

Lindsay Vanderbilt
Communications Manager
Phone: (903)984-8641 x218
Cell: (903)931-1830
Lindsay.Vanderbilt@etcog.org

Fax: (903)983-1440
3800 Stone Road
Kilgore, TX 75662
www.etcog.org

**EAST TEXAS COUNCIL OF
GOVERNMENTS**



PRESS RELEASE

ETCOG PRESENTS REGIONAL AWARDS

Six East Texans Honored for Contributions to the Region

Kilgore, TX, March 23, 2012: ETCOG honored regional citizens who exemplify excellence in performance, innovation, and contributions to the community at its 84th Semi-Annual Board of Director's Meeting on Thursday, March 22, at the Ben E. Keith Distribution Center in Palestine, TX (Photos Available). Award criteria and recipient information is as follows:

REGIONAL CITIZEN OF THE YEAR – DWAYNE GARNER, RETIRED FROM AIR FORCE, RESIDES IN BROWNSBORO, TX

This award is designed to honor a citizen of East Texas who has contributed to the well being of the East Texas Region. Dwayne Garner enjoyed a successful career in the U. S. Air Force and retired to his native East Texas. He has been a faithful volunteer at the Veterans Association in Tyler and has helped numerous Veterans and their family members obtain needed support. In addition to his work with Veterans, Mr. Garner is an active advocate for investing in the youth of the community. He is referred to in one recommendation letters as a "Champion for Children." He is a loyal supporter of Brownsboro Schools and has actively supported the athletic programs of the schools, rarely missing an activity. He has worked with student athletes encouraging them to excel in their studies as well as sports. He has also been instrumental in organizing a Little Dribblers Basketball Program and is working to continue that initiative.

REGIONAL CORPORATE CITIZEN OF THE YEAR- WOOD COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

The Regional Corporate Citizen of the Year award honors a corporate partner in East Texas that has contributed to the well being of the East Texas Region. Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC) is very active in education and training throughout East Texas and Northeast Texas. WCEC invests in the community by sending staff to demonstrate and present at regional schools, civic groups, and area events to promote electrical safety. They have also sponsored a local fifth grade class to attend science camp and members of the Occupational Safety and Health Club to attend a national event. Each year, the WCEC supports agricultural shows in Northeast Texas, Wood County, and Van Zandt County. They also offer \$25,000 in annual scholarships for college bound students. WCEC makes it a practice to support critical assets of the communities and over the years have given significant financial support to regional volunteer fire departments, various civic and charitable clubs, and spends about \$30,000 in financial support. A few projects include the Mineola Nature Preserve, the Governor Jim Hogg Park Arboretum, and the Emergence Development Park.

REGIONAL STATESMANSHIP AWARD – MAYOR BARBARA BASS, CITY OF TYLER

The Regional Statesmanship Award recognizes a local, state, or federal official that has demonstrated valuable dedicated service to regional cooperation. Barbara Bass was elected as Mayor of the City of Tyler in May 2008-- the first woman in Tyler's history to hold this position. She is currently completing her second term and is running unopposed in her bid for a third term as Mayor.

On the environmental front, Mayor Bass has provided leadership as Co-Chair of the North East Texas Air Care Committee which partnered with local industries to keep the NETAC area in attainment with EPA air quality standards. In addition, the Mayor recently led a successful effort to challenge a Texas Department of Environmental Quality ruling that jeopardized the water rights of Tyler and many other cities in our region.

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The Mayor has also been on the forefront in the fight against obesity in North East Texas, partnering with the North East Texas Public Health District, the Tyler Morning Telegraph and others, to launch the Fit City Initiative. She not only provided leadership, but has personally led monthly fit walks and promoted a Mayor's Fitwalk Challenge. As a result of this effort, Tyler was recently recognized with a gold level award by the State of Texas Heart and Stroke Healthy City Recognition Program. This award honors advancing best practices for preventing and controlling heart disease and stroke. Tyler's Fit City Challenge as so successful that the North East Texas Public Health District received a \$737,000 grant to develop fit living initiatives in Smith, Van Zandt, and Wood Counties. Mayor Bass also participated as a member of ETCOG's Chief Elected Officials Board to establish The East Texas Rural Planning Organization and a first of its kind Transportation Coalition of 35 rural, contiguous Texas Counties. . The RPO will collaborate with our Metropolitan Planning Organizations to develop transportation plans for the rural areas of our fourteen county region. The Transportation Coalition will provide the 35-member counties with a unified forum to plan and advance transportation projects where there is a shared benefit.

"It is easy to see why Mayor Bass was selected for the this award," ETCOG Executive Director David Cleveland said. "The span and scope of issues she willingly takes on is significant. We are truly blessed to have a public servant like her who is able to help identify, embrace and address issues of region-wide importance. "

REGIONAL COMMITTEE SERVICE AWARD – ED BRANDO, HOMELAND SECURITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE CHAIR, EAST TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER

The Regional Committee Service Award recognizes an individual who has demonstrated a sustained, dedicated commitment to ETCOG efforts and activities. Ed Brando, Jr. was presented with the Regional Service Award for his outstanding job as Chairman of the ETCOG Homeland Security Advisory Committee, a position he has held since the committee's inception. Ed has worked in the EMS field since 1969 in New Jersey, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

Currently, Ed is Regional Director for the East Texas Medical Center/Emergency Medical Services where he has worked for 27 years. In this position he manages 7 EMS stations in 5 counties which are Gregg, Panola, Wood, Franklin and Upshur. Ed began his career on an ambulance, was a Flight Paramedic on Air-1 for 7 years then promoted to Regional Director in 1992. He sits on the Regional Advisory Council, who he represents on the Homeland Security Advisory Committee as well as the following groups:

- EMTF-4 Executive Planning and Technical Planning Committees;
- RAC Preparedness and Public Education Committees;
- Department of State Health Services SNS Committee; and the
- Wood/Rains County Child Fatality Review Board.

ETCOG EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARD – ELIZABETH JONES AND SAVANNAH PACOBIT

The ETCOG Employee of the Year is nominated and voted on by ETCOG Staff and the top three candidates are presented to the ETCOG Selection Committee for consideration. Elizabeth Jones and Savannah Pacobit were selected as this year's co-recipients. Elizabeth Jones has been with ETCOG since 2000 as the Budget Manager. Savannah Pacobit has been employed with ETCOG since 2011 and serves as the Housing Manager.

For more information, contact ETCOG's Executive Director, David Cleveland, at (903) 984-8641 x221.

About ETCOG

The East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG) 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.