

WorkQuest

FOCUS

on Jobs for People with Disabilities

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Erik Omar Atayde of Goodwill Industries of El Paso honored with the 2023 Artie Lee Hinds Award



2023 Artie Lee Hinds Award winner Erik Omar Atayde, Goodwill Industries of El Paso, pictured with Aaron Demerson, Commissioner Representing Employers for the Texas Workforce Commission (left), and John Luna, WorkQuest Board of Directors vice chairman (right).

Erik Omar Atayde of Goodwill Industries of El Paso was recently recognized by WorkQuest with the 2023 Artie Lee Hinds Award. The award honors an outstanding Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) employee for leadership, dedicated service and commitment to excellence.

Atayde began his career as a groundskeeper at Goodwill six years ago. He's since worked his way up to a lead custodial position.

"He is a beacon of light," Melinda Jordan, CEO of Goodwill Industries of El Paso, said. "He goes into people's offices and his facial expressions, his smile and his positive attitude bring brightness to every workplace that he's encountered."

Atayde is more than just an employee, he serves as a mentor in several different ways. At Goodwill, he not only trains and helps his colleagues in the custodial department, but he's also taught his supervisors a thing or two.

"A lot of our senior leadership team has taken ASL classes to better help serve and communicate with our employees and customers that are deaf," Jeff Crox, district manager at Goodwill Industries of El Paso, said.

"Erik came to our graduation ceremony to help cheer us on. But at the same time, he was sitting there correcting some of our bad sign language."

Atayde also finds time outside of work to be a mentor in the El Paso community as a coach to a youth football team. "It's incredible the fact that he understands the sport so well. So it kind of makes it obvious the fact that he's a coach," Atayde's brother Victor, said. "He's always teaching the kids new things. And on top of that, teaches them little words in sign language."

"People that are deaf are so willing to work and help," Erik Omar Atayde added. "And if they don't know how to start, we're here to help them. As a deaf person, I can help other people grow."

The entire team at Goodwill Industries of El Paso is impressed with Atayde's work, and so proud of what he has been able to accomplish in all aspects of his life.

"What he's able to do for us as an organization and what he's able to do for himself and his family is just remarkable," Jordan added.

Artie Lee Hinds Award Dinner recognizes outstanding WorksWonders Program employees and customers

On September 26, 2023, inspirational stories and bouts of raucous applause filled the ballroom at the Doubletree Hotel in Austin for WorkQuest's 16th annual Artie Lee Hinds Award Dinner. Hundreds of attendees gathered to celebrate the WorksWonders Program and its supporters. The WorksWonders Program provides employment opportunities for Texans with disabilities.

To celebrate the accomplishments of the Program's employees, Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) representatives, Texas Workforce Commission representatives, and WorkQuest board members and employees joined award nominees and their families.



2023 Most Inspirational Employee Award Winner, Terry Smith, Jr., Peak Performers, pictured with John Luna, WorkQuest Board of Directors vice chairman (left), and Aaron Demerson, Commissioner Representing Employers for the Texas Workforce Commission (right).



2023 Most Motivational Employee Award Winner, Gary Seegers, E.Q.U.I.P. Enterprises, Inc., pictured with John Luna, WorkQuest Board of Directors vice chairman (left), Hadleigh Seegers (center), and Aaron Demerson, Commissioner Representing Employers for the Texas Workforce Commission (right).

Among those honored were Terry Smith Jr. of Peak Performers who earned the Most Inspirational Employee award; and Gary Seegers of E.Q.U.I.P. Enterprises, Inc. who received the Most Motivational Employee Award. WorkQuest also presented this year's Spirit of State Use Award to Rick Meyer, former WorkQuest Counsel, for his extraordinary commitment to providing accessible employment to individuals with disabilities.

The evening's keynote address was delivered by Keni Thomas—motivational speaker and decorated U.S. military veteran. Thomas recounted his experience as an Army Ranger in a 1993 battle in Mogadishu, Somalia, now commonly known as "Blackhawk Down". Thomas spoke about the intricacies of his leadership during the journey to rescue his fellow soldiers, and how we can redefine the way we understand what it means to be a leader in the journey of life.

Following the keynote address, WorkQuest recognized the Top 10 customers who purchase products, services and temporary employment services through the WorksWonders Program. These customers include multiple state, city and county agencies and organizations. Organizations that were recognized for being new to this year's lists for their purchase of products included the Texas Military Department and Teacher Retirement System of Texas.

Event attendees got a peek into the everyday lives of the evening's award winners including Smith and Seegers via short videos highlighting interviews with their families, colleagues and supervisors. Surrounded by his parents and brother, Erik Omar Atayde of Goodwill Industries of El Paso, Inc. took home the pinnacle award of the event, the 2023 Artie Lee Hinds Award. Atayde was recognized for his hard work, positive attitude and leadership both at his job and with young people in the El Paso community.

