

PRIMA PRESS

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR OUR MEMBERS

texasprima.org

Texas Chapter Public Risk Management Association

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Agents, spies, detectives...greetings!

Thank you for joining us for the 36th Annual Texas PRIMA Conference operation where the mission was definitely possible! It was all our sponsors, exhibitors, speakers, and attendees that made it great! Of the 733 attendees, 179 were first-time attendees, and 105 of those first-time attendees were from public entities! We welcome all of these first-time attendees to the Texas PRIMA family!

Lieutenant Colonel Waldo Waldman provided a dynamic introduction to our operation with his personal stories and wingtips. He taught us to "Push It Up!" when it's time to commit, advising that attitude plus action determines altitude. He inspired us to commit to excellence and lead with courage.

We followed this keynote up with various educational sessions that qualified for continuing education credit. Texas PRIMA is excited to be an accredited provider for CCM, TDI, SHRM, HRCI, Texas Bar, and most recently, TASBO.

Our mission would not have been complete without various opportunities for networking. From our time at various breaks throughout the days in the exhibit hall to our Monday Night Networking event, we had ample opportunity to meet, greet, and build.

Many thanks to all our sponsors and exhibitors; not only do they show up and make our conference special, but they provide the resources we need to be successful in our everyday operations! Special thanks to Titanium Sponsor, McGriff, A Marsh and McLennan Agency, for also sponsoring our Awards Luncheon for the second consecutive year! We are grateful for the long-term continued support of this association and its members.

Gregory Offner closed our conference out challenging us to think about the purpose of our presence day in and day out in the places we go and the things we do. He inspired us to show up and work in a manner that elevates the experiences of others.

I am incredibly grateful for the wingmen and wingma'ns who served alongside me on the board and on our various committees this year. Special thanks also to the members who graciously volunteered and moderated our sessions.

We welcome Fernando Hernandez to the 2026 board and bid farewell for now to Lesley Ward after her extended service on the Texas PRIMA board. Lesley has provided dedicated and unwavering service to the association since 2016.

Finally, it has been my honor and privilege to serve as your 2025 Texas PRIMA President. May God bless each one of you!

Jamee Higgins, CRM
2025 Texas PRIMA President

 [**View 2025 conference photos!**](#)



Season of Giving

December is often referred to as the *Season of Giving* and is a time to demonstrate gratitude and to support those less fortunate through donations or volunteering. The Texas PRIMA Board of Directors is not only passionate about serving the members of Texas PRIMA, but they are also passionate about giving back in the communities where they live and work. Below you will find organizations that each of our board members support. We encourage you to find a cause you're passionate about, then research and contact organizations in your area to get involved in the spirit of giving!

Jamee Higgins, President

[Christmas in Action](#)

Mandy Riske, President-Elect

[Crisis Center of Comal County](#)

Berry Bairrington, Secretary

[Alzheimer's Association](#)

Jason Hardy, Treasurer

[Texans on Mission](#)

Norma Martinez, Immediate Past President

[Fort Bend Women's Center](#)

Lesley Ward, Past President

[Brazos Valley Food Bank](#)

Belinda Raindl, Director

[Communities in Schools](#)

Cindy Gutierrez, Director

[Boys & Girls Clubs of America](#)

[Find a club](#) near you!

Travis Yarbrough, Director

[The Rainbow Room of Tarrant County](#)

[Click Here](#) to find a Rainbow Room in your area!

Yoli Perez, Director

[Habitat for Humanity of the Rio Grande Valley](#)

Fernando Hernandez, Director (*Incoming 2026*)

[Texas CASA](#)

Ashley Waggoner, Texas PRIMA Association Manager

[Alzheimer's Association](#)



Prevent Slips, Trips and Falls this Winter

What proactive steps can you take to reduce slip-and-fall risks in outdoor areas during freezing rain? Learn more in [this online article](#) from National Safety Council's Safety & Health magazine. Stay warm, stay safe!



Congratulations to our 2025 Scholarship Recipients!

