



THE CENTER

SERVING PERSONS WITH MENTAL RETARDATION

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GOING HOME BECAUSE THEY CAN

“It’s time for a change.” That was the first thing Jennifer J. Hendricks, HCS compliance manager, heard when she arrived at work

that morning six months ago. When she asked the client what she meant, she replied with a smile spread across her face, “I have been living here for 30 years and it is time for a change.” She went on to explain that she was excited about moving into

her new apartment with her two friends and having her own room. She and her housemates were so excited about being able to stay home and watch a movie and eat popcorn with each other in their own home.

When The Center moved forward with the Home and Community Based Services (HCS) program it was with a mix of apprehension and enthusiasm. For more than 50 years, The Center has been a provider of comprehensive programs and services for persons with mental retardation. Programs are designed to teach skills in independence and self reliance. Services and supports are available when and where needed. Cullen Residence Hall, The Center’s residential program located on the West Dallas campus was designed to allow individuals to live independently and yet have necessary supports and services conveniently provided. Willow River Farms was built upon the same foundation but with less structure in mind — requiring individuals with disabilities to function independently in a home setting with onsite and offsite supports, programs, and services.

The HCS program differs from other Center programs in that its funding core is specifically geared toward integrating clients into living in a public community apartment. Clients who have been trained in independent living skills for years are excited about this new program that allows them to live on their own while still receiving support from Center staff.

Miss Hendricks recalled another client: “Do you want to see my key?” She didn’t quite get what he said when she heard him the first time, so she asked him to repeat what he had just said. He stated, “Look, I got my key to my new apartment.” This was one of the clients that had just moved into his new apartment with his housemate. He was excited to have his key to the front door of the apartment in which he now resides. In the beginning, when he and his friends moved into their new home, they only wanted to visit friends who lived in a nearby apartment. That was the highlight of each day. “Now you’re lucky if you find them home when you go for a visit,” says Ms. Hendricks. “They enjoy going out on planned outings like hockey games, movies and dining out. They still enjoy visiting their friends who live nearby or at Cullen.”

That was six months ago. The Center’s HCS program now manages four group homes in the Houston area. The 12 clients who live in these homes have all adjusted well to their change and living arrangements. They still attend day programs at The Center’s West Dallas campus. It’s encouraging and inspiring to hear them say as they get on the Metro bus at the end of a work day, “I’m going home.”



ARCHIE BANES – TIBH EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR



(L to R) Jeff Miller, landscaping manager - The Center, GB Antwine crew leader - The Center, Archie Banes landscaping technician - The Center and TIBH Employee of The Year, Wilford Scott, TIBH senior sales manager, and Elizabeth Cullen, business development manager - The Center.

TIBH Industries, Inc. helps provide employment for Texans with blindness and other disabilities through the State Use "Works Wonders" Program. TIBH serves as the interface between vocational rehabilitation centers, like The Center's, and the purchasing systems of the state, cities, counties, school districts, and hospital districts. In 2007, there were over 7,600 people with various disabilities employed throughout Texas. TIBH contracts paid over \$26 million in wages to these exceptional individuals.

Archie Banes, who has a disability and who is a member of The Center's landscaping crew, was recently awarded Employee of the Year at TIBH's annual luncheon. "The Center has several contracts that provide services to the Texas Department of Transportation," said Wilford Scott, TIBH senior sales manager.

The Center is so proud of Mr. Banes' accolade. He has worked in landscaping for over nine years. When asked why he likes working for The Center, he replied, "I really like working with GB and Jeff. I also like the other guys. We are all friends."

A senior management official with the Houston district of the Texas Department of Transportation recently commented, "I wish all contractors were like The Center's. They show up when they are supposed to show up; they do what the contract calls for them to do; they just take care of business."

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of The Center:

With the start of spring The Center is taking on a renewed direction in opportunities for growth and change. Our Board of Governors has spent the last several months reviewing all the programs and services offered by The Center, as well as the needs of our buildings. We have looked at many questions and issues. For example, what are the needs of the community? What are the needs of the people we serve? And, how can The Center position itself not only to continue to meet these needs, but more importantly, what do we need to do to continue to be on the cutting edge of quality programs and services for persons with disabilities?

As part of these changing times, we have seen over 35 residents move out of Cullen Residence Hall. You may ask yourself, "What will happen to Cullen?" First, understand that we are committed to continuing to provide residential services at Cullen. Secondly, although it brings some sadness and apprehension, these moves are and will be in the best interest of the residents. All of our residents have secured funding either through the Home and Community Based Service program or the Intermediate Care Facility (ICF) program. I am happy to report that those that have moved are happy and making a wonderful transition. Although many lived at Cullen Residence Hall for most of their adult lives, they are viewing this move as an exciting chapter in their journey. Some of our residents have moved to

our Wil-
low River
Farms
community,
while others
have cho-
sen one of
our new apartment group homes
in the community. This is but
another chapter not only in the
lives of our residents, but also in
continuing The Center's mission
of providing choice and opportu-
nities for personal growth.



