

TLU's Center for Professional Development offers careers

By Michael Cary

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Valerie Salazar worked as a receptionist in a dentist's office after she graduated high school in Dallas.

Once in a while the dental staff needed help with a patient, and they called upon Salazar to lend a hand.

She discovered that on-the-job training as a dental assistant was interesting work.

Salazar returned to her hometown, Seguin, and planned her next career move.

She found out about a dental assisting certification program at Texas Lutheran University's Center for Professional Development, and with tuition help from Workforce Solutions Alamo, she signed up for the 10-week program.

One option Salazar had was to obtain a one-day internship with a dentist, and she sought out Janice Weinman of Seguin Smiles.

After passing her state board exam for dental assisting in May, she was hired by Dr. Weinman, and now she works full time in Weinman's new high-tech office on Eastwood Drive.

"I was looking for a positive, educated dental assistant, and she struck me with her wonderful smile. She's a great asset to our practice, and is heavy on quality," Weinman said regarding her new employee.

Salazar said she plans to settle into her career as a dental assistant and will work for Weinman for a long time to come.

"It's fun, you get to meet a lot of people. I take care of the instruments, do teeth impressions, and do everything to make things easier and faster for her," Salazar said.

She also said she would highly recommend the dental assisting certification program at the Center for Professional Development.

The CPD, located in the Tschoepe Building on the TLU campus, has developed a range of courses to help people of all walks of life.

"Our students come from a wide range of backgrounds. Some are unemployed, underemployed, people who make minimum wage or professionals who are looking for a career change," said Rosemary Dawson, Ed.D., the director of the center.

The CPD offers a wide range of courses for careers from accounting to wedding planning through a partnership with Gatlin Education Services and Education To Go.

Most of the partnership programs are offered online, but the CPD does the teaching for dental assisting and other career programs on the TLU campus.

Amanda Grahmann of Gonzales earned her college degree in psychology with a minor in economics.

After she graduated in 2004, she worked as a mental health caseworker, and worked as a loan processor for three years.

Then she signed up for the CPD's alternate teacher certification program, and as a result will be teaching second grade reading, math and science at Gonzales Elementary this fall.

She is in her third core class in a program that requires four altogether. She started the program in January, and will be a paid intern teacher earning a first-year teacher's salary.

"I am absolutely happy, they are really preparing me well, and I had looked into a lot of different programs. TLU was the best match for me, they give you a lot of support as far as passing the state tests," Grahmann said.

Diane Beeman was preparing to retire from a 33-year career as an elementary school counselor in San Antonio.

"I wasn't ready to retire from life, just from education. I knew I needed a plan," Beeman said.

She signed up for the CPD's real estate agent certification program and began classes in January 2007.

One of the guest speakers was local broker Karen McMillan, who also is a former teacher.

McMillan hired Beeman at first part time in her Seguin real estate office and helped her to hit the ground running in selling real estate.

Beeman now is a full-time real estate agent in McMillan's office.

She credits John Whitworth, a longtime real estate agent, a consultant and the instructor for the CPD real estate program, with helping her to start her second career.

"He prepared us well, he really did. Every time I do something I think about something he preached or a story he told, he did a fabulous job," Beeman said.

She said she had options for obtaining her real estate agent's license, including online courses, but she chose TLU.

"With my education background I felt the university would be what I needed," Beeman said.

After taking the courses, Beeman and other CPD students studied for and took the state exam.

"A lot of us that took the course passed it the first time. I passed my state exam in the high 90s. That says a lot for the program, it really does," Beeman said.

"I've seen people get through the exam and sit down in an office to sell real estate, and they don't have the foggiest idea of what to do," Whitworth said.

Whitworth, who managed a real estate office in Seguin and at Canyon Lake for many years, said the program at TLU prepares its graduates to be successful in a real estate career.

"I'm not going to teach them enough to just pass the state exam. I work with them as though they would be working in my real estate offices," Whitworth said.

The proof is in the pudding, to use a cliché.

Whitworth said the average number of students passing the state exam the first time is less than 50 percent.

"We are in the high 90 percent of people passing the exam the first time," Whitworth said.

"I hear from my graduates constantly," Whitworth said. "It's rewarding, we've been able to help people get into a totally different career."

Dawson said the center will offer a new program, "Mapping Your Retirement," this coming fall for three weeks.

"This is for people who are thinking about retirement or those who have retired and there are areas where we might be able to help," Dawson said.

The center also works with local industries to design curriculum for what they deem as high in demand, and other programs that are geared to the community.

"We are always looking for new ideas," Dawson said.