We had another amazing annual conference as we developed agents of change at the beautiful Moody Gardens Hotel and Convention Center in Galveston! This year, scholarships were awarded to 17 individuals who represent school districts, counties, cities, transit agencies and river authorities across the state of Texas, as well as one student from St. Mary's University and one student from University of Houston-Downtown. The majority of this year's recipients are new to the Risk Management field and new to Texas PRIMA, so please take time to reach out to them in the Texas PRIMA online community and welcome them! The scholarship program would not be possible without our generous scholarship program sponsors. On behalf of the board and the 2025 scholarship recipients, I would like to thank each of you for your support of this program. This year's annual conference scholarship sponsors were Marsh & McLennan Agency, LLC, Sedgwick, TRISTAR, Athens Administrators, Injury Management Organization (IMO), Delta Dental Insurance Company, Alternative Claims Management, Claims Administrative Services, Inc. (CAS), ClearRisk, Commercial Risk Services, Trinity Review Services, Wilber Group, VONA Case Management, and Genesis Information Services, Inc.



Join me in congratulating our 2025 Annual Conference Scholarship Recipients:

Arlene Aguilar, City of Fort Worth

Jennifer Calandra, University of Houston-Downtown

Laura Cerda, City of Edinburg

Michelle Clemens, City of McKinney

Martha Franklin, City of Beaumont

Darrick Givens, City of Conroe

Monica Gonzalez, Hidalgo County

Stephanie Gonzalez, City of Austin Police Dept.

Abdullah Mahi, St. Mary's University

James Ogunjuyigbe, Trinity River Authority

Candace Schmitke, Lewisville ISD

Corrinne Stiles-Lester, City of Sugar Land

Julia Sykes, City of Corinth

Joseph Tracy, Brazos County

Mai Tran, Tarrant County

Marshall Wiggins, DART

Shaena Williams, City of Aubrey

Hear from the Scholarship Recipients:

"The convention is truly as good as you make it. I enjoyed meeting and interacting with the present and future presidents. Moderating, attending and participating in the breakout sessions was informative and rewarding. I did get some new ideas that will assist me with implementing a project I had been thinking about. Finally, I tried to have meaningful interaction with everyone I met. I hope they got something from me!" – Darrick Givens, City of Conroe

“Attending the Texas PRIMA Conference far exceeded my expectations. After several years in risk management, you think you have a solid understanding of the field—but events like this offer new insights, fresh perspectives, and meaningful opportunities for improvement. I connected with professionals from across Texas, many of whom have already become part of my LinkedIn network, and the learning environment was truly invaluable. If I had to describe this conference in one word, it would be *superb*. I highly encourage anyone working for a public entity to get involved with Texas PRIMA—read the newsletters, connect with the board members, utilize the resources, and attend the annual conference. You will not regret it.” – Monica Gonzalez, Hidalgo County

“As a graduate student specializing in Security Management and Cybersecurity, I am thankful for the scholarship that enabled me to attend conference. The sessions on cyber resilience, fraud prevention, natural disaster strategies, data management, and workers' compensation, along with insights into legal matters, Waldo Waldman's speech, and networking opportunities, significantly enhanced my understanding of cybersecurity risk management.” – Jennifer Calandra, University of Houston-Downtown

“First, I want to express my gratitude to the sponsors of the scholarship; it was greatly appreciated. Secondly, the connections I made, the friendships I formed, and the educational sessions I attended all exceeded my expectations. The level of enjoyment was incredibly high. I plan to attend the conference every year from now on!” – Marshall Wiggins, DART

“Attending the Texas PRIMA Conference was an incredible opportunity. I learned so much about public risk management and connected with professionals who shared valuable, real-world insights. Being in that environment opened my eyes to the many paths and possibilities in this field. I’m genuinely grateful for the chance to be there, to learn, and to grow. It’s an experience I will carry forward in my career.” – Abdullah Mohammad Mahi, St. Mary’s University

Mandy Riske
Scholarship Committee Chair



A Tribute to Our Outgoing Texas PRIMA President

I am privileged to recognize Jamee's exceptional leadership and to officially welcome her into the respected legacy of Texas PRIMA Presidents—individuals who have guided this association through years of growth, innovation, and progress.

Early in her term, Jamee established a clear vision: strengthen our professional network, enhance our association, and ensure that every member—new or experienced—had access to the highest-quality resources, tools, and educational opportunities. Under her leadership, Texas PRIMA expanded its educational offerings by introducing new strategies, fresh perspectives, and innovative programs that elevated the professional development of our entire membership.

Through changing circumstances and unexpected challenges, Jamee led with steady focus and unwavering commitment. Her leadership has been defined by clarity, resilience, and a dedication to the long-term success of Texas PRIMA. Though her term as president is concluding, she will continue to serve Texas PRIMA as Immediate Past President—providing guidance, continuity, and valuable institutional knowledge.

Jamee's guidance, dedication, and steadfast commitment have strengthened this association and inspired our entire membership. She has broadened our vision, led with distinction through complex times, and demonstrated that true leadership is both thoughtful and forward-looking.

Jamee, on behalf of the Board of Directors and Texas PRIMA, we thank you for your remarkable leadership and another exceptional year!

Mandy Riske

2025 Texas PRIMA President-Elect



2025 Risk Professional of the Year

Sallyann F. Rigdon

Manager of Risk Management with VIA Metropolitan Transit

With an expansive career spanning over three decades as a licensed attorney, as the former Wyoming State Risk Manager and Assistant Risk Manager for the City of San Antonio, Sallyann is currently part of VIA Metropolitan Transit's Legal Team and serves as the Manager of Risk Management. In this capacity, she combines her legal background with her risk management experience to administer VIA's Self-Insurance Liability Program. Sallyann is responsible for supervising an exceptional team of risk management personnel who handle VIA's public liability matters and for the investigation, evaluation, and management of complex claims and tort litigation lawsuits. In addition to maintaining VIA's insurance portfolio, she pursues subrogation recoveries for damage to VIA property and fleet. Sallyann acts as a liaison with the Office of General Counsel, VIA's Tort Litigation Attorney, and retained outside counsel, in supporting efforts to settle or defend litigated matters. She is vested with settlement authority on behalf of VIA and serves as VIA's representative in all tort litigation matters including depositions, mediations, and trials. Sallyann earned a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and Spanish from Wellesley College in Massachusetts and a Juris Doctorate from the

University of Michigan Law School. She is licensed to practice in both state and federal courts in Texas. She received her Associate in Risk Management (ARM) designation from the American Insurance Institute. She is a current member of the Public Risk Management and Insurance Association (PRIMA), the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), and the State Bar of Texas. She has been a member of Texas PRIMA since 2007.



2025 Rising Star

Giovanny Lopez, Risk & Benefits Advisor with City of Irving

Giovanny Lopez began his risk management career with the City of Irving in May 2021 as a Risk Management Intern. One of his first key projects was updating the city's statement of values to ensure accurate insurance coverage and asset reporting. It was during this time his interest in pursuing a career in public risk management. In November of 2021, Giovanny joined the City of Irving full-time as the Risk & Benefits Advisor, while still completing his undergraduate degree.

Giovanny graduated from the University of Texas at Dallas with a bachelor's degree in Finance, concentrating in Risk Management and Insurance. Throughout his time with the City, he's been part of numerous impact projects, including the implementation of a risk management system, the implementation of Smith Driver System Training, and has done numerous training presentations for supervisors. In May of 2025, Giovanny was promoted to the City's Risk Management Administrator, where his role in risk management has grown even more.

He's been a member of PRIMA since 2020 and presented at the 2023 Texas PRIMA Conference, sharing insights on his experience implementing a RMIS system.



