

News 'n Views

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Department of Workforce Services

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Conway office voted one of best again!

Residents of Faulkner County recently voted the Arkansas Workforce Center at Conway as First Runner-Up for Best Employment Agency for the second year in a row.

“Customers voted us one of the best for the second year, which says a great deal about the level of customer service our staff are providing,” Department of Workforce Services Director Artee Williams said. “This honor reflects the accomplishments DWS is making toward moving from ‘good to great.’”

Around 30 employees from DWS, Workforce Investment Act programs and other agency partners work at the Conway office, which provides employment services to both employers and job seekers.



AWARD — Staff from the Department of Workforce Services Conway office pose for a photo recently. Residents of Faulkner County recently voted the Arkansas Workforce Center at Conway as First Runner-Up for Best Employment Agency for the second year.



2 offices hold grand openings

The Arkansas Workforce Centers at Blytheville and Helena recently held grand opening celebrations.

The office at Blytheville relocated to 2825 S. Division. The Highway Department purchased the old building in order to build an overpass through the area.

The new office is located on the Arkansas Northeastern College campus, giving customers better access to agency programs and services.

The center in Helena is currently located at 819 Newman Drive. Three DWS offices relocated to the new office: the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families office in Marianna, the TANF office in Helena, and the Employment Services/Unemployment Insurance office in Helena.

“DWS is committed to ensuring that each office is easily accessible and customer friendly,” DWS Director Artee Williams said.



One assistant director, four managers selected

Gary Do

Gary Do was recently named manager of the Department of Workforce Services office at Texarkana.

Do oversees the daily operations of the Texarkana office, which provides job placement, Unemployment Insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, services to veterans and the Arkansas Career Readiness Certificate program for residents of Miller, Little River and Sevier counties in Arkansas, as well as Bowie and Cass counties in Texas.

He began working for the state in September 2009 and for DWS in 2011, where he was a workforce specialist before being named manager.

Do has a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

"I look forward to being able to continue to expand my knowledge of all DWS programs and embrace all new innovations the agency has to offer," Do said.

Shemekia Hicks

Shemekia Hicks was recently named manager of the Department of Workforce Services office at Magnolia.

Hicks oversees the daily operations of the Magnolia office, which provides job placement, Unemployment Insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, services to veterans and the Arkansas Career Readiness Certificate program for residents of Lafayette and Columbia counties.

Hicks began working for DWS in 2002 and worked in the Camden office for 10 years. She has served as an Employment Services interviewer, Work Pays case manager and Transitional Employment Assistance supervisor before being named manager of the Magnolia office.

She has a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration degree from Southern Arkansas University at Magnolia.

"I look forward to working with



Gary Do

employers and job seekers in Magnolia and surrounding areas," Hicks said. "It is not the title one holds but the service one provides that is most important.

Jenny Patoka

Jenny Patoka was recently named manager of the Department of Workforce Services office at Mountain Home.

Patoka oversees the daily operations of the Mountain Home office, which provides job placement, Unemployment Insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, services to veterans and the Arkansas Career Readiness Certificate program for residents of Baxter County.

She is a retired school teacher and has worked for DWS for three-and-a-half years, where she was a workforce specialist in Dumas and a program supervisor in Rogers.

Patoka has a Bachelor of Science in Biology and Mathematics degree from the University of Arkansas at Monticello and is a graduate of the 12-week Dale Carnegie program.

"I look forward to working with the team in Mountain Home as the agency moves from 'good to great!'" Patoka said.

Lee Reddix

Lee Reddix was recently named manager of the Department of Workforce Services office at Helena.

Reddix oversees the daily operations of the Helena office, which provides job placement, Unemployment Insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, services to veterans and the Arkansas Career Readiness Certificate program for residents of Phillips, Lee, Prairie and Monroe counties.