WorkQuest wants to thank everyone who attended this year's event for making our celebration so special! We hope you'll return to honor a new group of exceptional employees in 2024.



2023 Artie Lee Hinds Award Keynote Speaker, Keni Thomas, addresses the crowd at the 16th annual Artie Lee Hinds Award Dinner.

Scenes from the Awards Dinner



A Message from President and CEO Fred M. Weber, Jr.

On behalf of WorkQuest, I would like to thank everyone who was able to make it to Austin this September to join us for our 16th annual Artie Lee Hinds Award Dinner and 35th annual Products and Services Expo.

Year after year, both of these events serve as a reminder of the benefits that the *WorksWonders* Program provides to individuals with disabilities across the state of Texas – and to the stakeholders that utilize the products and services provided by Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) employees through the Program. Without the partnerships that exist between all of these organizations, WorkQuest and the *WorksWonders* Program would not be able to accomplish the ever-increasing goals and initiatives for which we continually strive.

I would like to extend special gratitude to the CRPs who ensured their nominees were able to attend this year's awards dinner. The commitment and enthusiasm of these tremendous employees – and all of the employees working under the *WorksWonders* Program – are the driving factors behind the growth the Program sees in wages and sales every year. While we recognize a handful of these individuals during this event, it is also the achievements of the thousands of employees working day in and day out around the state that we honor and celebrate throughout the evening.

As always, WorkQuest is grateful for your continued support of the Program. We feel privileged to work alongside partners who are just as passionate about WorkQuest's mission as we are, and we look forward to strengthening those partnerships – and the Program – in the future.



Fred M. Weber, Jr.
President/CEO



2023 Artie Lee Hinds Award Nominees

1. Robbie Allen, Aldersgate Enrichment Center
2. Erik Omar Atayde, Goodwill Industries of El Paso
3. Carlos Black, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
4. Michael Bradford, Liberty Proclaimed Ministry
5. David Caballero, Jr., RGR Industries
6. Edward Chandler, Relief Enterprise of Texas
7. Joshire Coleman, On Our Own Services, Inc.
8. Pauline Deopere, Beacon Lighthouse
9. Taylor Ferguson, Endeavors Unlimited
10. Alexandra Flores, Marian Moss Enterprises
11. David Flores, Camino Real Community Services
12. Edgar Garcia, Xceed Resources
13. Jose Garcia, Goodwill Industries of Northeast Texas
14. Victor Garcia, Xceed Resources
15. Juan Garcia-Ortiz, Lighthouse for the Blind of Houston
16. Stacie Hernandez, South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
17. Kevin Horrigan, New Hope Academy of Fort Worth
18. Ronnie Johnson, Liberty Proclaimed Ministry
19. Hannah Jones, Southeast Keller Corporation
20. Christine Keeler, Goodwill Industries of Central Texas
21. Minetta King, Relief Enterprise of Texas
22. Michelle Maldonado, Goodwill Industries of Central Texas
23. Roxette Manzanares, PCSI
24. Tommy McLane, Liberty Proclaimed Ministry
25. John Meaux, David & Ivory Ministries
26. Carl Medford, Rising Star Resource Development Corporation
27. Princeton Miller, Center for Life Resources / Janie Clements Industries
28. Vicente Moreno, MHID of Nueces County
29. Donnie Olson, Amplify
30. William Patton, Jr., Lighthouse for the Blind of Fort Worth
31. Precious Phose, Austin State Supported Living Center
32. Bernice Prieto, Corpus Christi State Supported Living Center
33. Brenda Questelles, Envision – Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind
34. Melissa Reed, World Technical Services
35. Thomas Roberts, MHID of Nueces County
36. Demetria Sanford, Travis Association for the Blind
37. Gary Seegers, E.Q.U.I.P. Enterprises, Inc.
38. Allen Sigler, West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
39. Krystina Smiley, Precious Gems Services, Inc.
40. Terry Smith, Jr., Peak Performers
41. Jonathan Teague - WorkQuest
42. James Thomas, Liberty Proclaimed Ministry
43. Eduardo Vasquez, Jr., Goodwill Industries of East Texas
44. Lorena Washington, Lending Helping Hands to Others
45. Charles Williams, A Lift for Life Outreach Center
46. Paul Wolf, The EB Foundation

SPIRIT OF STATE USE AWARD WINNER



2023 Spirit of State Use Award winner Rick Meyer, former WorkQuest Counsel, pictured with John Luna, WorkQuest Board of Directors vice chairman (left), and Aaron Demerson, Commissioner Representing Employers for the Texas Workforce Commission (right).

