (JJDP)
\$210,039

Due to the complexity of federal allocation requirements for the STOP Violence Against Women Act program, CJD could not develop a reliable estimated allocation for the Violence Against Women Criminal Justice and Training Projects.

Grant workshops for the funding streams will begin in December or January. For more information, contact Beverly Brooks at 903.984.8641 x282.

EXTRA HELP AND LOW INCOME SUBSIDY AVAILABLE FOR PRESCRIPTION ASSISTANCE

The East Texas Area Agency on Aging (AAA), administered by ETCOG, has trained counselors to help seniors with enrolling in Extra Help and choosing a Medicare prescription drug plan. The program, paid for by Social Security and the State of Texas, offers seniors the opportunity to get a lower co-pay, help paying their Part B or Part D medical premium, and may prevent a coverage gap for the individual and save deductible costs.

Trained counselors are available by appointment with the AAA to help complete an Extra Help / Low Income Subsidy application. The counselors are available to help individuals get answers to questions, review Medicare plans and see if the individual is eligible to qualify for extra help.

The monthly income limit for an individual to qualify is \$1,353 or \$1,821 for a couple. Resources limit, including property, stocks, bonds, and savings, is \$12,510 for an individual and \$25,010 for a couple. A homestead, one vehicle, and personal belongings are not included in resources.

Our counselors suggest seniors call even if their income is higher than these limits because only certain income sources are counted.

For an appointment or for more information, contact 903.984.8641 or Toll Free at 1.800.442.8845. Seniors will need to have their red, white and blue Medicare card and a list of their prescriptions for appointments.

"Seniors receive a lot of marketing materials from companies that are not clear about what they offer. We want to partner the individual with the plan that will best suit their needs."

**- Dovie Lawrence,
Benefits Counselor**

ETCOG PROVIDES ADDITIONAL GRANT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

In an effort to assist the membership and its communities with grant funding, ETCOG has subscribed to two major online funding resources for the Grants and Research Analyst to connect grant seekers to national, state and local grant makers. Reports from the online resources are now available to ETCOG members by request.

The Foundation Directory Online (FDO)

This online directory, which is considered the nation's premier grant seeking database is updated weekly and provides the most comprehensive, accurate information available on the top 10,000 U.S. grant makers and their grants. FDO's funder profiles and grant records are meticulously indexed, providing more than 1,100 terms to ensure a targeted and accurate subject-based search.

The Nonprofit Resource Center of Texas (NPRC)

This online directory offers grant seekers user-friendly, quick searches on private and community foundations in the State of Texas. The service includes the database with complete

profiles on over 3,200 foundations. The search criteria is based on Areas of Interest, Foundation Name, City, and Types of Support. The foundation profiles also list Trustee and Officer names.

ETCOG's Grants and Research Analyst, Monique Jackson, considers the purchase of these subscriptions an invaluable investment for the entire ETCOG Service Region. Monique states, "According to

**"...There is substantial access to a constant stream of potential funding sources...to assist with the critical needs facing the communities within the fourteen county service region."
- Monique Jackson
Grants & Research Analyst**

a recent survey, 99% of the online directory subscribers recommended the services provided. With ETCOG's recent purchase of these annual subscriptions, there is substantial access to a constant stream of potential funding sources which would allow for continuity in seeking grants to assist with the critical needs facing the communities within the fourteen county

service region."

For more information and to obtain data access to specific foundations within these online directories, contact ETCOG at 903-984-8641.



REGIONAL REVIEW COMMITTEE - CDBG GRANT PROGRAM

On April 27th, the East Texas Regional Review Committee, comprised of 12 members appointed by Governor Rick Perry, met at the East Texas Council of Governments to discuss grant criteria for the next biennium of the Texas Community Development Block Grant program. The committee chose to keep the scoring criteria the same, with only a few minor changes. These changes consisted of updating the dates in the ETRRC Guidebook and adding a clause that requires members of the committee to be present for the entire meeting in order to vote on any measures. The Committee also voted to raise the maximum amount that a city or county can apply for from \$250,000 to \$275,000. While this will provide additional funding to eligible entities, this measure may affect the total number of entities that are funded.

Approval of the 2011-2012 Guidebook by the Texas Department of Rural Affairs is expected in June of 2010, however some delays may occur. The application period for the program is expected to open in October of 2010. Information regarding the application will be mailed as well as posted on the ETCOG website.

