

# FISCAL NOTES

A Review of the Texas Economy from the Office of Susan Combs, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts



By Constance Matheny and Bruce Wright

A life in business doesn't always end with retirement. In Texas and across the U.S., thousands of successful retired men and women are using the skills and knowledge accrued in their careers to help others get started in the business world.

The Service Corps of Retired Executives, now called SCORE, was created in October 1964 as a group of volunteers who agreed to provide counseling and mentoring to entrepreneurs and small business owners. Since that time, SCORE volunteers have aided more than 9 million ventures, providing free, confidential counseling on topics such as business plan development, financing, purchasing and day-to-day management.

Today, about 13,000 SCORE volunteer mentors are organized into more than 340 chapters throughout the U.S., with 10 active in Texas.

## **Pet Collars in Dallas**

The Dallas SCORE office, opened in 1965, has 50 volunteers with backgrounds in accounting, finance, marketing, franchising,

real estate and social media.

“Our volunteers want to give back to their community and to make a difference in the lives of the people we mentor,” says Ken Fogg, director of the Dallas office.

One of the office’s many success stories is Hagar Collars and their product, Neck’s Best Thing®. The collar was named after a cockatoo; Hagar was plucking out his feathers to the point of injury.

“A veterinarian put on the traditional cone-shaped collar to protect him,” says the bird’s owner, Els Bowen. “It lasted about 15 seconds on Hagar, as he ripped it off with his beak.”

In response, Bowen invented a new type of adjustable recovery collar looking like a human neck brace, one that can be worn by birds, cats, dogs and other small animals to protect them after surgery or injury. It’s a more comfortable alternative to the hard plastic “Elizabethan” cones many pets dislike.

Bowen met with Lyman Bowe of SCORE, explaining her product and her need for assistance with moving it to market. Bowe helped Bowen write a complete business plan, with information about manufacturing, distribution options, office and warehouse needs.

“I know the people from SCORE are sincere,” Bowen says. “They volunteer their services and have nothing to financially gain or lose by offering their advice.”

In 2012, Bowen sold Hagar Collars to Chakri Paila, a business consultant and inventor. Paila is focused on marketing Neck’s Best Thing® throughout the U.S. and internationally. Today, the collars are being used by nearly half of the 28 veterinary schools in the U.S., many practicing veterinarians and pet owners who want an alternative to the hard-cone collars. Paila also is connecting with pet rescue groups looking for a better alternative to cone collars.



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— Ken Fogg,  
director of the Dallas  
SCORE office



*Chakri Paila and Hagar*



*Hagar Collars' product, Neck's Best Thing®*

Paila likes to give back to the community and plans to volunteer at the Dallas SCORE office. He feels that SCORE will provide a great opportunity to help other businesses succeed.

### **Sharp Cookies in El Paso**

The El Paso SCORE office, opened in 1970, has 14 mentors with experience in business ownership, marketing, financial services, insurance, real estate and management.

One startup they helped is a bakery goods business called Sharp Cookie.

“Mark Lysinger, the district director of the El Paso SCORE office, was the first person who gave me the confidence to start looking for a space to lease for a commercial kitchen,” says Nancy S. Reynolds, a former schoolteacher and Sharp Cookie proprietor.

“It was really tough to get people to take me seriously, but Mark did right away,” she says. “I opened my first bakery in October 2007. They are taking me seriously now, I’m happy to report.”

“Over the last six years, I have visited regularly with Nancy in her bakery to go over any business concerns she may have,” Lysinger says. “Our SCORE volunteers have a long-term commitment to consult with these businesses with an average tenure of nine years.”



*Nancy Reynolds, proprietor of Sharp Cookie*



*Sharp Cookie in El Paso*

Dick Wright, another El Paso SCORE volunteer, suggested that Reynolds use Facebook for marketing, a strategy that succeeded.

“In 2013, the business is growing very nicely,” Reynolds says. “The growth is mainly in custom orders but overall sales revenues are up. Sharp Cookie has three employees, one full-time and two part-time.”

## Cracking Eggs in Corpus

Corpus Christi’s SCORE office, opened in 1972, relies on 24 business mentors.

