

Texas Workforce Press Release

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TWC Announces Five Finalists for 2013 Texas Workforce Solutions Employer of the Year

AUSTIN – The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) announced today that Caterpillar Inc. of Waco, Durcon Inc. of Taylor, Exxon Mobil Corporation of Baytown, GE Transportation of Fort Worth and Village Farms of Monahans were named finalists for the 2013 Texas Workforce Solutions Employer of the Year Award.

“All five Employer of the Year finalists were nominated based on their demonstrated commitment to their workers and communities, and their contributions to the Texas economy,” said TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar. “We are proud to recognize their contributions and highlight the positive outcomes that result from successful partnerships.”

The five finalists were chosen from among 25 private-sector employers who were nominated by their Local Workforce Development Boards for their contributions to the community’s workforce through innovation and collaboration with the Texas workforce system. The nominated employers exemplify TWC’s mission of promoting and supporting an effective workforce system that offers employers, individuals and communities the opportunity to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.

“These employers reflect the economic diversity found in Texas,” said TWC Commissioner Representing Employers Hope Andrade. “TWC is proud of our Texas employers showing initiative in developing workforce partnerships, responding to unique workforce challenges in their communities, and promoting economic growth and stability.”

The 2013 Employer of the Year will be announced at the 17th Annual Texas Workforce Conference Employer Award Luncheon to be held at the Grand Hyatt San Antonio on Thursday, December 5. The 2012 Employer of the Year was Champion Cooler Corporation of Denison.

Also honored at the luncheon will be the 28 local Employers of Excellence for their involvement with the Texas workforce system and the positive contributions they have made to employers, workers and their communities.

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2013 Texas Workforce Solutions Employer of the Year Nominees

Caterpillar Inc.

Construction and mining equipment manufacturer Caterpillar Inc. provides an example to employers across the state for growing a business, investing in workers, and partnering with Texas Workforce Solutions to meet workforce needs.

Caterpillar goes the extra mile to keep its employees trained. The company cross-trains its workers in different departments to increase employee skills, provide additional professional development opportunities, and promote employee engagement, leading to increased job satisfaction and higher retention rates. Caterpillar also offers college tuition assistance to eligible employees who have been with the company for a year or longer. This company also is very active in the local community, partnering with local high schools, universities, colleges, and community organizations to address workforce concerns and collaborate on training. Caterpillar also works with the Greater Waco Chamber of Commerce to find ways to give back to the community.

Caterpillar uses Workforce Solutions Heart of Texas (Heart of Texas) to find skilled workers, and connects with qualified job seekers through WorkInTexas.com. The company recently coordinated with Heart of Texas to fill 60 new positions. On the state level, Caterpillar opened a facility in Victoria this past year and began operations with about 225 new employees from the local area. The plant is scheduled to hire up to 800 people once it is fully operational.

Durcon Inc.

Last year when work surface manufacturer Durcon Inc. (Durcon) elected to consolidate its nationwide manufacturing activities into its 120,000 square-foot production and warehouse facility in Taylor, a small city in eastern Williamson County, the company embraced the community as an interested and vested partner. Durcon was eager to work cooperatively with regional higher education organizations, Taylor Independent School District, and Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area (Rural Capital).

To date, Durcon has invested more than \$7.5 million in its Taylor facility. With the assistance of the Taylor Economic Development Council and Rural Capital, Durcon has increased its Taylor-based employees from 220 to 430, while still actively recruiting an additional 80 new hires in production, technical, and managerial positions.

Most of the new jobs have been filled by residents of Taylor. Durcon also is a strong supporter of area veterans, partnering with California-based Fidelis Education to provide career training and employment for veterans in Durcon's manufacturing facility.

Durcon was recognized as the Central Texas Medium Business Exporter of the Year by the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, in cooperation with GlobalAustin, the City of Austin and the State of Texas. The company was also recognized by Governor Rick Perry during his keynote speech at the Governor's Small Business Forum: Texas Global Business Summit.

