PRESS RELEASE
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Excellence in state government and higher education was recently highlighted at the 49th Annual Texas Association of State Systems for Computing and Communication (TASSCC) conference in Dallas, Texas, August 6th though August 9th. During the conference, TASSCC presented several awards to recognize excellence and innovation in Texas public sector IT services.

The TASSCC Trailblazer Award recognizes leadership and excellence in IT in both state agencies and higher education. It was presented to two exceptional individuals: John Hoffman – Chief Technology Officer and Deputy State Chief Information Officer for the Texas Department of Information Resources and Ed Pierson – Vice President and CIO for Information Technology at Texas A&M University.

John Hoffman - Chief Technology Officer and Deputy State Chief Information Officer for the Texas Department of Information Resources, is recognized as a thought leader. He has served on national and state boards and committees including Vice President, and President for the National Association of State Technology Directors (NASTD). In 2021, he received the Lifetime Achievement award from the association. Additionally, John has been a fixture at TASSCC events and regularly contributes opening comments, panels, and presentations.

In recent years, John demonstrated broad leadership and organizational change success by advancing the Next Generation Data Center Services contract structure to include a larger portfolio of contracts, leading to additional service offerings for customers and the ability for customers to scale their IT infrastructure infinitely through a unique hybrid on-prem to cloud infrastructure.

John has led an impressive number of outstanding State of Texas initiatives and has always done it with an infectious smile and positive attitude. The TASSCC community always enjoys and welcomes the skill and good-humored approach from “the Hoss”. John is one of those rare individuals who is more focused on giving credit to others rather than taking credit for his own excellent work. John is an invaluable asset to the State of Texas.

Ed Pierson – Vice President and CIO for Information Technology at Texas A&M University, is an exceptional leader who seamlessly integrates cutting-edge leadership styles and behaviors to effectively lead a geographically dispersed team of over 700 IT professionals spread across more than 500 buildings in diverse locations such as Texas, Washington DC, and Qatar. With a strategic approach to leadership, Ed demonstrates a deep understanding of the organization's goals and develops well-thought-out
strategies to achieve them, leveraging his critical thinking skills.

Ed fosters a culture of appreciation and collaboration through his monthly "Ed Talks," where he showcases the remarkable work of IT professionals and celebrates their achievements. He also promotes collaboration and team cohesion by organizing "IT Meet and Greets" that facilitates cross-functional collaboration and personal connections.

Recognizing the importance of understanding his team's perspectives, Ed proactively engages with his teams by visiting various IT locations and engaging in meaningful conversations. This allows him to gain valuable insights, discuss long-term plans, and align goals with the aspirations of his team. Ed's commitment to the growth and development of his employees is evident in his comprehensive six-month review process. This process focuses on assessing individual aspirations, setting meaningful goals, and providing necessary support to facilitate their professional progression. Ed's review process also encourages employees to step out of their comfort zones and strive for excellence in new areas, fostering personal and professional growth.

Overall, Ed Pierson's visionary leadership, strategic thinking, culture of appreciation, collaboration initiatives, and commitment to employee development create a thriving environment that enhances both the success of the organization and the well-being of its employees.

The TASSCC Rising Star Award for 2023 was presented to five exceptional individuals: Desiree Delacorte – Office of the Attorney General Child Support Division; Emily Faber – Comptroller of Public Accounts Information Technology Division; Allison Oslund – Texas A&M University; Lindi Ragsdale – The University of Texas at San Antonio; and Sara Reilly – UT McCombs School of Business.

Desiree Delacorte – Office of the Attorney General Child Support Division, is a rising leader and one of the most dedicated in the Child Support Division IT organization, and she is one of the most dedicated and driven individuals. An inclusive leader, Desiree brings an acute focus on the mission of the agency, which is to serve the children and families of Texas. She has played a pivotal role in leading CSD modernization efforts for several years and has quickly grown into a more influential leader and continues to take on more responsibility with each passing day. Desiree brings passion, focus, and positive energy to the team and promotes unity and forward momentum across the entire team. She has been a key driver of multiple successful releases of modern applications that have transformed the way that CSD operates; much of the success can be credited to her being a champion of the Agile process and human-centered design initiatives. Desiree is highly deserving of this award for the many impactful contributions she has made for CSD IT Modernization.