He began working for DWS in 2012 and previously served 23 years in the Army, Reserves and Mississippi National Guard. He also worked two-and-a-half years for the Helena-West Helena Police Department, 12 years in corrections, four years as the chief of



Jenny Patoka

security at a maximum security prison, and seven years as the director of Custodial Services for the Mississippi Governor's Office of General Services.

Reddix has a Bachelor of Science degree from Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi. He also has several Army commendations and is a graduate of several programs, including the Army Air Assault School and Intelligence Officer Course.

Reddix said he looks forward to working with community and business organizations as well as encouraging staff to reach their full potential in providing the best customer service to customers.

Earnest Sweat

Earnest Sweat was recently named the assistant director for Information Technology. Sweat replaced Tom Bohannon, who retired.

As assistant director, Sweat oversees all of the IT applications and services for DWS offices around the state, including Unemployment Insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Employment Services.

Sweat began working for DWS in August 1982 as an intermittent programmer analyst. He was promoted in 1983 as a full-time analyst who was assigned to the Interstate Benefits Exchange program (now called ICON).

He was promoted to senior program analyst in the 1990s and became the automated solutions manager in 2001. Sweat served in that role until he was promoted to assistant director.

Sweat has a Bachelor of Arts in Business and Computer Science from Southern Arkansas University at Magnolia. He also is a graduate of the DWS Leadership Development Program, Class 3.

He currently serves as senior pastor of Mount Sinai Church of God in Christ in Conway, a position he has held for the last 18 years.

He is married to his college sweetheart, Jescena, to whom he has been married for 32 years.

"I always believe in teamwork because it takes teamwork to make the dream work," Sweat said.



Earnest Sweat



Shemekia Hicks



Lee Reddix



AWARD — Staff from the FIRE/BPC units pose with a Distinguished Performance Award the agency received from On Point Technology. The national award celebrates the achievement and contributions of state workforce agency employees who have a positive impact on the Unemployment Insurance program.

‘Good to Great’ suggestions pour in

More than 40 “Good to Great” suggestions have been received from employees around the state. Suggestions include the development of new training programs for staff and possible policy changes.

“Senior management is very impressed with the quantity and quality of the submissions,” DWS Director Artee Williams said. “The submissions demonstrate employee engagement in the ‘Good to Great’ initiative.”

To address one of the “Good to Great” suggestions, employees can now submit suggestions anonymously through inter-office mail. In order

to be considered for implementation, however, anonymous suggestions must have detailed information since the employee will not be available for further contact if questions arise.

“These suggestions have been well thought out and complex,” Williams said. “Many of these suggestions will take extensive time and planning to implement, but senior management is reviewing and considering all of them.”

Suggestions can be submitted to dws.goodtogreat@arkansas.gov or can be sent through inter-office mail to Lauren Goins, Quality Assurance Coordinator, Central Office.



MARATHON — Unemployment Insurance Assistant Director Ron Calkins (left) and Board of Review Chairman Keesa Smith (right) participated in the Little Rock Marathon earlier this year. Calkins completed the marathon, and Smith completed the half marathon.



APAC GRADUATION — Four DWS employees and one former employee recently received management certifications from the Arkansas Public Administration Consortium. Receiving the Arkansas Governmental Manager certification were (l to r) Stephanie Robinson, Doss Burgess, Allen Coleman and Keith Tarter (a former employee). Rena Stevenson (r) received the Certified Public Manager certification.



RETIREMENT — Walter Oliver (center) recently retired after 39 years of service.



RETIREMENT — Paula Hines (right) recently retired after 35 years of service.



RETIREMENT — Bobbie Smith recently retired after 35 years of service.



RETIREMENT — Lavern Johnson (right) recently retired after 38 years of service.

Best Wishes

It is with bittersweet emotions that I announce that my last day with DWS will be this Friday, as I have accepted a position with another state agency.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the last 12 years at DWS and have forged some great friendships with some wonderful people.

To all of you who helped me along the way, I sincerely want to say, "God bless, and thank you!"

*Best wishes,
Kimberly Friedman*



RETIREMENT — Emma Lay (center) recently retired after 38 years of service.