

summer
09

east texas council of governments **Regional Report**

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SAVE THE DATE Board of Directors Meeting Scheduled

The next Semi-Annual Board of Director's meeting will be held in Henderson, Texas on Thursday, September 24. Invitations will be sent the last week of August.

The ETCOG Board of Directors is comprised of elected officials representing the ETCOG membership. Each member of ETCOG has an opportunity to designate between one and four representatives to the ETCOG Board of Directors based on the type of membership and population size of the member city or county.

The ETCOG Board of Directors meets semi-annually to discuss and vote on ETCOG business.

The semi-annual board meetings are rotated consecutively among member counties.

For inquiries regarding your member representatives call 903.984.8641.

In the Right Direction

Message from Executive Director, David Cleveland

On June 16, 2009, the Wood County town of Yantis officially became the region's newest community senior meal site. City, County, ETCOG and Tradition's Restaurant officials officially opened the meal site by cutting a yellow dedication ribbon and enjoying a tasty and nutritious meal with the area's seasoned citizens. Numerous client customers sought me out during the event to express gratitude for the exceptional quality of the meals and the hospitality and kindness of staff. Credit and praise for the quality of the food belongs to Tyler's own Tradition's Restaurant, an esteemed new member of ETCOG's Senior Nutrition Program team.

Even though Yantis is one of the regions smallest cities, it now enjoys the distinction of hosting the largest community meal site in all of East Texas. The average number of daily meals served at the site currently stands at a whopping seventy-nine (79)! The Yantis community meal site grand opening is one of the initial steps of ETCOG's overall strategy to strengthen the Senior Nutrition Program while simultaneously improving meal quality.



Two years ago, the Senior Nutrition Program, comprised of both home-delivered and congregate/community meals was administered through three ETCOG/AAA contractors. Ten of our fourteen counties were served by one contractor and the remaining four counties were split evenly by the remaining contractors. Participation in the congregate/community based meal program that was intended to afford seniors an opportunity to connect and socialize together had dwindled to the point that the program, in most counties (including Wood), was on life support. More

alarming was the fact that no contingency plan existed in the event that any one of the existing contractors should fail. Even if such a plan existed, the entire Senior Nutrition Program relied on three meal providers, with primary reliance on one contractor that administered the program in ten counties. Our region simply did not have a sufficient number of strong meal contractors in the system to begin building a reasonable system back up plan.

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Promote the Business Climate of East Texas and Your Community for Free

Although we are experiencing tough economic times, there are plenty of reasons to do business in East Texas. To name a few - we are centrally located, have a thriving and diversified collection of industries, low cost of living, scenic beauty, a skilled and adaptable workforce and an ideal tax climate.

Like many of you, ETCOG is working to promote economic development in East Texas. We understand not all of our communities have the time and resources to invest in this, so we have partnered with Journal Communications to produce the printed and online publication **Business Images of East Texas** to assist in your efforts.

The magazine highlights each of our fourteen counties and explains why it is a great place to live, work and do business.

Call today for your free copies or visit the online publication imageeasttexas.com



Reduce Dependence on Imported Oil

ETCOG & DOE collaborate to save money, increase energy security, and benefit the environment

As the cost of fueling vehicles rises, consumers at all levels look for ways in which to reduce the amount of fuel they use to ease the pinch to their pocket book. Individual consumers, local delivery businesses, municipalities, among others face a significant operating cost increase as fuel prices rise. One service provided by ETCOG that can aid in reducing fuel use and is available to all East Texans is the Department of Energy's (DOE) Clean Cities Program.

Clean Cities is a voluntary, government-industry partnership designed to reduce petroleum consumption in the transportation sector by advancing the use of alternative fuels and vehicles, idle reduction technologies, hybrid electric vehicles, fuel blends, and fuel economy measures. Clean Cities strives to advance the nation's economic, environmental, and energy security by supporting local decisions to adopt practices that contribute to the reduction of petroleum consumption.

East Texas Clean Cities Coalition (ETCCC) was officially designated by DOE in May 2004. By completing the designation process, ETCCC has access to a large collection of technical data and information, including current data on fuels, vehicles, fueling station and truck-stop electrification locations, infrastructure development, state and federal incentives and laws, technology and outreach publications, and industry resources. In addition, ETCCC has access to information and incentives from DOE and other federal agencies and industry partners that can help fund projects in our region. The coalition provides a forum for members to leverage their resources, develop joint projects, collaborate on public policy issues, and promote petroleum reduction and clean air technologies.