Emily Faber – Comptroller of Public Accounts Information Technology Division, has displayed the utmost dedication and drive since she joined the team. Emily’s relentless commitment to her work has been evident, particularly in her pivotal role and leadership in the success of the Geographic Information System Software Solution (GISSS) project.

Emily’s technical know-how is remarkable, but what sets her apart is her unwavering enthusiasm to continuously enhance her skills. Even with a demanding schedule, she readily volunteers for additional geographic information system (GIS) training, ensuring she remains at the forefront of her field. This commitment not only benefits her team but also reflects her genuine desire to improve her own capabilities to better support her work.
Emily’s proactive approach and diligent work ethic make her a natural leader, so it came as no surprise to her colleagues when she assumed the position of GIS Team Lead earlier this year.

Since becoming Team Lead, Emily has demonstrated a can-do attitude and striking resourcefulness. She overcame numerous setbacks and challenges while leading the GISS update project to the finish line — evidence that Emily's ability to devise effective solutions, address issues promptly and adhere to project timelines is nothing short of impressive. Furthermore, her “team-first” mindset fosters an environment where collaboration thrives, which makes working with her a true pleasure.

Emily Faber’s determination, technical expertise and superior leadership undoubtedly make her a shining star for CPA and all of Texas state government.

Allison Oslund – Texas A&M University, built an award-winning communications team and made significant improvements in the culture of IT that benefited the entire campus. When Allison first arrived, communications were often seen as a barrier to getting things done instead of a crucial component to our organization’s success. Over time, she built a reputation for excellence and an environment where there are more requests for communications assistance than there will ever be resources available. A new executive recently said, “When Allison Oslund is involved in any projects, they just go better.” In a 2022 campus survey, the Division of Information Technology received the highest ratings for “clear communications” than any other campus communications team and was rated as one of the Division’s “highest strengths.”

Not only is Allison innovative and talented, but she also loves building teams and developing young professionals. She actively seeks opportunities to give back and help grow skillsets and currently serves as a mentor.

Lindi Ragsdale – The University of Texas at San Antonio, technical knowledge comes from personal experience that she has leveraged in her current and past positions. Most of her professional work experience has focused on communications and student recruitment and advising. However, Lindi unofficially became the liaison for many technical projects and the primary contact for technical support in the Online Program office which allowed her to demonstrate her technical abilities. UTSA Online offers 100% online degree programs to students all over the country, so Lindi’s role directly contributes to the recruitment and success of UTSA students, an effort which has recently been recognized by the US News and Word Reports. UTSA Online was ranked the #1 online program in San Antonio, Texas - The #1 online program in the UT School System - The #7 online program in the State of Texas - In the Top 25% of online programs across the nation UTSA Online jumped up 50% in the rankings since 2021, and Lindi’s technological innovations contributed to this directly. Lindi has been directly involved in maintaining better student records, increasing recruitment and retention, offering better communication options, and giving students schedule flexibility.

Sara Reilly – UT McCombs School of Business, might not fit the mold of the stereotypical IT person, but she is what the future of IT looks like. Sara has a Swiss army knife of soft skills that she uses every day in service to the State of Texas. She is polite, professional, and easy to work with. She uses strong verbal and written communication skills to establish a shared understanding between business and IT and to produce meaningful project artifacts that help the team capture requirements, decisions, and justifications. Most of all, Sara understands that the business’ mission, goals, and objectives are what matters the most. She focuses on understanding what the business really needs to be successful, and she helps her team understand those needs. Sara realizes that success looks different from one project
to the next, and that no two projects are exactly alike. Sara can do a little bit of everything and if she
doesn’t know it, she’s going to go learn it. It is people like Sara who are the glue that hold successful
teams together.

The TASSCC Project Excellence Awards were established to recognize the innovative application of
communications and computing technologies in the state of Texas. As public-sector IT employees, the
work that we do frequently happens behind the scenes. TASSCC established the Project Excellence
Award to recognize state and Higher Education Projects and Employees who are using technology in
innovative and impactful ways. This year we received numerous outstanding nominations.

The TASSCC Project Excellence Award for Cost Effective / High Value Initiatives was presented to the
Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) for their TxDOT Artificial Intelligence Program.
To strengthen and improve TxDOT IT processes, TxDOT has implemented a Machine Learning and
Artificial Intelligence system to capture, digitize, and automate our processes which further build our IT
enterprise for tomorrow. TxDOT decided to utilize Robotics Process Automation (RPA) to bring cost
savings and efficiency to the agency. Many of TxDOT’s processes were repetitive, manual, error prone,
and required many resources to operate. TxDOT’s UAM processes required manual work with more than
150 steps, 120 applications, and 2 weeks of wait time for the end-user. Since implementing the Artificial
Intelligence (AI) system, TxDOT has reduced lead time in onboarding, access management and invoice
processing. With further machine learning capabilities, TxDOT is now able to make intelligent business
decisions quicker than ever before, reducing process time from many weeks to a few hours! The AI
initiative builds on itself, constantly learning from input provided by our userbase and guided by the
business mission and vision.

The TASSCC Project Excellence Award for Collaborative Solutions was presented to the Department of
State and Health Services (DSHS) for their VAOS (Vaccine Allocation and Ordering System) Project.
The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) embarked on a modernization journey in May 2020 to
address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. One critical issue was the inefficiency of the
Texas DSHS Immunization Unit’s legacy vaccine inventory system, which struggled to handle the rapid
distribution and tracking of COVID-19 vaccine doses. To overcome these limitations, DSHS stood up the
Vaccine Allocation and Ordering System (VAOS) using the Salesforce platform. The VAOS solution aimed
to provide a customizable and user-friendly system capable of efficiently distributing vaccines while
accommodating changing federal requirements. The project successfully integrated all state-managed
vaccines and COVID therapeutics into VAOS, establishing a centralized source for vaccine providers
across Texas.

The TASSCC Project Excellence Award for Application of Innovative Tools to Transform the Delivery of
Public Services was presented to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for their My Texas
Future project. My Texas Future is a new digital portal that connects Texans with postsecondary
education credentialing opportunities to bridge the skills gap and provide support to individuals as they
work to further their career. My Texas Future uses interactive tools to help students identify their
interests, align those interests with potential career opportunities, and then find relevant credentialing
programs across the state. For the State of Texas, it is the first product of its kind that provides an end-
to-end journey for students using localized data from multiple state agencies. Prospective students will
be able to find exploration tools, resources, and support from real advisors, specific to their
individualized needs at every stage of their postsecondary journey. Users begin by exploring
professional interests with the Career Quiz. Once they learn which professions fit their interest, they can
use the Career Explorer to compare hundreds of Texas-based careers determined by local demand, pay,
required education, and related skills. Then, they can use the Program Explorer to sort through higher ed programs based on related careers, tuition, salaries after graduation, and time to graduation. If students create an account, they can receive recommended search results from these interactive tools based on their learning goals. They can also save careers, schools, and resources to their profile. My Texas Future helps advance the State of Texas’ strategic 60x30TX plan, with the goal of ensuring at least 60% of Texans between the ages of 25-34 can obtain a certificate or degree by 2030. In future releases, the portal will add features to support prospective and transfer students to explore degree plans and see how their courses transfer across Texas public colleges.

The TASSCC Project Excellence Award for Data Sharing & Management was presented to The University of Houston-Clear Lake for their Data Warehouse Initiative Project. The University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL) implemented its new strategic plan in the Fall of 2021, Impact 2025 and beyond. One of our objectives is to improve business and academic operations by providing access to 1) a data warehouse and 2) data visualization tools. The launch of Clarity, a collection of software and processes, marks an innovative leap forward for UHCL in its ability to address all data management and data governance needs to ensure consistency, accuracy, and timeliness across the institution. Clarity allows UHCL to reduce costs, transform data delivery methods, and improve decision-making processes through data accessibility. The development and implementation of our institutional data warehouse and data governance framework is a testament to the support of our Executive Leadership and the collaborative effort of our campus community and content experts. UHCL looks forward to the expansion of the Data Warehouse Initiative to ensure all areas of data governance are addressed to secure long-term sustainability and success.

The TASSCC mission is partnering to advance education and networking among professionals supporting information technology for Texas public sector and higher education. TASSCC members are doing extraordinary things, and TASSCC is more than happy to support and encourage future growth and highlight those individuals and organizations who deserve it. Congratulations to all our 2023 TASSCC Awards winners!