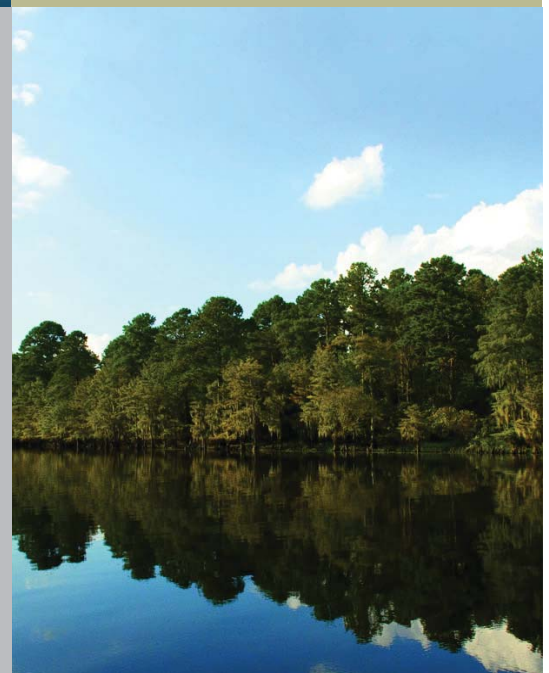
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With this report in hand, you can see that your ETCOG membership really does deliver an outstanding value in both lean and prosperous times. Rest assured that even more benefits and value are coming your way soon.

ETCOG Vision, Mission & Core Business Services

On May 26, 2010, the ETCOG Executive Committee met in a work session setting to draft ETCOG's Vision, Mission, and Core Business Services. All present were pleased with the results of their collective efforts. Comments like "I now have a better understanding of what we are trying to accomplish"; and "We rarely get an opportunity like this to step back from monthly business responsibilities and take a big picture look at where we are going as an organization" were shared by those present. After the draft Vision, Mission, and Core Business Services statement is approved by the Executive Committee, it will be brought to the Board of Director's meeting for consideration in September; and then shared through the regional forums later this year.





VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT FUNDING ALLOCATED

The following projects are recommended for funding for FY 2011 unless we receive a change of funding allocation from the Governor's Office Criminal Justice Division:

- Women's Center of East Texas \$80,000
- Children's Advocacy Center of Smith County \$80,000
- Crisis Center of Anderson & Cherokee Counties \$80,000
- Wood County Victim's Services \$57,602
- Smith County Crime Victim's Services \$32,097
- Northeast Texas Child Advocacy Center \$80,000
- East Texas Crisis Center, Inc. \$80,000
- Rusk County Children's Advocacy Center \$70,955
- Henderson County HELP Center, Inc. \$80,000

Total: \$640,654



NORTHEAST TEXAS AIR CARE ANNOUNCES BEGINNING OF OZONE SEASON

Ozone Action Days usually occur on hot days with lots of sun and little or no wind beginning in May and ending in late September. Emissions from vehicles, power plants, gasoline-powered lawn equipment and household cleaners "cook" in the hot sunlight to form ground-level ozone. In combination with fine particulate matter, this chemical combination forms the smog or haze that hangs over the entire area. On such days, local governments, citizens, and industry are encouraged to reduce or refrain from activities that emit ozone-forming chemicals.

Voluntary Steps in Helping Prevent Ozone

- Share a ride to work or school.
- Avoid morning rush-hour traffic.
- Walk or ride a bicycle.
- Combine errands into one trip.
- Avoid drive-through lanes.
- Postpone refueling until after 6 p.m.
- Don't top off your gas tank when refueling.
- Postpone using gas engines such as lawnmowers until after 6 p.m.
- Keep your vehicle properly tuned to keep exhaust levels low.

Tips for Business and Industry: Small Steps,

Big Solutions

- For employees who rideshare or use public transportation, provide a guaranteed emergency ride home.
- Carpool to lunch and meetings.
- Schedule meetings that don't require driving (meet on site or make conference calls).
- Offer free drinks at your cafeteria to encourage employees to eat at work.
- Postpone fueling fleet vehicles until after 6 p.m.
- Postpone working with mowers, bulldozers, backhoes, tractors, and other two-cycle engine activities.
- Delay painting, degreasing, tank cleaning, ground maintenance, and road repair.
- Postpone routine flaring or venting of hydrocarbons.
- Postpone the loading and hauling of volatile organic compound (VOC).
- Postpone VOC-producing activities such as chemical treatment and catalyst preparation.
- Switch loads to fired heaters or boilers with low nitrogen oxide burners.

For more information, visit www.netac.org.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY - EDUCATE YOUTH

Do you enjoy educating others? Become a 9-1-1 PEPPER!

Our 9-1-1 Division is looking for PEPPERS: People Educating People Providing Educational Resources & Services. As a PEPPER you can:

- Educate the public about 9-1-1
- Show videos / make presentations
- Distribute free 9-1-1 promotional items
- Write newspaper articles
- Act out 9-1-1 calls
- Lead Red E. Fox through a crowd or dress up as Red E. Fox
- Assist in creation of slogans for 9-1-1 public education items
- Use your creativity to teach citizens about

9-1-1 Services by accepting this opportunity to network with other volunteers

Being a part of the PEP Team is a free and rewarding way of bringing great minds together to increase the visibility of 9-1-1 and its importance. Join us at our next PEP Team Workshop:

**July 7, 2010, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. at ETCOG
Lunch will be provided, at no charge to you**

Contact Darla Mack, Public Education Trainer, for more information at 903-984-8641 ext. 211.

WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS EAST TEXAS

CHILD CARE PROVIDER TRAINING

The Workforce Solutions East Texas Board is hosting training for licensed and registered child care providers in the fourteen county East Texas Workforce Development Area. The child care provider staff training is funded through an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant from the Texas Workforce Commission and offered at no cost to the participants.

Training sessions, offered by presenters from Champions for Children of Tyler and the Region 7 Education Service Center have been held in Tyler, Longview, Marshall and Athens addressing Infant and Toddler training, Pre-School and School Age training and Pre-School Inclusive Care and Special Needs Children training. These training sessions have been an opportunity for child care professionals to increase their knowledge and skill levels, equipping them for enhanced care for children throughout East Texas.

Training opportunities featuring additional trainers and topics are scheduled throughout the remainder of the year. Child care providers and staff desiring information regarding dates and sessions should contact Peggy Collier with the Workforce Solutions East Texas Board at 903-984-8641x253 or peggy.collier@etcog.org.



EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM HELPS REPAY CHILD SUPPORT

In 2009, Workforce Solutions East Texas (WSET) began a pilot employment program for Non-Custodial Parents (NCPs) residing in Gregg County. NCPs that are unemployed or underemployed with unpaid child support are being provided a full array of employment services enabling them to gain employment to financially better support their children.

In partnership with the local OAG Child Support Services and the local child support court system, WSET seeks to accomplish the two project goals of NCP: employment and increased child support payments.

A typical NCP participant did not finish high school, is low income, and has few skills or little work experience. The NCP who has not been paying child support and whose children are currently receiving or have previously received public assistance will be ordered by the child support services court Judge Joe Perkins, to participate in the NCP program or serve time in jail.

NCPs who opt for employment are assisted by WSET staff to find immediate employment. The participant's commitment to the program begins in the court room

meeting with WSET staff where they learn that they are to report the following day to the workforce center to be trained to perform their job search responsibilities. Staff provides counseling, oversight, support services, encouragement, and rewards for participation and success. One successful participant wrote to the Judge, "If it were not for my counselor, the job club and my family I don't think I would have made it this far." Employment may be a while in coming for even the most diligent effort but non-compliance with the program results in immediate return to the courtroom for adjudication by the judge.

The award winning Texas demonstration program has received national recognition as the most effective effort in this field to date. The Gregg County NCP project has the highest entered employment rate in the state, 82.76%, has a six month employment retention rate of 80% and has collected \$93,280 in child support wages.

In the coming year WSET is preparing to expand operation of the program into Harrison County in preparation for a larger expansion into the other counties in the East Texas Workforce Delivery Area.

REGIONAL WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS CENTERS

Workforce Solutions East Texas has 14 regional centers for job seekers to receive services Monday through Friday from 8:00-5:00.

Anderson - 500 E. Murchison Palestine, TX 75802 (903) 729-0178

Camp - 211 Mill St., Ste 127 Pittsburg, TX 75686 (903) 856-5643

Cherokee - 2027 N. Jackson St., Ste A Jacksonville, TX 75766 (903) 586-3688

Gregg - 2430 S. High St. Longview, TX 75606 (903) 758-1783

Harrison - 4300 E. End Blvd. S. Marshall, TX 75671 (903) 935-7814

Henderson - 500 Murchison, Ste 101 Athens, TX 75751 (903) 677-3521

Marion - 208 N. Walnut Street Jefferson, TX 75657 (903) 665-1024

Panola - 424 W. Sabine St. Carthage, TX 75633 (903) 693-2272

Rains - 209 E. Quitman St. Emory, TX 75440 (903) 473-8757

Rusk - 1424 S. Main St. Henderson, TX 75653 (903) 657-9553

Smith - 4100 Troup Hwy Tyler, TX 75703 (903) 561-8131

Upshur - 405 E. Marshall St. Gilmer, TX 75644 (903) 680-3655

Wood - 405 S. Hart St. Quitman, TX 75783 (903) 763-5421

Van Zandt - 1760 N. Trade Days Blvd. Canton, TX 75103 (903) 567-4706



East Texas Council of Governments | Serving 14 Counties of East Texas | 2010

REGIONAL REPORT

3800 STONE ROAD • KILGORE, TX 75662 • (903) 984-8641 • (903) 983-1440 F • ETCOG.ORG

The East Texas Council of Governments is a voluntary association of counties, cities, school districts and special districts within the fourteen-county East Texas region. ETCOG assists local governments in planning for common needs, cooperating for mutual benefit and coordinating for sound regional development. Established in 1970, ETCOG, either directly, or through its contractors, provides programs and services for East Texas seniors, employers, and job seekers. ETCOG and its contractors also build the 9-1-1 emergency call delivery system, provide peace officer training and homeland security planning services; and deliver rural transportation services, business finance programs, and environmental grant funding for the region.

TDD: 711



3800 Stone Road
Kilgore, TX 75662