

# WorkQuest

# FOCUS

## on Jobs for People with Disabilities

WorkQuest Newsletter LXIV

June 2024



*Pictured: Chris Rios, supervisor on the GOJO and PURELL skin care line at the Austin Lighthouse.*

## Austin Lighthouse: Restoring independence through job opportunities

The Austin Lighthouse is a nonprofit organization that offers education, training, advocacy and community for blind and visually-impaired individuals throughout Central Texas. Through job skills training, education and employment opportunities, the Lighthouse encourages its employees to become involved in their local communities and help build or restore their independence.

The Austin Lighthouse, which is also a Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) in the *WorksWonders* Program, is honored to be able to provide opportunities to Central Texans for over 90 years. They are proud to currently employ 200 Texans with disabilities.

“At the Austin Lighthouse, we are focused on developing the skills of our employees and blind individuals in our community to empower them to make their own decisions,” said Jim Meehan, CEO of the Austin Lighthouse.

Many people have the misconception that blind and visually impaired individuals cannot work a steady job. However, Meehan wants people to know that people who are blind and visually impaired are more than capable of doing just that.

“The first thing that people say when they come to the Austin Lighthouse is ‘I had no idea,’ said Meehan. “People assume that

blind people can’t do many things, but when they come here, they realize that blind people can work just as well as them, they just do it differently.”

Chris Rios is one of the fortunate individuals who works at the Austin Lighthouse. He learned about the organization when he enrolled in a blind training program, and he feels blessed to have this opportunity. Rios has worked his way up to supervisor at the Austin Lighthouse since starting in the receiving department.

As a supervisor, Rios is responsible for uplifting his team, among other tasks. Rios is a positive presence in the workplace who always encourages others to be optimistic. “Whenever I see someone that has a negative attitude like I used to have, I try to inspire them to see things from a different perspective, just like others at the Austin Lighthouse once did for me,” said Rios.

Rios’ supervisor, Martin West, applauds Rios for being a stellar employee and for how much he has grown within the company. “This job is a great opportunity for him, he went from working on the floor to being a supervisor,” said West. “He is developing his future, taking the next steps in his career journey and right now, the Lighthouse is playing an important role in that.”

# Message from President/CEO Fred M. Weber, Jr.



I am excited to announce that we will be offering annual compliance and training seminars beginning this summer and continuing into the fall. These seminars have been developed to help new and existing *WorksWonders* community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) better understand the guidelines and requirements that allow the Program to operate successfully. A variety of topics are examined to give CRPs the tools they need to utilize the resources available to them through the Program, including:

- The requirements needed to participate in the *WorksWonders* Program
- Staff development and career counseling training
- How to contract with government agencies
- Procurement procedures and law
- Competitive integrated employment curriculum and initiatives

The 17th annual Artie Lee Hinds Award Dinner and 36th annual Products and Services Expo will take place this September. The dinner will take place the evening of Monday, Sept. 23 and the Expo will take place the following morning on Tuesday, Sept. 24. The events serve as a way to celebrate the accomplishments of the hard-working *WorksWonders* Program CRP employees – as well as the customers that purchase their products and services – and we hope you take the opportunity to attend these events this fall.

To find out more about training seminars offered near you, or about the 17th annual Artie Lee Hinds Award Dinner and the 36th annual Products and Services Expo, please visit [www.WorkQuest.com](http://www.WorkQuest.com).

On behalf of WorkQuest leadership and staff, I would like to thank each of you for your continued partnership and support of the *WorksWonders* Program's mission to expand employment opportunities for Texans with disabilities.

Fred M. Weber, Jr.  
President/CEO

## 2024 WorkQuest Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) Compliance & Training Seminars

**July 11, 2024**  
Austin

**August 6, 2024**  
Houston

**August 29, 2024**  
Webinar

**July 15, 2024**  
Abilene

**August 7, 2024**  
Corpus Christi

Please visit [WorkQuest.com](http://WorkQuest.com) for more information about seminars being offered near you.

**July 16, 2024**  
Dallas/Fort Worth

**August 16, 2024**  
San Antonio

**August 2, 2024**  
Tyler

**August 27, 2024**  
El Paso

## **Margie Garcia** – WorkQuest Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist

WorkQuest is delighted to spotlight Margie Garcia, WorkQuest Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist.

In 2017, a legislative change to Chapter 122 of the Texas Human Resources Code required *WorksWonders* Program community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) to maintain certain competitive integrated employment initiatives and prompted WorkQuest to offer a skilled staff position to ensure that those requirements were being met.

This change led WorkQuest to hire Garcia in 2023 after her 14-year vocational rehabilitation (VR) career with the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services and the Texas Workforce Commission VR Department.

In her role, Garcia is tasked with assisting CRPs in advancing initiatives related to competitive integrated employment, person-centered planning, staff development and career counseling. Some of these tasks involve:

- Expanding staff development and career counseling training programs
- Conducting statewide staff development training programs via regional seminars
- Performing individual person-centered plans/vocational assessments for CRP employees with disabilities when requested by the CRP or TWC
- Developing policies in alignment with TWC's VR goals regarding the employment of individuals with disabilities

In her personal life, Garcia is happy to announce that she is a proud new grandmother.

## **Brian Powell** – WorkQuest Contract Specialist

WorkQuest is excited to announce Brian Powell's transition into the new role of Contract Specialist.

Powell joined WorkQuest in 2022 as the Region 1 regional marketing manager, where he was responsible for the coordination of services provided to county, city and state agencies throughout the region.

In this new role, Powell will monitor and assist Program community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) in maintaining compliance with contract specifications and Program requirements. His duties in this role include but are not limited to:

- Developing, directing and maintaining contract and Program compliance among CRPs throughout the state
- Identifying key contract specifications and monitoring CRP performance and compliance
- Conducting contract compliance reviews at CRPs as needed
- Maintaining accountability on contract compliance to ensure requirements and scopes of work are being met

With the creation of this role, WorkQuest intends to continue to ensure that employment opportunities are available to individuals with disabilities around the state.

In his personal life, Powell has been married for 28 years and is a father of two boys.

# WorkQuest

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**17th Annual Artie Lee Hinds Award Dinner**  
**Monday, September 23, 2024**  
**Doubletree Hotel Austin**  
**6505 N IH-35**  
**Austin, Texas 78752**

**2024 Products and Services Expo**  
**Tuesday, September 24, 2024**  
**Doubletree Hotel Austin**  
**6505 N IH-35**  
**Austin, Texas 78752**

**View the WorkQuest catalog at [WorkQuest.com](http://WorkQuest.com)**