



News Release

TCEQ marks 25 years of internship program

Conference 'Celebrating 25 Years of Impact and Influence' of Mickey Leland program

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The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality marked 25 years of the Mickey Leland Environmental Internship Program today during its annual intern conference at the University of Texas' Pickle Campus.

The conference, titled "Celebrating 25 Years of Impact and Influence," was primarily geared toward helping the interns currently in the program and included numerous distinguished speakers, including TCEQ's current chairman, Bryan Shaw; one of its commissioners, Toby Baker; and John Hall, the founding chairman of TCEQ's predecessor agency, the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission.

The Mickey Leland Environmental Internship program – which places interns at TCEQ, other state agencies, and private companies – started in 1992 with 35 interns and currently has 115.

Since its inception, TCEQ has benefited from the 1,977 interns who have participated in the program and has positively impacted many of the interns' lives and careers. The agency's human resources department looks at interns as part of its potential job hiring pool; currently, 45 former interns are on the agency's payroll.

Some noted examples of former interns include Ramiro Garcia Jr., deputy director for the TCEQ's Office of Enforcement and Compliance; Jaime Garza, regional director for TCEQ's Laredo and Harlingen offices; Lori Wilson, executive assistant to TCEQ's executive director; and former NFL coach Daron K. Roberts.

Hall, the keynote speaker at the conference, stated that he long admired the career of U.S. Rep. Mickey Leland, who was widely known for his efforts to combat hunger worldwide. After Leland's death in 1989 in a plane crash in Ethiopia, Hall wanted to find a way to honor him and thought that an internship program would be especially appropriate because Leland was such a believer in public service.

Hall, who was recognized by the Mickey Leland advisory board for what he helped to start, thanked the current TCEQ commissioners and their employees for continuing the program through all of these years.

"Mickey was engaged in public service for the right reasons," Hall said. "He loved people. He was committed to transforming the lives of ordinary people."

If Leland were still alive and was able to address the interns, "I think he would tell you to get involved in public service," Hall said. "Get involved in your community and make a difference."



Chairman Shaw encouraged interns to go beyond dressing for the job they want to do; he told them to find opportunities during their internships to do the work that would be expected of them in the job they want.

“Make sure you don’t miss those opportunities just because it is uncomfortable,” he said, adding that his mentor during his Ph.D. program challenged him to do tasks that other doctoral students did not normally get. “I took advantage because I was willing and ready.”

Commissioner Baker explained to the interns several issues the TCEQ is dealing with right now and the difficulties faced in enforcing environmental laws. As a regulatory agency, it matters little how he feels about the law, and as a commissioner, he has to uphold what the law dictates.

He says the agency is happy with the internship program and is viewed upon highly by others outside the agency.

“I hope you have been able to get a lot out of it,” Baker said to the interns. “One thing I will tell you is that we are not afraid to give you work.”

Despite the large number of interns accepted, which included 99 undergraduate and 16 graduate students, the positions were quite competitive with more than 550 applicants. Top universities represented as Mickey Leland interns include the University of Texas at Austin with 31, Texas A&M University-College Station with 21, Texas State University with 12, and Texas Tech University with five.

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