One tool developed by Clean Cities that is available to anyone is the Petroleum Reduction Planning

Tool (<https://www.afdc.energy.gov/afdc/prop/index.php>). The Petroleum Reduction Planning tool helps fleets, consumers, and business owners create a strategy to reduce

“Clean Cities strives to advance the nation's economic, environmental and energy security”

conventional fuel use in fleet and personal vehicles. This interactive tool allows users to evaluate and calculate petroleum reductions by choosing one or a combination of the following

methods:

- Alternative Fuels
- Hybrid Electric Vehicles
- Biodiesel Blends
- Fuel Economy
- Vehicle Miles Traveled Reduction
- Truckstop Electrification
- Idling Time Reduction
- Onboard Idle Reduction

For more information please see: <http://www1.eere.energy.gov/clean-cities/index.html>



U. S. Department of Energy



SAVE THE DATE 18th Regional Education on Aging, Caregiving and Healthcare Conference

ETCOG will host its annual REACH Conference October 29-30, 2009 at the Maude Cobb Convention Center in Longview, Texas. The conference, themed "Seasons of Change," is a collaborative effort to provide educational workshops, plenary sessions and networking opportunities for professionals, caregivers, and anyone interested in Aging issues.

Continuing education courses will be offered for Nursing, Social Work, Licensed Professional Counselors, Nursing Home Administrators, and Activity Directors. Attendees will be moved by opening speaker, Bryan Dodge of Dodge Development, Inc.

Registration for the event is \$75 and includes lunch both days. To become a sponsor, exhibitor, presenter, or for more information on the REACH Conference, call Priscilla Jones at 1-800-442-8845.

REACH is made possible by grant funding by the Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services, and its Planning Committee comprised of representatives from 17 state and local agencies.

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About eighteen months ago, ETCOG/AAA staff began to take action to proactively address these systemic issues. Our objectives once again are to strengthen the program and improve the quality of the service. We began the process of strengthening the system by adding a new meal contractor to the system and by reassigning county service responsibilities among the expanded

contractor base. By contracting with Tradition's Restaurant for the Wood County pilot, we have expanded the contractor base yet again, and at least in Yantis we have improved the quality of the meal service with stellar results. Customers have a tendency to vote for a quality service with their feet.

By this fall, we hope to expand this community/congregate

meal model to several other willing Wood County communities. As of this writing, we still have a long way to go before our Senior Nutrition Program objectives are fully achieved, but we have certainly moved a step or two in the right direction. Just ask our customers in Yantis.

ETCOG Launches New Website

Communicating with our customers is a top priority for ETCOG.

The programs and services available to our member governments and citizens of East Texas is constantly growing. To better communicate this information, we have launched a new website at etcog.org.

The site has detailed information on our organizational news, services, funding announcements, and much more. For example: ETCOG supports many of cities and counties by providing citizens with their 9-1-1 addresses. You



may even request your new address online. To view these available services please check out our addressing link. Are you interested to attend one of our open meetings? Visit the home page to check meeting times and download agendas. Do you want to give us feedback on our services? Visit our website and submit a Contact Us form. A staff member will get in touch with you as soon as possible.

Find out more about ETCOG on the newly designed and updated etcog.org. We look forward to your visit!

LOAN PROGRAM Refinancing Option No Longer Temporary

The Small Business Administration (SBA) announced the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act 504 Loan Program Debt Refinancing interim final rule in the Federal Register. Debt refinancing as an eligible 504 Project Cost is a permanent change to the 504 Loan program, not just a temporary stimulus initiative.

This new debt refinancing authority will allow expanding small businesses to restructure qualified existing debt as part of new 504 loans. This will enable small business owners to free up critical capital to expand their businesses and create jobs.

A copy of the Federal Register notice can be viewed at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/E9-14886.htm>.

For more information about SBA 504 loans, visit the East Texas Regional Development Company at www.etrdc.com.



Keep It Moving

An update on ETCOG's transportation program, services that benefit you

Transportation is one of the greatest needs in our East Texas Region. Whether the need is a means to get to work, the development of area roads and highways to improve accessibility and promote economic development, or advocacy for new technologies; ETCOG staff is working to help meet these needs.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

ETCOG operates the Rural Transit District (RTD) providing demand/response public transportation in all fourteen counties of East Texas. Our fleet of 44 buses make 400 - 500 trips a day throughout the region. The RTD just gained three new buses, and as a result of funding from the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act, our fleet will increase by 17 buses in September.

In order to accommodate a growing need for public transportation as well as provide customers in East Texas with better service, ETCOG has adopted a new operating schedule giving RTD riders expanded hours to travel. The new

operating schedule is 6 AM - 7 PM Monday through Friday. To schedule a trip, just call our dispatch center at 1.800.590.3371.

ADVOCACY

To position East Texas for federal and other funds, as well as prioritize regional transportation project needs, ETCOG has formed a Citizens Advisory Team to advise staff on the development of a Rural Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO).

Staff and Team efforts will place the region in front of proposed State Legislation which would encourage RTPOs being linked to Councils of Governments. The team will consider best practice alternatives with the goal to present the ETCOG executive committee an RTPO framework that will strengthen the region's transportation, planning, consensus building and advocacy activities.

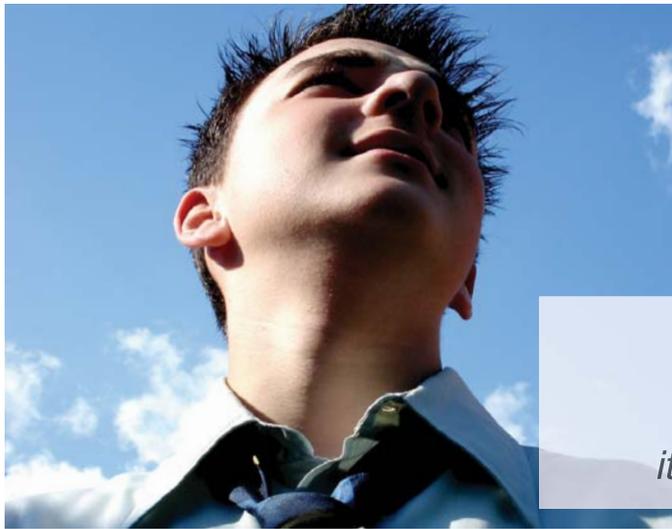
Citizens Advisory Team Members include: Harrison County Judge

Richard Anderson; Jeff Austin III, Chairman of Northeast Texas Regional Mobility Authority; Smith County Judge Joel Baker; Randy Brogotti, MB Construction Management; Randy Hopmann, TxDOT Tyler District; Griff Hubbard, Amtrak; Bobby Littlefield, TxDOT Paris; Robert Ratcliff, TxDOT Atlanta; Gregg County Judge Bill Stoudt; Tim Vaughn, East Texas Corridor Council Chairman. The team is supported by staff members John Hedrick, ETCOG's newly appointed Director

“Our fleet of 44 buses make 400-500 trips a day throughout the region.”

of Transportation; and David Cleveland, ETCOG's Executive Director.

ETCOG has also partnered with the East Texas Corridor Council providing staff support for the initiative of bringing Higher Speed Rail to East Texas from Shreveport, LA to Dallas. For more information on our Transportation programs and services, visit our website etcog.org or call 903.984.8641.



East Texas Summer Youth Work Experience Program

it is more than experience and wages

The Stimulus Package funded a Summer Youth Employment Program for the East Texas region that has been dormant the last five years. Six hundred youth between the ages of 14 and 24 are now enrolled in a Summer Work Experience Program. The program is structured to train low income youth “how to get a job and keep it.”

The youth are earning \$7.25 an hour and work 40 hours a week with school districts, counties, cities, non-profit organizations and for-profit employers. Job positions range from maintenance workers to office assistants in city and county offices.

The youth are not only gaining valuable work experience and money, but also receive guidance, encouragement and life skills necessary for the rest of their life. Our staff monitors have found the program is providing so much more than wages...

There are three young men with disabilities who will receive their high school diploma as a result of their positive work experience in the Summer Youth Employment Program.

Staff entered a worksite one day to find they were giving a program participant a birthday party with cake and gifts. The young lady was elated and informed the staff it was the first birthday party she had ever had. She was 16 years old and referred to her supervisor as an “angel.” Staff visited one young lady who indicated

**“I plan to help my
parents out with the
house payment.”**

she did not have appropriate work clothes for an office setting. Workforce Solutions East Texas Career Coaches took the participant to a shop with donated clothing and assisted her in selecting appropriate attire for an office setting.

A youth with dyslexia was given a computer to assist her in her disability and daily work duties.

Board staff interviewed a supervisor who had the aura of being rough and tough. At the end of the interview, the supervisor made it clear that he was extremely attached to the young men when he stated, “those are MY boys” as his voice cracked.

Staff would periodically ask participants what their plans were for the money earned over the summer. Staff expected answers like buying clothes, a car, or spending it. The answers received were far different. “I plan to help my parents out with the house payment. My mother is out of work and I will give most of it to her to help with bills. I will keep part of it but my brother is planning on attending college and I am giving him a portion to help with his expenses. I’m saving it. This will help me with diapers and clothes for my child.” One memorable response from a 22 year old was that she planned to use her earnings to defray the cost of rearing her eight year old niece for whom she has been assigned legal custody.

What has the Summer Youth Employment Program done for youth in the 14 counties of East Texas? It’s given them work experience, money and life lessons that far exceed Summer employment. Experiences that have the possibility of changing their lives forever and creating a future workforce in East Texas that could produce countless benefits to our businesses and citizens.



east texas council of governments Regional Report

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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



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