

News

Release

July 22, 2011

United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service

Contact: Melissa Blair
Melissa.blair@tx.usda.gov
Phone: 361-241-0609

NRCS Receives Business of the Year Award NRCS Employee Roel Guerra Honored

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was recently named 2011 Business of the Year by the Harlingen Region of the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)/Division for Blind Services (DBS). NRCS received the award for its commitment to working with and employing blind and visually impaired individuals in Rio Grande City and throughout Texas. Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in South Texas, Tomas Dominguez, received the award for NRCS.

NRCS employee of 24 years, Roel Guerra of Rio Grande City, was also honored for his commitment and hard work with the agency in helping landowners with conservation planning. Guerra, who is legally blind and hearing impaired due to a hereditary eye condition that affects peripheral vision and hearing, was presented with a proclamation from State Representative Ryan Guillen. The House of Representatives' resolution, which was presented by Starr County Judge Eloy Vera, recognized Guerra's career as a soil conservation technician and planner that has earned him an outstanding reputation among the landowners in Starr County and his peers.

The House Resolution No. 1888 states: "This esteemed Texan has successfully forged a notable career to which others may aspire, and he may take justifiable pride in his many accomplishments; now therefore, be it resolved, that the House of Representatives of the 82nd Texas Legislature hereby honor Roel Omar Guerra for his personal and professional achievements and extend to him sincere best wishes for continued success."

Ralph Rangel, field director and Bonnie Notargiacomo, vocational rehabilitation coordinator, with DARS/DBS in the Harlingen Region, shared with attendees which included family, friends, NRCS and DARS/DBS employees, Starr County officials and others, that the cooperative effort of employers, such as NRCS working in cooperation with DARS/DBS, enables individuals such as Guerra to live full productive lives by being employed and being able to provide for their families.

"Roel is a valued employee and a strong role model for his family as well as his community as a whole," said Notargiacomo, who is Guerra's vocational counselor. "Roel has demonstrated time after time his unwavering dedication to continue to work and provide for his family despite the many obstacles he has faced. You see, Roel is legally blind and severely hearing impaired due to Retinitis Pigmentosa and Ushers Syndrome, a hereditary eye condition that affects the peripheral vision and hearing."

Notargiacomo said Guerra's wife of 29 years, Reyna, stated that, "My husband will not give up, he is a fighter, and he never let his disability define him as a person."

-Over-

Guerra came to DBS seeking assistance in job retention and after developing a comprehensive assessment, it was jointly agreed upon with NRCS that Guerra would benefit from the vocational rehabilitation service that derive from the “Big Six” philosophy: Employment lifestyle skills training, adjustment to blindness, orientation and mobility, low vision and hearing evaluations, along with specialized glasses and hearing aids. In addition, DARS/DBS provided adaptive technology equipment so that Guerra could continue to complete his work tasks independently. Notargiacomo told the audience that after a year of receiving DBS services that Guerra had reached his goal of retaining employment and had benefitted from their rehabilitation services.

Arturo Ibarra, resource team leader with NRCS in Edinburg, who has assisted Guerra during his career and Dominguez, told the audience about their work with Guerra and how NRCS is like a big family who works together not only for improving Texas lands, but also improving employees. Both Ibarra and Dominguez, and State Conservationist, Salvador Salinas, were presented framed recognition certificates for their cooperative efforts with NRCS and DBS in working with Guerra.

“NRCS is honored to have an outstanding employee like Roel who knows the true meaning of Helping People Help the Land,” said State Conservationist, Salvador Salinas. “We also appreciate DARS/DBS recognition of NRCS’ efforts to recruit, hire and train a diversified workforce that includes disabled employees, who we work with to provide the environment, equipment and assistance they need to overcome challenges in the workplace.”

Guerra’s few words of heartfelt thanks and appreciation to his family, friends, co-workers, DBS and NRCS contractors and landowners who have provided him the support and help over the years said that NRCS mission of Helping People, Help the Land is the right mission and he has enjoyed every year of it.

Starr County Judge Vera also honored his long-time friend Guerra. “This is a topic we do not talk about often enough because historically people thought it was rude or inappropriate. Thanks to research in the field of rehabilitation and a good friend like Roel, we have moved past those times and grown into a better society.”

“Blindness is defined as not being able to see. However, I believe Roel “sees” and “hears” just fine. He has seen the beauty of a productive life and a wonderfully happy marriage. He hears how much he has inspired us not to see the glass half empty, but half full. He inspires us to look on the bright side and see greener pastures.”

Guerra’s two children, Roxanne and Roel Jr. have followed in his footsteps working for NRCS. Roxanne has served as a technical service provider in the Zone 3 office in Corpus Christi and Roel Jr. is currently a soil scientist in the Abilene NRCS office.

NRCS is a federal agency that works with private landowners on conservation practices to improve and protect their soil, water and other natural resources. NRCS has 764 employees in 217 field offices throughout Texas, and is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

###

USDA is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer.