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News Release

**Entrepreneurs! A recent workforce research report highlights Williamson County as a great place to start and scale a business—especially in STEM**

A researcher at Texas State University, Dr. Omar S. Lopez, has combined his own experiences as an entrepreneur with his line of academic research in workforce development to identify Williamson County as a great place to start and scale a business. As an associate professor in the Organization, Workforce, and Leadership Studies department within the Texas State College of Applied Arts, Dr. Lopez conducts his research on the workforce trends and needs of the state and nation to help align the academic programs of Texas State University with workforce demands in order to support area employers and to enable graduating students to have rewarding and profitable careers. Dr. Lopez has a career-long interest in small business development and how these businesses can grow and thrive.

 In addition to his faculty position at Texas State, Dr. Lopez is the founder of the Corporation for Public School Education K16, a research and data analysis firm that operates in Round Rock, Texas. “As an entrepreneur, I know only too well the challenges—as well as the excitement of ‘giving birth’ to a new business. Like all newborns, a start-up business generally doesn’t come with specific instructions on how to care best for its life,” Dr. Lopez explains. According to Dr. Lopez, a well-developed business plan helps the entrepreneur guide that business into the action of selling products or services where at some point, the business generates enough cash to match expenses—and then on toward sales where a profit is realized.

Dr. Lopez continues, “Many of us keep our business within a size called a ‘micro firm,’ an enterprise with fewer than 5 employees. In my talks with other micro firm owners, I’ve concluded that most have dreamed at one time or another of scaling their business to a larger size. More employees, higher sales, multiple locations—these are only a few ways that they express that dream to grow their small business.”

“Just like it ‘takes a village to raise a child,’ however, I have found that it ‘takes a community to grow a business.’ In my research on how entrepreneurs scale their business beyond the micro firm, I identified Williamson County as a community that has some essentials for making this a reality,” Dr. Lopez said.

To provide some context, consider that there are currently 3,143 counties across our country. The US Census groups the counties into categories by the size of the population within a defined region. Williamson County is one of 432 in the category within a region with the largest regional population—1 million or more residents. Regional population is important because micro firms are more likely to scale in counties where there are greater possibilities of resources available to do so. Of those 432 counties in large regional populations, Williamson County lands in the top 25 percent in the following ways important to scaling a business.

Firstly, Williamson County ranks 104th with over 6,870 micro firms, which define a sort of “nursery” from which scaled firms can emerge. In so doing, the county has done well ranking 108th with 4,913 scaled firms consisting of employees between 5 and 100.

The county’s population also has some important attributes. Of the county’s population, it ranked 54th with 94.4% of the 609,017 residents in 2020 defined as affluent, that is, above the poverty level. More so, ranking 53rd, the county’s median household income of $92,000 is about 1.4 times that of the median household income for the state of Texas.

“It has been said that ‘the more you learn, the more you earn’ and among the 432 counties, Williamson County ranked 93rd with 42% of the working population having a Bachelor’s degree or higher,” Lopez said. Thus, the county provides a sizeable pool of quality employees for a wide range of small businesses—including those needing workers with skills in STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. This is no small achievement. Of the estimated 6,900 micro firms and 4,900 scaled firms in Williamson County about one-half and one-third, respectively, were associated with an industry where STEM workers contributed to the development of products and delivery of services. “To put this another way,” Lopez continued, “STEM related businesses in Williamson County in 2020 paid an estimated $6.6B in annual wages of the total $10.3B paid in salaries by all businesses—and yes, that’s a “B” for billions of dollars! “

For entrepreneurs, the evidence so far suggests that starting and scaling a business has never been better in Williamson County, according to Lopez. More findings will come as research continues of how entrepreneurs scale their business beyond the micro firm.

The Williamson County Workforce research project is a part of the STEM-For-All project, funded by Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriation Bill through the advocacy of U.S. Congressman John Carter, Texas District 31. STEM-For-All is a partnership of the Texas State University Round Rock campus, Round Rock ISD, and the Round Rock Chamber of Commerce that is under the direction of Dr Leslie Huling, director of the LBJ Institute for STEM Education and Research. Dr. Huling explains, “STEM-For-All is grounded in the belief that all community members, regardless of their career paths or aspirations, interact daily with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and to function comfortably and effectively in today’s society, all citizens, regardless of their age, can benefit from captivating and enriching STEM engagement experiences.”  The Williamson County and Round Rock communities are particularly well suited to the STEM-For-All project because these communities have strategically pursued and successfully attracted enterprise in the areas of high tech, health care, education, and manufacturing, all of which directly intersect with STEM.

**For more information, contact STEM-For-All Project Coordinator:**

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