“Our volunteers want to impart their wisdom to people just starting out in the business world, and perhaps keep them from making mistakes they learned about the hard way years ago,” says Rebecca Esparza, director of the Corpus Christi SCORE office.

One Corpus Christi SCORE success story is the Atomic Omelette and Grill, a breakfast and lunch destination owned by Michael VanSyckle and James Greer, who dreamed of opening their own place after working together for eight years at a chain restaurant.

The two began by attending a local seminar on opening a business. “James and I went in blind, and had our eyes opened real fast to everything involved in opening a startup restaurant,” says VanSyckle.

A SCORE mentor gave them step-by-step instructions for writing the business plan that would guide their newborn business. The partners received a loan from Accion Texas, a nonprofit that supports small businesses, and put up the rest of the money they needed themselves.

“James and I really believed in ourselves,” VanSyckle says.

“James was 50 years old and I was 53 when we blew our stability and started our adventure — with our spouses’ blessing! We opened in February 2011.

“James passed away on April 12, 2011. It didn’t stop our dream,



*Atomic Omelette and Grill owners James Greer and Michael VanSyckle*

though, and the restaurant is still open to this day,” he says. “Lots of folks said we were nuts to open a new business at our age — but now, they’re all glad we did. James Greer’s legacy will live on.”

## SCORE’S TEXAS IMPACT IN 2012

In 2012, SCORE helped create nearly 2,700 new Texas businesses.

New Businesses Started	2,671
Jobs Created	7,483
Number of Clients Who Grew Their Businesses	3,040
Total Revenue Growth of Texas SCORE Clients	\$214,006,346

Source: The SCORE Foundation

### Help around the House in Tyler

The East Texas SCORE office in Tyler, open since 1983, has 10 active mentors, some with more than 20 years of experience with SCORE.

“Our volunteers are motivated with a sincere desire to help a business succeed,” says Jim Albritton, East Texas SCORE director. “We mentor every step they take, if requested, to ensure their success. We also consider it a success if we recommend that a person not go into business due to a lack of experience, education or passion, which will save them time, effort and more importantly money.”

SCORE helped Ingrid Klein begin her business, Texas Home Help Services LLC, in May 2011. Her business connects screened contract workers with those who need help with housecleaning, yard work, cooking, errands, pet sitting, packing and other routine chores.

“Prior to launching my business, a friend of mine had heard about SCORE and, knowing it was a free service to the community, suggested I contact them,” Klein says. “I presented my business plan to get their honest feedback. After our first meeting, I felt very encouraged to move forward with my company, knowing that SCORE would be available to meet with me along the way. All of SCORE’s ideas, advice and wisdom were incredibly valuable and appreciated.

“One idea SCORE had was to contact the local newspaper to see if they would be interested in writing a story about my business,” she says. “A week after I officially launched, the *Tyler Morning*



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— Jim Albritton,  
East Texas SCORE director



*Telegraph* agreed to write the story and it was featured in the business section of the Sunday paper. Because of SCORE's advice, it was not long before Texas Home Help Services had a large base of clients.

"We grew so quickly that we made enough revenue to completely pay off any startup costs associated with the business and were already profitable [within a month]," Klein says. "A friend in Nashville was eager to open a location there, and in February 2012 we officially launched the second location. I saw the potential and have now added a third location in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Going forward, I would love to see a Home Help Service in every city in the U.S. — and will be requesting the help of SCORE for direction and advice on that topic."



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— Ingrid Klein,  
Texas Home Help Services LLC

### SCORE OFFICES IN TEXAS



SCORE offices can be found throughout the state.

Location	Year Chartered	Current Number of Volunteers
Austin	1980	50
Dallas	1965	50
East Texas (Tyler)	1983	10
El Paso	1970	14
Fort Worth	1966	45
Houston	1965	80
Lubbock	1980	26
Rio Grande Valley (Harlingen)	1975	25
San Antonio	1976	44
Corpus Christi	1972	24

Source: Comptroller survey of SCORE offices

To find the SCORE office nearest you, visit  
<http://www.score.org/chapters-map>.