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Spanish is coming to them

Plano city workers to have classes tailored to job requirements

By **MISTY DEAN**
Special Contributor

PLANO — It's back to school for some Plano city employees.

Richland College is bringing several Spanish classes to city departments so that city employees can learn to better communicate with a growing Hispanic population.

In the past, the city offered optional conversational Spanish classes but switched to Command Spanish classes last year because they are directed toward particular occupations.

Unlike traditional Spanish classes, the courses are grammar-free and concentrate on repetitive occupational phrases to elicit expected responses. This allows the employee to maintain control of a conversation within a specified career field, says Konley Kelley, assistant dean of corporate services at Richland. Students participate in role-playing, group

work and learn cultural etiquette.

"We're trying to be a little more efficient," said Greg Carpenter, training and development specialist for Plano.

Richland offers Command Spanish classes for dental and medical professionals, criminal justice, public safety, education, hospitality, industry and manufacturing, business and commerce, mission teams and general community Spanish.

"Most people don't expect immediate results with learning a new language, but with this it is result-oriented," Mr. Kelley said. "They will be able to apply it on the job right after they walk out of the classroom."

Members of the Plano Fire Department will finish a 10-week course, "Survival Spanish for Paramedics and EMTs [emergency medical technicians]," next week. Classmates say the course has made them feel more comfortable handling an emergency medical situation with a Spanish-speaking individual.

"Even if we can communicate a little, it will help us do our job

better," said Dan Rogers, a Plano firefighter/paramedic.

The curriculum is set by shadowing businesses in all industries to provide specific phrases for employees in an individual work environment.

Some Plano 911 operators and other city employees have completed courses in "Community Spanish: A Survival Guide for English Speakers" and "Spanish for Requesting Personal Information and Data." The class schedule and meeting place is tailored to the employer's availability. More classes will be added if there are requests for them, Mr. Carpenter said.

"Spanish for Library Staff" and a second community Spanish course will begin in the spring.

"It's adult education at its finest," said Tommy Marion, a certified Command Spanish instructor for corporate services at Richland. "The college comes to the student. All they have to do is show up."

Misty Dean is a Dallas-based freelance writer.