

# We've got talent, yes we do

By Dave Schafer

In August 1997, Manuel Leal gave himself 10 years to become a published writer before giving up his dream and devoting his free time to more profitable ventures.

In June, Wizard Consulting and Publishing will print Leal's first book of poems, with more poetry and short story collections to follow.

"There's been a lot of failures in trying to get published, but it's all made me a better writer," said the 53-year-old dumpster permitting inspector in Solid Waste Management.

Leal also writes, produces, directs and acts in plays, staging them at Helios restaurant, the Spring Branch Boys and Girls Club, and Talento Bilingue De Houston.

"I have a gift and I want to share it," he said. Leal isn't alone. Many city employees enjoy sharing their gifts outside the job.

## Images in print and paint

Louis Aulbach, Finance & Administration, has authored five river guidebooks that mix history with mile-by-mile information and maps. Three of his guides are on the Rio Grande. The others are on the lower Pecos and Devil's rivers.

"I've been canoeing since the late 1970s, and I realized there were these exciting rivers, and there weren't maps and histories to

help guide you through them," Aulbach said.

He published his first guide in 1987.

Three or four times a year, Aulbach said, he spends a week canoeing down a river. When he's writing a guide about a river stretch, he canoes it three or four times.

"Once you do the research, you want to tell people about it," Aulbach said.

For as long as she can remember, Lilibeth Andre has been painting. Her parents and her grandparents were artistic, and she studied art and design in college in Mexico City.

Now, she sells her paintings through her Web site and galleries in Bellaire, Fredericksburg and Galveston. Andre paints landscapes, wild and still life, and portraits.

She hopes her art can provide a stable income someday. For now, "I'm doing it as something I enjoy."

As Public Works & Engineering bicycle pedestrian coordinator, Andre uses her skill to design fliers, the Bikeway Program Web site and "anything we put out to the public."



Photo Courtesy of Lilibeth Andre

Lilibeth Andre, Public Works & Engineering, has been painting all her life. She has an in-home studio and sells her paintings online and in local galleries.

## Why do birds fly south? Because it's too far to walk

Others prefer performing in front of live bodies. Dwayne Santa Cruz spins discs and entertains around Texas and Louisiana as D.J. Cruz.

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In junior high school, Cruz started disc jockeying family parties. In 1985, he opened Cruzin' Entertainment. He plays weddings, birthday parties, and, on the weekends, at Maxwell's the Club on South Main Street.

"I like being around music, and I like seeing people have a good time," said Cruz, a Finance & Administration accountant.

Shawn Williams, a PWE administrative supervisor, always told jokes at the dinner table. When a friend suggested she try standup comedy 20 years ago, she started performing at her church's Christmas banquets.

Now, using the stage name, Shawn Deblieux (pronounced "W"), she does standup at birthday parties, DARE functions, and church retreats. Every Wednesday, she performs at Tymes Square on Fuqua.

Her motto: "A laugh for any occasion."  
"I don't curse, and I try not to say any-

thing that will embarrass my family or members of the audience," she said.

"God has really blessed me with this talent, and performing gives me a sense of satisfaction and a real inner peace."

Her sense of humor is helping her deal with breast cancer diagnosed just before her 50th birthday.

So how did she tell her friends about it?

"Wow, guess what I got for my 50th birthday?" she told them.

### **Kick out the jams**

Some like to belt out tunes.

Stephen White, Aviation, began playing piano at 12 and started singing lessons in high school. He wanted to pursue piano playing as a career, but an instructor at the University of Houston told him he was a better singer than piano player.

So White focused on his singing. Now, he performs at banquets, weddings and Aviation functions. He's classically trained, but he's flexible enough to sing almost anything.

"Singing touches the soul of who I am, and I'm able to touch the souls of others," he said.

For 10 years, Roland Taub sang barbershop. Now, he's a member of the Houston Choral Showcase, an adult show choir that features costumes, dancing and different genres of songs, including jazz, show tunes and pop.

Taub takes on the roles that require dialect or a comical touch.

A senior microcomputer analyst for the E.B. Cape, Taub said he likes to be part of a bigger sound.

Johnny Lee, F&A, also likes being part of a group. He plays bass and sings in the Jacinto City Opry and is a member of the country and old-time rock band OSAGE.

Lee and his father bonded through music, and he began drum lessons when he was 8, Lee said.

"Music is like a part of me," he said. "I don't feel full without it."

Lee moved on to the guitar and bass at 14 because, "Drums sit in the back and don't get attention from the girls."

In the third or fourth grade, Randy Zamora saw a drummer live.

"That was it. I wanted to be a drummer," said Zamora, municipal courts' chief prosecutor.

Zamora is also a Trivial Pursuit buff who once took the test to get on "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" He missed one of 40 questions. He moved a few weeks later and never heard from the producers.

"I have a lot of non-income-generating knowledge floating around in my head," he said. "I can't think of any instance when it's helped me in my job.

"But, hey, it's a great conversation starter."

As far as the drumming, Zamora is between musical mates, but he soon expects to join a group that plays 40s big band and another that plays rock.

He plans to rock well into old age. After all, he enjoys it, and he's got a talent for it. Just like other city employees who have found gifts in their hobbies.

Visit [www.citysavvy.org](http://www.citysavvy.org) for links and works written by Manuel Leal.