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Exxon Mobil Corporation

Exxon Mobil Corporation (ExxonMobil) has championed workforce and economic development statewide and particularly in the Gulf Coast region. The company partners with seven area schools in two school districts, providing funding for volunteers and actively participating in initiatives to increase interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) occupations. The company leads in STEM promotion by sponsoring the ExxonMobil Texas Science and Engineering Fair each year.

ExxonMobil's expansion in the Baytown area alone will create an estimated 10,000 construction jobs and 350 permanent jobs. The company is investing in a workforce initiative to recruit and educate thousands of new workers in the greater Houston area for chemical operations along the Gulf Coast. The nation's largest energy company partners with workforce programs at nine Houston-area community colleges. On June 7, 2013, ExxonMobil announced a \$500,000 commitment to fund the Community College Petrochemical Initiative to promote training programs and recruit workers for high-paying jobs.

ExxonMobil works closely with the Workforce Solutions Office in Baytown, most recently recruiting for new-hire process operators. The company serves on boards for economic development associations, chambers of commerce, workforce committees, and education at all levels.

The company also invests significantly in its own workforce, partnering routinely with Lee College to train and upgrade its incumbent workers. ExxonMobil also provides financial and volunteer support to the Lee College Veteran's Center, which was established with TWC College Credit for Heroes funding.

GE Transportation

GE Transportation has become an important workforce, economic and community partner in the North Texas region. Through partnerships with two Local Workforce Development Boards—Workforce Solutions Tarrant County (Tarrant County) and Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas (North Central Texas)—the company has taken an active role in school districts working on STEM projects, and “Build Your Own” future workforce programs. The company has shown a commitment to hiring veterans and taken the lead in advancing the National Association of Manufacturers' veterans-credentialing initiative through its National Manufacturing Institute.

When GE Transportation chose to establish a large manufacturing site in north Fort Worth on the Tarrant/Denton county line, the company approached Tarrant County and North Central Texas to develop a staffing and training model. The two Boards brought in Tarrant County College and North Central Texas College to develop a Skills Development Fund grant, which the TWC awarded in the amount of \$745,000.

By the end of the first quarter of 2013, the company had hired 333 new employees, including 54 veterans. Some 259 of the new hires upgraded their skills in welding, assembly, and machining through the Skills Development Fund grant.

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Village Farms

Village Farms, an innovative agricultural employer located in Monahans, Texas, collaborates with Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande (Upper Rio Grande) to help improve crop-harvesting opportunities in the area. Using the latest hydroponic climate control technology to grow crops in greenhouses, Village Farms developed the ability to harvest year-round.

Traditionally, the agricultural industry has relied on contract migrant seasonal farm workers during a harvest season of only a few months earning approximately \$7.25 per hour each. Village Farms now offers year-round work along with health insurance, sick pay, and vacation time, and an hourly wage of \$10-18 with bonuses. Village Farms' workers also contribute directly to Social Security and federal taxes, and work in a more comfortable, climate-controlled environment.

Since 2012, Village Farms has collaborated with Upper Rio Grande to fill 200 new jobs, often hiring former unemployment insurance benefits recipients and homeless veterans, helping them to become gainfully employed and independent. Village Farms also provides transportation for workers to visit family in El Paso approximately 250 miles away every two weeks for a weekend at home and provides discounted on-site housing, since housing in Monahans is limited.

Village Farms' unique efforts of using technology in combination with an employee-centric philosophy result in a win-win for both the employer and worker. Village Farms increases revenue by harvesting year-round, while workers earn more money, improve their quality of life, and enjoy better working conditions.

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The Texas Workforce Commission is a state agency dedicated to helping Texas employers, workers and communities prosper economically. For details on TWC and the programs it offers in coordination with its network of local workforce development boards, call 512-463-8942 or visit www.texasworkforce.org.