2025 Risk Management Program Achievement Award

ELDT Pre-Trip Training of City of San Marcos

The City of San Marcos provides in-house Entry-Level Driver Training (ELDT) for all employees who are required to hold a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) as part of their position. During training, the instructor identified a common challenge—many employees lacked confidence when performing the pre-trip inspection at the DPS testing site. To address this issue, the instructor developed training videos tailored specifically to the two types of trucks in the City's fleet. Since incorporating these videos into the ELDT curriculum, the City of San Marcos has seen a notable increase in first-time pass rates. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in the number of retesting visits to DPS and less time away from the job site for employees.



2025 Risk Management Program Achievement Award Motor Vehicle Accident Prevention Strategy of Arlington Independent School District

Arlington Independent School District (AISD) implemented a comprehensive Motor Vehicle Accident Prevention Strategy aimed at reducing vehicle-related incidents across the organization. During the initial assessment, staff identified several key challenges contributing to accidents, including distracted driving, improper backing, unsafe lane changes or failure to yield, and improper turning. In collaboration with the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB), AISD provided targeted accident prevention training to all supervisors. The district also introduced driver's license verification for all drivers and launched a "How's My Driving?" program to promote accountability and safe driving practices. To further strengthen its efforts, AISD established a cross-functional accident review team to analyze all vehicle incidents. The district also partnered with the National Safety Council and TxDOT to participate in the "Habit Builder" Program, which promotes consistent safe driving behaviors. Additionally, all AISD vehicles are now equipped with a standardized Motor Vehicle Collision Packet to support proper documentation and response in the event of an accident. As a result of these initiatives, AISD is already experiencing a measurable decline in vehicle collisions and a reduction in the associated costs.



2025 Risk Management Program Achievement Award National Safety Month Campaign of City of Tyler

Since 2018, the City of Tyler has proudly celebrated National Safety Month with a city-wide campaign reflecting their commitment to employee well-being and public safety. As a city whose weekday population grows from 114,000 to over 200,000, the city tailors its safety efforts to meet the demands of a diverse and fast-paced environment. With over 900 staff—plus temporary workers, volunteers, and daily visitors, the City of Tyler's Risk Management team uses a data-driven approach to select the top four annual claim categories, turning them into weekly safety topics. These are promoted through posters, flyers, and targeted training, both in-person and online. In 2025, the City of Tyler launched its first Safety Month Committee, bringing together staff from across departments to brainstorm creative ways to promote safe practices. One highlight was a city-wide safety competition, with the winning team receiving a celebratory lunch and the 2025 Safety Champion Trophy. The city kicked off the month with a launch event featuring a mayoral proclamation, music, a photo booth, and free popsicles—supported by City Council and the City Manager.

As safety challenges evolve, so does the City of Tyler's approach. National Safety Month has become more than an annual event—it's a reflection of the City's values and ongoing commitment to a safe, engaged, and empowered workforce.



Education Update

Holiday Hangout December 19th, 9:00am-9:45am

Join us for a fun and festive morning as we reflect on this past year and enjoy a few jolly games to kick off the holiday season!

Texas PRIMA Risk Transfer 101 Workshop January 14th, 9:00am–11:30am

Registration coming soon!

Texas PRIMA members are invited to register for this interactive 2.5-hour workshop, presented by David Clovis, that will introduce the essential components of risk transfer, explain the purpose and mechanics of shifting risk through contracts and insurance, and connect those principles to real-world scenarios.

Participants will complete required pre-work involving a practical scenario designed to build “muscle memory” for evaluating and transferring liability. During the workshop, attendees will share their analyses, and David will walk through entity-specific considerations to strengthen your approach to risk transfer. Topics include certificates of insurance (COIs), common contract clauses, indemnification and hold harmless language, pitfalls public entities frequently encounter, and strategies for collaborating with internal and external stakeholders.

This highly-requested educational opportunity is being offered to Texas PRIMA members for a low rate of \$40. Seats are limited.

Don't forget that recordings of our webinars are in your [Community](#) under the Resources header.



Members on the Move

Congratulations to **Helena Pina**, CA, Workers' Compensation Administrator on her recent retirement from VIA Metropolitan Transit!