WorkQuest hosts 35th annual Products and Services Expo



A major benefit to purchasers who attend the Expo is the opportunity to learn about the products and services offered through the *WorksWonders* Program that they may not be aware of.

“When we attend this event, it’s important for us to find other businesses that might not be as highlighted,” Amanda Gomez, purchaser at the Teacher Retirement System of Texas, said. “The Expo provides a great opportunity for exposure and allows us to meet new people and new vendors that may provide services we didn’t think to consider and solutions to problems we already have.”

The Products and Services Expo was able to bring more than 350 CRP representatives and purchasers together this year. Purchasers appreciate the convenience of this event and enjoy exploring new products and services that their companies can benefit from.

“The most helpful aspect of this event is getting to know the vendors and actually seeing the products they offer in person,” Margaret Scarborough, budget analyst at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, said. “And of course, meeting the people behind the products.”

Exhibitors who attended:

Beacon Lighthouse
Corpus Christi State Supported Living Center
Daniel Pest Control & Professional Services
East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
Envision - Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind
GSG Talent Solutions - Goodwill of Central Texas
Goodwill Industries of East Texas
Lighthouse for the Blind of Fort Worth
Marian Moss Enterprises
New Hope Academy of Fort Worth
Professional Contract Services, Inc.
Peak Performers
Relief Enterprise of Texas
Rising Star Resource Development Corporation
South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
Texas Correctional Industries
The Lighthouse of Houston
Travis Association for the Blind
VRC Industries
West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
WorkQuest

On September 26, 2023, WorkQuest hosted its 35th annual Products and Services Expo. During this event, Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) representatives were able to connect with customers and purchasers. CRPs display their products and speak about the products, services and temporary employment opportunities they offer through the State Use *WorksWonders* Program – the Program that helps connect Texans with disabilities with meaningful employment opportunities.

CRPs are located throughout the state of Texas, so for many of these organizations, the Expo is the one time a year where they get to see their customers in person and have the opportunity to network.

“This is one of the only opportunities where we get to see and interact with the purchasers,” Lee Tillson, senior vice president of sales and marketing at Horizon Industries, said. “WorkQuest is the conduit for us to be able to sell our products to the different state agencies. We sell 10,000 pairs of boots a year and these sales include a lot of individual transactions that WorkQuest is very involved in.”

Additionally, CRPs appreciate the exposure they get from participating in the Expo and use it as an opportunity to create connections with prospective customers that can lead to new contacts.

“We have been attending this event for over 10 years and we gain a lot of connections from it,” Tiffany Velasquez, workforce development Manager at PCSI, said. “The biggest benefit of the State Use Program is being able to employ individuals with disabilities and fulfill our company’s mission”.



Scenes from the Expo





2023 Artie Lee Hinds Award Nominees



Robbie Allen, Aldersgate Enrichment Center



Erik Omar Atayde, Goodwill Industries of El Paso



Carlos Black, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind



Michael Bradford, Liberty Proclaimed Ministry



Edward Chandler, Relief Enterprise of Texas



Joshire Coleman, On Our Own Services, Inc.



Pauline Deopere, Beacon Lighthouse



Taylor Ferguson, Endeavors Unlimited



Alexandra Flores, Marian Moss Enterprises

2023 Artie Lee Hinds Award nominees (holding awards) are pictured with John Luna, WorkQuest Board of Directors vice chairman; Keni Thomas, motivational speaker and U.S. military veteran; and Edward Serna, executive director of the Texas Workforce Commission.



David Flores, Camino Real Community Services



Edgar Garcia, Xceed Resources



Victor Garcia, Xceed Resources



Stacie Hernandez, South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind



Kevin Horrigan, New Hope Academy of Fort Worth



Ronnie Johnson, Liberty Proclaimed Ministry



Minetta King, Relief Enterprise of Texas



Roxette Manzanares, PCSI



John Meaux, David & Ivory Ministries

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Carl Medford, Rising Star Resource Development Corporation



Princeton Miller, Center for Life Resources / Janie Clements Industries



Vicente Moreno, MHID of Nueces County



William Patton, Jr., Lighthouse for the Blind of Fort Worth



Brenda Questelles, Envision – Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind



Melissa Reed, World Technical Services



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Terry Smith, Jr., Peak Performers



Jonathan Teague, WorkQuest



Eduardo Vasquez, Jr., Goodwill Industries of East Texas



Charles Williams, A lift for Life Outreach Center

Congratulations to all of the 2023 Artie Lee Hinds Award nominees!

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WorkQuest recognizes and celebrates October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month.



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