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PRESS RELEASE

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AUSTIN - The Texas Association of State Systems for Computing and Communication (TASSCC) held its annual conference in Dallas, Texas from August 1st through August 4th. Over 340 members and associate members were in attendance. During the conference, TASSCC bestowed the TASSCC Excellence Award to recognize excellence and innovation in Texas public sector IT services.

The TASSCC Excellence Award recognizes a project that showcases innovative application of leading-edge computing and/or communications technologies. Nominated projects must result in demonstrated improvements to internal operations, customer service or communication. Projects must be fully implemented and deliver the services described.

The TASSCC Excellence Award recipient for in 2010 was the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) in collaboration with Health and Human Services Commission Information Technology Department (HHSC IT). For more than 30 years, the WIC nutrition program has helped pregnant women, new mothers and young children eat well, learn about nutrition and stay healthy. WIC provides nutrition education and client centered counseling, nutritional foods, and help accessing health care to low-income pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women, as well as children under the age of five. All WIC services are free to those who qualify. Texas WIC participants receive their food benefits on a card similar to an ATM card called the WIC Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card. The EBT card provides flexibility so that participants can purchase just a few foods or all of the WIC foods at one time. Benefits are loaded to the EBT card for up to three months and participants receive a shopping list that tells them how much food is available on their card. Potential applicants call the Texas 1-800-WIC-FORU number for general WIC eligibility information, WIC clinic locations, referrals to other programs, and assistance in reporting a lost or stolen Electronic Benefit Transfer card. The 1-800-WIC-FORU call center consists of 7 permanent employees and operates Monday through Saturday 8 am to 5 pm, handling over 20,000 calls per month. In May 2009, WIC program participation exceeded one million participants. This growth has significantly increased the number of calls to 1-800-WIC-FORU.

To meet the increased volume of calls, WIC staff began researching the use of an IVR system to support calls that do not require a caller to speak with an agent. In March 2010, WIC in partnership with HHSC's Commission IT deployed the WIC IVR application. This new WIC IVR application automated routine inquiries (clinic locations, general WIC information, eligibility requirements, and referral to other programs) so 1-800-WIC-FORU agents can concentrate on handling EBT lost/stolen cards and other

time complex issues for the callers. The WIC IVR application allows callers to use either telephone dial pad or speak to directly the system, which employs speech recognition technology. The application responds with eligibility information, clinic locations, and other information using pre-recorded messages or dynamically generated audio (TTS).

The WIC IVR project reflects a successful collaboration between two state agencies; DSHS and HHSC. WIC management and HHSC's Commission IT telecommunication staff worked together, using program knowledge and technical expertise, to develop an effective solution to handle WIC's increasing work load. Tien Tran and Robb McKenzie accepted the award on behalf of DSHS and HHSC IT.

The TASSCC mission is to advance education and networking among Texas public sector IT professionals. TASSCC's full members include state agencies and state institutions of higher education, while associate members are primarily companies involved in computing and communications. TASSCC produces three education conferences and participates in numerous community service events throughout the year.