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## Board Bulletin



Oliver J. Bell, Chairman

## Governor's Criminal Justice Volunteer Service Awards

By Oliver J. Bell, Chairman

Each spring, the Texas Board of Criminal Justice has the honor of hosting the Governor's Criminal Justice Volunteer Service Awards Ceremony. Created in 1995, these service awards honor individuals that unselfishly give of themselves to assist in the rehabilitation of offenders and to provide the offenders with hope and opportunities for a better life.

Currently, the TDCJ has more than 19,000 approved volunteers serving in various roles, assisting within the agency and the community. During FY 2011, these individuals gave more than 526,000 hours of valuable service, making a positive difference in the future of our state. These volunteers help provide education, aid offenders during reentry, assist victims, and work with chaplaincy and in departmental offices, providing endless support. This article highlights a few of those individuals recognized during the 17th Annual Governor's Criminal Justice Volunteer Service Awards Ceremony, held on April 19, 2012, in Austin.

The recipient of the Carol S. Vance Volunteer of the Year award for 2011 was Doris Zercher. Mrs. Zercher provides faith based substance abuse recovery classes at the San Antonio Parole Office, and currently ministers with her husband, a fellow award recipient, at the Dominguez Unit faith based dorm. Through her efforts, and those of her church, her husband, and the TDCJ Parole Office, a new faith based substance abuse class was recently established for parolees in San Antonio. This class is held at the church on Sunday mornings, which allows parolees to meet their class requirements without disrupting work schedules. As an ordained minister, Mrs. Zercher has been called upon to be a mentor, minister and teacher to many parolees in the South Texas area. In addition, she and her husband have been selected by their church to be their representatives for the Restorative Justice Ministries in San Antonio. Mrs. Zercher is a compassionate, positive role model whose service is positively impacting the community.

This year, the TDCJ Employee Volunteer Award was given to Vernell Houska. Ms. Houska is employed at the Neal Unit. She is known for going the extra mile, always ensuring things are completed with excellence. Her efforts not only benefit the offender population, but also staff members who are influenced and touched by her positive words. She is known to send birthday and sympathy cards to fellow employees to lift their spirits. On her days off, she volunteers at the Neal Unit by assisting with prayer, setup and support for church services. In addition, she works closely with other volunteers to plan and prepare special events at the unit. Ms. Houska is an inspiration to the offenders as well as the staff assigned at the facility.

Retired Senior Warden Brenda Chaney was also recognized at this year's ceremony. Ms. Chaney served the state of Texas for more than 23 years, retiring in late 2011. She began her career with TDCJ in 1987, promoting through the ranks to senior warden. From 2008 to her retirement, Warden

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Chaney served as senior warden at the Darrington Unit. In 2010, upon learning of the effort to establish the first Bible College in a Texas prison at the Darrington Unit, she immediately embraced the idea and has been an active supporter since its inception. For her service as a leader who effected positive change for employees and offenders alike, Warden Chaney received the Volunteer award for Criminal Justice Administrator. (Photos of Warden Chaney and Ms. Houska accepting their awards appear in the Saluting Employees section of this issue of TDCJ Connections.)

The names and awards of the 16 other recipients honored at this year's event appear in the table below. More information about each of this year's recipients is available on the TDCJ website.

The service of these individuals and organizations, as well as the tens of thousands of other volunteers working within TDCJ, is invaluable. They play an important role across the state. In recognition of their service, I ask that each of you join me in extending our appreciation to the volunteers that are working among us. They are making a valuable contribution to the betterment of our community and our state. ●

Governor's Criminal Justice Volunteer Service Awards

| Award   | Recipient                               |
|---|---|
| Chaplaincy Department                                   | Rodney and Jean Still                   |
| Correctional Institutions Division                      | Eugenia Rust                            |
| Private Facility Contract Monitoring/Oversight Division | Stephanie E. McComb                     |
| Nancy Hees Award - Parole Division                      | Reverend Albert Lucio                   |
| Religious Service                                       | Narvin "Butch" Waller                   |
| Religious Service                                       | Golden Eagle Ministries                 |
| Substance Abuse Treatment Program                       | Gordon Don Zercher                      |
| Pathfinder Award - Victim Services Division             | Michaela Burns                          |
| Judy Burd Award - Windham School District               | Carolyne Fox                            |
| Restorative Justice                                     | C.O.O.L. Ministries                     |
| Susan Cranford Award - Female Offender Program          | The Grace House                         |
| Most Innovative Program                                 | Operation Rebound                       |
| For Community Service                                   | Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable |
| For the Best Family Program                             | Day with Dad                            |
| Leonard Davis Award For Most Hours Served               | Lawrence Alwin                          |
| For Extensive Travel                                    | Roger Reno                              |