Congratulations to **Yolanda Perez**, Risk Manager for the City of McAllen, on obtaining her Associate in Risk Management (ARM)!

Join us in congratulating **Joe Peppelman** on his retirement from Munich Re Specialty!

Congratulations to **Donna Parker Stirman** on her retirement from Hays County! Donna also served on the Texas PRIMA Board of Directors and as Texas PRIMA President in 2016.



Introducing the 2026 Texas PRIMA Board of Directors

The Nominations and Elections Committee Chair is pleased to announce the addition of one new Director-At-Large and one returning Director-At-Large to the 2026 slate of officers for the Texas PRIMA chapter. Elections were conducted in October and the newly elected board members were announced during the membership meeting at our 2026 Annual Conference. The new board terms begin January 1, 2026. Congratulations to the new Director-at-Large, Fernando Hernandez, and returning Director-At-Large, Yolanda Perez:

Fernando E. Hernandez, Risk & Safety Manager with City of Austin

As Risk & Safety Manager for the City of Austin, Fernando leads one of the largest municipal Workers' Compensation and Occupational Safety programs in Texas—serving more than 16,000 employees across public safety, utilities, and general government operations. With over sixteen years of public-sector risk management experience, Fernando focuses on developing collaborative claim oversight, employee safety culture and data driven solutions.

In collaboration with internal and external partners, Fernando has played a key leadership role in the implementation of the city-owned Central Texas 504 Healthcare Panel. This initiative reflects a coordinated, citywide effort to strengthen medical care delivery, streamline processes, and ensure consistency and accountability in Workers' Compensation services.

A Certified Safety and Health Official (CSHO) and Associate in Risk Management (ARM) candidate, Fernando blends technical expertise with a people-centered approach, emphasizing collaboration among HR, Legal, and first-responder leadership. His work exemplifies the next generation of municipal risk professionals and focuses on building resilient public organizations.

Beyond City Hall, Fernando is a proud member and active contributor to Texas PRIMA, passionate about mentoring emerging professionals and advancing best practices in Texas public risk management.

Yolanda "Yoli" Perez, ARM with City of McAllen

Yoli Perez serves as the Director of Risk Management for the City of McAllen, Texas. She has over 30 years of experience in occupational health and safety, which includes medical claims management, general insurance, drug and alcohol program management, and occupational safety. She received her bachelor's degree from Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas, and her master's degree from the University of Texas–Pan American in Edinburg, Texas.

She joined the City of McAllen in 2011 and has successfully led numerous cost-effective initiatives for injury and accident prevention. She is an advocate for continuing education, professional development, and service. Ms. Perez is grateful for having been re-elected to the Texas PRIMA Board and looks forward to continuing to serve alongside such dedicated and inspiring professionals. It has been an honor to contribute to an organization that continues to advance public risk management across our state. Excited for all that's ahead!

Welcome Fernando, and welcome back Yoli, to the 2026 Texas PRIMA Board of Directors!

The 2026 Texas PRIMA Board consists of:

PRESIDENT: Mandy Riske, City of San Marcos

PRESIDENT-ELECT: Berry Bairrington, City of Waco

SECRETARY: Belinda Raindl, La Vernia ISD

TREASURER: Jason Hardy, City of Irving

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT: Jamee Higgins, City of Midland

PAST PRESIDENT: Norma Martinez, City of Houston

DIRECTORS: Cindy Gutierrez, City of Edinburg; Fernando Hernandez, City of Austin;

Travis Yarbrough, Tarrant County; and Yolanda Perez, City of McAllen

Here's to another year of serving you, our Texas PRIMA members!

Berry Bairrington

Nominations & Elections Committee Chair



September Member Spotlight

Julie Whiteman, Director of Risk Management for the City of Garland

Julie began her career in risk management in 2004, and since then, she states, “not one day has been the same.” She truly enjoys the challenges and complexities of the risk management industry and believes a collaborative, team-based approach achieves successful outcomes.

