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## Board Bulletin



Leopoldo "Leo" Vasquez III, Secretary

## TDCJ PACT Conference: An effective avenue for communication

By Leopoldo "Leo" Vasquez III, Secretary

Communication is critically important to the success of every business or partnership, including government agencies. Through effective communication and understanding, collaboration can occur both internally and externally. In 1989, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) developed the Ombudsman Office, now known as the Ombudsman Program, to facilitate communication with its stakeholders. This provides a single point of contact for members of the general public who have inquiries regarding the agency, offenders or TDCJ staff.

To further enhance communication with outside stakeholders, the TDCJ Public Awareness - Corrections Today (PACT) Conference was implemented. The PACT Conference is sponsored by the Ombudsman Program, and coordinated by a team of agency staff from several departments. It is a free daylong conference open to the public that is held every other year in Huntsville. This

year's conference is scheduled for March 24, 2012, at the Sam Houston State University, George J. Beto Criminal Justice Center.

Based on participants' feedback, the PACT Conference is now structured to also benefit offender family members and advocates, as well as the general public, community leaders, criminal justice volunteers, and jail and prison ministries. It provides attendees with direct access to information about TDCJ programs, services, and policies and procedures. Participants have the opportunity to learn about virtually every aspect of the TDCJ, and how best to help those that are incarcerated or on parole.

As a part of the conference's agenda, informative presentations and panel discussions are held on varying topics. There are exhibit rooms where agency representatives are on hand to distribute brochures and information about their programs and have one-on-one discussions. Staff members are

available throughout the conference to interact with attendees and answer questions.

The PACT Conference routinely focuses its main presentations on parole, incarceration, rehabilitation and health care. Topics timely in nature, such as agency organizational changes, or new programs and initiatives, are also highlighted. Representatives from the Board of Pardons and Paroles participate in the conference to address issues relating to the parole approval process. There also is an exhibit room dedicated to the GO KIDS (Giving Offenders' Kids Incentive and Direction to Succeed) initiative. This exhibit room includes resource tables for organizations that provide assistance to strengthen the bond between incarcerated parents and their children.

Presentations for this year's conference will feature programs related to operational matters of Correctional Institutions, Parole, Rehabilitative Programs, Community Justice

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Assistance, Health Services, and the Reentry and Integration divisions, as well as the Windham School District and the Board of Pardons and Paroles.

Along with communicating information to our stakeholders, each conference offers the participants an opportunity for feedback. Attendees are surveyed to assess the value of the conference's content. This communication ensures future conference presentations will have the greatest impact and usefulness for those involved.

In 2010, more than 320 individuals attended the PACT Conference, and attendance for this year is anticipated to exceed that number.

This agency's business is truly a people business and, as with any business, communication with your constituency is essential to being successful. The TDCJ PACT Conference provides an outstanding venue for our stakeholders to familiarize themselves with the agency and to interactively communicate with knowledgeable staff representing TDCJ and other criminal justice agencies. Don't miss this opportunity to join us on March 24, 2012! ●