Working together with The Foundation, The Center is positioning itself to increase its level of service in all areas. We will strive to meet the needs of our current population, as well as the needs of new clients. Some of this is already taking place with the unprecedented growth of our day programs.

As we move forward, I look to the continued support of our families, our staff, our donors, our volunteers and our friends. This is where our major source of strength lies, WITH YOU! It is your tremendous support that historically has made The Center what it is today and has helped it navigate through challenges and opportunities. We are grateful for your continued confidence and trust. With your help and support, we will continue to provide the highest quality of programs and services for persons with disabilities.

ONE IN A MILLION JANIS JACKSON 2008 EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNER!

In late February 2008, Mr. J. M. Hedge, Chief, Support Services Division (SSD) for the Houston Veterans Administration (VA) regional office, received the initial correspondence from the Houston Federal Executive Board (FEB) soliciting nominations for the 2008 Excellence in Government Awards Program. This is an annual special event that is sponsored by the Houston FEB, which is devoted to recognizing extraordinary accomplishments by exceptional federal employees. There are ten (10) categories of winners that are recognized at an awards luncheon that will be held on Wednesday, May 7, 2008, which coincides with National Public Service Recognition Week.

Mr. Hedge was proud to nominate our very own Janis Jackson, a resident at Cullen and a mail clerk at VA Medical Center, for consideration to receive the 2008 Award for Employees With Disabilities. The category description was "for any employee who is physically disabled and through significant personal effort has overcome the disability and performed his or her job in an exceptional manner." After reading the description, without hesitation, he immediately thought of Janis and began writing up the nomination. Although he knew that the competition would be stiff, he was confident that "JJ's" efforts and accomplishments were noteworthy

and would be very competitive.

This week, Mr. Hedge received the fantastic and exciting news from Mr. Michael Mason, executive director, Houston FEB that Janis was selected as the winner for the 2008 Excellence in Government Award - Employees With Disabilities.

In Mr. Hedge's professional opinion, "Janis serves as a role model for people with disabilities, in that, despite her own limitations, she has overcome her disabilities to the very best of her ability and has exceeded our employment expectations in so many ways." As the actual award nomination states, "JJ" has established herself as a valued member of the mailroom team and she positively contributes each day in support of our mission to provide the very best service to our nation's veterans. Needless to say, Janis is blessed with a wonderful family and the staff at the Center, who have guided her to be independent in her activities of daily living. Janis is assertive, understands and exercises her personal rights, which is evident in her choices of her routine, activities, goals and personal relation-



Janis Jackson, 2008 recipient Excellence in Government Award - Employees With Disabilities.

ships. We, as well as her parents, are very proud of her efforts and of this wonderful recognition.

Mr. Hedge comments, "Janis is not only a role model for people with disabilities...she has inspired our leadership team, her supervisors, and her coworkers with her enthusiasm, positive attitude and the sense of urgency that she exhibits when performing her assigned duties and responsibilities. JJ is one in a million!"

Coming Up!
in 08

April 26:

Blue Cross/Blue Shield WellPoint
Volunteers at West Dallas campus

April 27

Ice Cream Sunday. 3-6 pm. Autry
Park. See details on back page

May 1

West Houston Church of Christ
Volunteers at West Dallas campus



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ADULT ACTIVITY CENTER ON A ROLL IN MARCH

A full schedule of fun activities and good food kept things rolling all month long:

March 10 Chili Cook-Off

March 13 Talent and Fashion Show

March 17 St. Patrick's Day Party

March 23 Easter Egg Hunt

March 26 St. Thomas High School Jazz Band



RIVER OAKS BAPTIST SCHOOL

On Valentine's Day, boys and girls from River Oaks Baptist School visited Cullen Residence Hall to make the day extra special for its residents. The residents were greeted with roses and gourmet cookies. Thank you River Oaks Baptist students for sharing your valentines with Cullen residents. Special thanks also to Tana Wood, Foundation Board member, for making the visit possible.



LUNCHEON MAKES IT RIGHT

The Center Serving Persons with Mental Retardation was thrilled to host their Sixth Annual Luncheon in January. Devoted activist for the disabled and a nationally recognized speaker on diversity in the workplace, Richard Pimental spoke to the crowded room at River Oaks Country Club about his personal struggle with deafness and his courageous fight to change people's perceptions about persons with disabilities. He laid the foundation for what would become the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Mr. Pimental made a passionate appeal to people to take a stand for what they believe in and make a difference in the world. Guests left with a wonderful feeling of empowerment. Great Big Thanks to Dena Prasher, Tana Wood, Elizabeth DeLuca, Kathryn Smith and Farrell Saunders for chairing this hugely successful event.



Luncheon Chairs Dena Prasher, Tana Wood, Elizabeth DeLuca, Kathryn Smith and Farrell Saunders with speaker Richard Pimental (center.)



The Center Executive Director Eva Aguirre with Michelle Colvard, Executive Director of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities and Foundation for the Retarded President David Baldwin.



Alumnae and Mothers of Chi Omegas gathered in full force at the Luncheon again this year. From left are: Marie Fischer, former Foundation director Gwen Koch, Board member Joni Hruska Fichter and Sherry Gift.



Center Board of Governors and Foundation Trustee B.Z. Lee with wife Alicia, founder of Gingersnaps ETC.



MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS TEAM UP IN GINGERSNAPS' COOKIE CENTER

Among the hundreds of Gingersnaps project volunteers are members of the National Charity League (NCL), whose mission is to foster mother-daughter relationships in a philanthropic organization committed to community service. NCL members are a regular part of the Gingersnap team, participating as frequently as school schedules permit. In March, during spring break, 165 mothers and daughters, members of the Bayou City Chapter of NCL, worked at The Center, preparing the cookie and cake tins used in the project.



Gayle Saunders with Alicia Lee



(L to R) - Esther Shelby, Ebbie Smith, Marilyn Hensley and Tootie Williams

GINGERSNAP DONATIONS EXCEED \$1 MILLION!

What started modestly enough in 1996 has evolved into one of The Center's major fundraising activities. Alicia Lee, whose son Jeffrey lives at Willow River Farms, began baking fruitcakes to sell at NovemberFest. It has grown from a one-woman operation – first year sales were \$1,300 – to a successful enterprise that now involves hundreds of volunteers with annual sales of nearly \$350,000! It grew from that small start thanks in part to one very special person – former First Lady Barbara Bush.

While she and her husband B.Z. were living in Wahington, D.C. Alicia was a volunteer in the First Lady's White House Press Office. Then, when both families returned to Houston, Alicia volunteered in the former President's office. Having developed a relationship with Mrs. Bush, Alicia told her about her fundraising fruitcakes and asked her to buy some to give as Christmas gifts.

Mrs. Bush suggested Alicia bake

gingersnaps in addition to fruitcakes to sell for The Center. Always one to accept a challenge, Alicia set about to develop the perfect gingersnap recipe. After many attempts, she produced some that suited her and that she thought Mrs. Bush would like. She did. Mrs. Bush bought some as gifts and the rest, as they say, is history.

In 2001, Gingersnaps ETC added Cheesesnaps to their offerings, adding Crunchy Chocolate Nuggets to its product line in 2006. Since 2000, Gingersnaps ETC has had sales of nearly \$2 million contributing more than \$1 million to help improve the lives of those served by The Center.

And, by the way, Gingersnaps ETC still bakes and sells fruitcakes by the thousands each year. Gingersnaps, Cheesesnaps, Crunchy Chocolate Nuggets, and Fruitcakes are not just for holiday time. They can be purchased all year long at www.gingersnaps.org or by calling 713-525-8468.

Year-round. Yummy!

Gingersnaps



Cheesesnaps



Crunchy Chocolate Nuggets



Traditional Fruitcakes



Order for someone special, for any occasion. These tasty products can be given as a special gift expressing appreciation for any occasion.

Call toll free at 1-800-939-3720 or 713-525-8468. Order online at www.gingersnaps.org

Proceeds benefit The Center Serving Persons with Mental Retardation.

WRF BOWL GIVEN TO SENATOR

On April 9, while on tour at the state Capitol in Austin, students from the St. Vincent de Paul Catholic School 7th grade class visited with Texas Senator Kyle Janek. The students presented the Senator with a *people bowl*, handmade by residents of Willow River Farms, in commemoration of his service to the people of Texas. He loved the bowl and is proud to have it!



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THANK YOU FOR GRANTING WISHES!

Many thanks for your generous donations and overwhelming response to our wish list. We wished and you made it happen! The Center received in-kind donations that included clothes, a BBQ Grill, televisions, exercise equipment, an area rug, computer equipment and silk plants.

We are always in appreciation of your support of The Center and the wonderful people we serve!

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Benefiting The Center Serving Persons with Mental Retardation
Chaired by Angie Hollaway, Jennifer Martinez, and Enid Cleland

Sunday, April 27
3-6 pm
Autry Park

All you can eat ice cream, soft
drinks, hot dogs and more.

Lots of rides, a petting zoo,
karaoke, and lots of fun!

For tickets and sponsor
information, call 713/525-8484.

Autry Park is located on the West Dallas
campus of The Center, behind Cullen
Residence Hall.



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