Julie believes Texas PRIMA has been a valuable resource in her career. Through continuing education and networking opportunities, she has furthered her professional development and established connections with members who have provided excellent insight into problem-solving.

Over the years, she has dedicated time to the Young Risk Professionals Association, as she believes in empowering the next generation of risk management leaders to strengthen the future of the industry. She is also grateful for the opportunity to serve as a board member with the Texas Political Subdivision, a position she has held since 2018. Her favorite quote is, “Never ruin an apology with an excuse,” which she believes fosters accountability and humility.

Work-life balance is important to her, and although she spends some of her personal time preparing for the ARM designation program, she also finds joy in cooking, outdoor family adventures, and coaching her daughter’s recreational volleyball team.



October Member Spotlight

Andy Rausch, Manager of Insurance Programs for North Texas Tollway Authority

Andy has served in this capacity since 2023. Although relatively new to public sector risk management, he is a seasoned professional, having held various lead adjuster positions with private insurance companies since 2011.

Reflecting on his career, Andy shares that he has “embraced the challenges and fast-paced environment of the risk management industry”. He is grateful for the opportunity to adapt to an ever-changing risk landscape and often takes the road less traveled when problem solving. Andy believes a positive mindset is essential in overcoming challenges; his motto for success is “Win the Day”.

Andy states that “Texas PRIMA has provided him with valuable resources that have allowed him to connect with colleagues and vendors when needs arise”. Quality continuing education opportunities on emerging topics have also provided a wealth of information.

Andy currently holds the CPCU, RIMS-CRMP, and ARM designations. He is a University of Texas at Austin alumnus and is a sports enthusiast! He enjoys spending time with his family, particularly taking long walks with his wife, three children and their dogs.



November Member Spotlight

Cheryl Courson, Manager of Risk Management

Cheryl has enjoyed a long and accomplished career with Mesquite ISD, where she has devoted more than 31 years of service. She began her risk management journey in 2016 when she became a certified all-lines adjuster. In 2022, she was selected to lead the Risk Management Department as the Manager of Risk Management. Since stepping into this role, Cheryl has found the field both challenging and rewarding—describing its diverse areas as “always fresh and evolving.”

A Texas PRIMA member since 2016, Cheryl has frequently served on the Education Committee over the years. She considers Texas PRIMA to be an invaluable resource in her career; through continuing education and networking opportunities, she has furthered her professional development and built meaningful connections with fellow members. She has attended the Texas PRIMA Conference annually since 2016 and has consistently enjoyed the extensive educational content and speakers.

Cheryl earned her master’s degree in business in 2024 and received her Certified School Risk Manager (CSRM) designation in 2021. Her favorite life motto is “Always Have a Plan B,” a philosophy she feels aligns perfectly with her work as a Risk Manager.

Outside of her profession, Cheryl is an avid traveler who often spends weeks exploring various parts of Europe. She is also a devoted reader, frequently taking advantage of any free moment to enjoy a good book.



Letter From the Editor

Thank you for reading the latest edition of the Texas PRIMA Press newsletter. I hope you have found the updates and content to be beneficial. As 2025 comes to an end, I leave you with this quote from Vern McLellan: “What the new year brings to you will depend a great deal on what you bring to the new year.”

*Mandy Riske, ARM
Texas PRIMA Press Editor
Texas PRIMA President-Elect
mriske@sanmarcostx.gov*



Sponsor Highlight

Marsh McLennan Agency (MMA) provides business insurance, employee health & benefits, retirement, and private client insurance solutions to organizations and individuals seeking limitless possibilities. With 15,000 colleagues and 300 offices across the U.S. and Canada, we combine the personalized service model of a local consultant with the global resources of the world's leading professional services firm, Marsh McLennan.



Founded in 1991, Injury Management Organization, Inc. (IMO) is a full managed care company. IMO serves public and private employers, nonsubscribers, insurance carriers and third party administrators. IMO conducts all managed care services and organically developed the IMO Med-Select Network, a top network performer with high quality and premier customer service delivery.

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