Teamwork: We work together in support of our mission. Our individual contributions are amplified by the synergistic effect of cooperative effort focused towards a common purpose. We value the individual as an integral member of the team. We treat each other with respect and dignity.

*Part of the Values at Work Series*

**Explore UT: Collaboration Helped Build Discovery for Texas Kids**

On March 5, 2016, around 465 school buses filled with more than 19,000 school-aged children from all over Texas descended upon The University of Texas at Austin to attend Explore UT. For some, it was the first time they had ever seen a college campus, let alone one of this magnitude. There was so much to see and discover! This excitement is what motivated the Facilities Services (FS) and Project Management & Construction Services (PMCS) staff at the university as they prepared and provided services for the 17th year* of Explore UT.

With a multitude of venues and configurations to be set up before the big day, how did it all come together? As in past years, it started with a meeting in October (five months prior to the event) between the Explore UT organizers, Susan Threadgill and Doug Bolin of University Events, and Ben Arellano of PMCS and other representatives of PMCS and FS. As they met, they discussed University Events’ plans for the event, including where and when their activities would occur on campus. After the initial meeting, Arellano developed the master schedule, a comprehensive spreadsheet of all the venue details.

The master schedule is a tool that was first created by Arellano. It allows staff to draw from the previous year’s schedule and its details when coordinating University Events’ requirements for the current year’s Explore UT, such as how the campus mall spaces are to be set up. This information improves efficiency for all involved in meeting University Events’ needs for this occasion. But what about all the exhibits that need to be planned and coordinated on behalf of the university’s colleges, schools and work units (CSUs)?
For the CSUs, each exhibit has different requirements and timing. For example, is the venue going to be inside or outside? If it is outside, will there be electrical needs, such as lighting or outlets for computers? Are custodial services needed and when? How many tables and chairs or easels will be used? Planning the exhibits each year can be a daunting task. Enter the Facilities Service Center (FSC), whose staff members provide event-planning assistance to the CSUs. In fact, this group of client service advocates developed a custom form just for Explore UT event planners to use for their exhibit needs. This year, the deadline for submitting event requests was January 15, 2016, and 35 requests were submitted for processing by the FSC.

For the overall event’s needs and for each event request submitted by the CSUs, the FSC then coordinates the specifics with each facilities team involved before, during and after Explore UT takes place. A sequence of collaborative actions among the teams all contribute to the overall success of the event, making an indelible impression on the children who will come from all parts of Texas to Explore UT. For the university’s PMCS and FS staff, the work begins long before the big day arrives.

This year, as in past Explore UT events, excitement built as crews worked diligently on the campus grounds in preparation. PMCS’ General Construction crews put up barricades, removed graffiti, repaired potholes, and addressed tripping hazards. FS’ Landscape Services crews worked to get the campus grounds shipshape and ready to impress. Live oak leaves were swept . . . and then swept again as the wind blew more leaves to the ground. Before the event, Custodial Services crews cleaned floors in the spaces to be used for the exhibits across campus.

Closer to the event day, crews began to set up the exhibits. From Construction Services in PMCS, electricians from the Electric Shop started the day before. They provided for all the electrical needs for exhibits set outside and ran cable to power the concession stands. From FS, Event & Moving Services teams delivered and set up items such as tables, chairs, easels and more. With more than 30-40 more (and larger) work orders than usual to support this day, scheduling was like solving a Rubik’s cube puzzle to ensure all items were delivered where and when they should be.

On the morning of the event, crews began at 6:30 a.m. Custodial Services teams put up restroom signs and checked for last-minute cleaning requirements. With multiple crews working together to set up an event, proper timing and a collaborative spirit were essential. For example with an outside exhibit, the Electric Shop crews ran and secured electrical lines at
the site before tables and chairs were be arranged. Events & Moving crews delivered and set up the tables so that the Custodial Services crew could place linens on the tables. With around 400 exhibits occurring across campus, and many to be set up and ready before the big day, there was no time for confusion and chaos.

During Explore UT, the FSC and PMCS had additional coverage available at 512-471-2020 to assist with facilities-related inquiries or issues. Staff members were assigned from other teams to provide support throughout the day. For example, Custodial Services' weekend crews unlocked indoor spaces to be used during the event. Custodians also provided porter services, which included tidying up and replenishing paper supplies and soap in the restrooms and maintaining the appearance of public areas. Landscape Services employees were on hand to pick up trash from the campus grounds. Electricians and General Construction Shop staff were also working the event. Events & Moving staff were on standby throughout the day.

Like most really big events, Explore UT was followed by a really big cleanup effort. Landscape Services staff cleared the grounds of trash. Custodial Services crews picked up items delivered to the exhibits, cleaned the well-used restrooms on campus and locked up the spaces used that day. Solid Waste & Recycling collected the trash, with several additional runs throughout the day for the more-than-usual amount of trash. Crews from both departments started at around 5:00 p.m. picking up the items delivered and set up, all the while being mindful that groups of children were making their way to their school buses. Yet, for all these crews their regular duties—apart from Explore UT—still had to be completed.

When the sun set on this year’s Explore UT, PMCS and FS staff may have recalled the many hours of preparation and work that went into the event. But as they remembered the look on the faces of the children who stepped off those 465 or so buses that morning for a day of wonder and awe, they knew it was all worth it. They smiled and thought, Perhaps someday some of those very kids will be attending classes right here on our campus. Will it still look as big as it did to them when they were kids?

*The first event was held in 1999. That year it was called UT Interactive.

For more information about the collaborative efforts of Facilities Services and Project Management & Construction Services for Explore UT and other events, contact Laurie Lentz, Communications Manager, at laurie.lentz@austin.utexas.edu.