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First of its kind VA workforce development program graduates second cohort

NEW ORLEANS—At noon on Friday, Feb. 12, eight new graduates will celebrate the completion of the second cohort of the Hudson Thomas Program, a project of New Orleans Works (NOW), which is a workforce collaboration focused on the health care sector and housed at the Greater New Orleans Foundation.

The graduation will take place in the first floor auditorium of the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System (SLVHCS) administrative building, 2400 Canal Street.

The Hudson Thomas Program is a unique partnership between NOW, SLVHCS and Delgado Community College. It teaches literacy and computer skills to incumbent entry-level employees within SLVHCS to help them be more competitive in advancing their careers and meet the future workforce needs of the new VA medical center in Mid-City New Orleans. It is one of the only incumbent training programs of its kind in the nation's Department of Veteran Affairs.

“This program provided SLVHCS employees the training to upgrade their core foundational skills. As a result, program participants will have the tools needed for opportunities to advance their careers as well as enhance their professional and personal development,” said Dr. Larissa Littleton-Steib, Vice Chancellor for Workforce Development and Technical Education at Delgado Community College. “Delgado is extremely honored to have played a role in the development and implementation of this training program. We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System and the NOW Collaborative.”

The Hudson Thomas Program was made possible by a grant of \$185,558 from NOW to help pay for instructional time, tuition, curriculum, software, and supplies for up to 45 SLVHCS workers who are federally classified as General Schedule (GS) 1-5 and equivalent. The program focuses on competencies in reading, writing, and computer literacy, as well as soft-skills and career coaching. The goal of this program is to increase the number of entry-level workers eligible to apply for mid-level positions

within the growing VA system. Next week's graduation marks the completion of the second of two program cohorts. The first cohort of 19 participants completed in June 2015. Planning is underway to launch a third cohort in the fall of 2016.

The program is named in honor of Hudson Thomas, a dedicated SLVHCS leader who passed away in 2012. Thomas served as a respiratory therapist with the Department of Veterans Affairs for 22 years, and also served as president of the American Federation of Government Employees. Thomas is a U.S. Veteran who proudly served in the United States Navy and Air Force. Thomas reaffirmed qualities of fairness and respect, and was integral in advocating that SLVHCS create a culture of ongoing learning and professional development. Hudson Thomas had a strong commitment to assisting others in achieving their goals, and it is in this spirit that this educational program was founded.

The Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System currently provides primary, specialty and mental health services for Veterans through community-based outpatient clinics and coordinates inpatient care through a network of facilities. The health care system serves over 40,000 Veterans and provides more than 500,000 outpatient visits. It operates community based outpatient clinics in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Slidell, St. John, Franklin, Bogalusa, Houma and Hammond. VA's new 1.6 million square foot medical center is currently under construction in Mid-City New Orleans, and will create approximately 1,000 new jobs, many of which are already in recruitment and will continue in the next year.

Delgado Community College, founded in 1921, is Greater New Orleans' largest higher education institution and Louisiana's oldest community college. Delgado is fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and offers 43 degrees and 54 certificates in Allied Health, Nursing, Arts & Humanities, Business & Technology, Communication, Science and Mathematics. As the training provider partner and educational institution in this partnership, Delgado will guide curriculum development and provide instructors for the training program.

NOW is a private-public collaborative started in 2011 when the National Fund for Workforce Solutions awarded a grant to the Greater New Orleans Foundation. Matching funds are leveraged from local partners including, Baptist Community Ministries, BioDistrict New Orleans, Capital One Bank, the City of New Orleans, United Way of Southeast Louisiana and Urban Strategies. National philanthropic partners include the Ford, JPMorgan Chase, Kellogg and Surdna Foundations.