

## Businesses allow workers to watch events on TV

By David Burge / El Paso Times

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EL PASO -- At Facilities Connection's West Side headquarters, employees gathered around televisions under red, white and blue streamers and munched on snacks Tuesday while watching Barack Obama's inauguration as president.

The company was one of many small businesses in El Paso that took a timeout to observe Tuesday's historic event.

Facilities Connection, which is a full-service project management and interior design company, gave its 30 employees an extended midmorning break to watch the inauguration.

"It's a great day for everyone," said Sheila Lynum, who is the company's federal customer service representative. Lynum said she never thought she'd see the day that a fellow African-American would become president.

Employees at the El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and several member business owners gathered around a television in the chamber's boardroom and had a potluck brunch.

"This ceremony is testimony that just as President Barack Obama, anyone can be part of the American dream," said Hispanic Chamber Chief Executive Officer Cindy Ramos-Davidson. "If we set our mind to it, we have the freedom to be president, senator, governor or the owner of a business. The possibilities are endless."

Patty Holland-Branch, chief executive officer and founder of Facilities Connection, said it was important to give her employees the opportunity to share in history.

"Today is about the peaceful transfer of power," said Holland-Branch, a native of Chihuahua City who became a U.S. citizen at age 12. "It's to be envied by countries around the world. We are truly blessed to have this democratic process and have our freedom."

Holland-Branch is a Republican but says she frequently crosses party lines because "I'm an American first."

She was appointed to the Governing Board for the Texas Department of Economic Development by then-Gov. George Bush and served about two years.

"We didn't want (our employees) to miss this," Holland-Branch said. "This is such an historic event. The bottom line is we are all Americans. I'm so appreciative to be a citizen of this country."

Kory Ellis, information technology coordinator for Facilities Connection, said he was excited to

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watch the event.

"The fact that it's an African-American is a pivotal moment in history," Ellis said. "Within the past 150 years, we still had slavery. It's wonderful to see the hurdles we've jumped over to get to this moment."

Renard Johnson, president and chief executive officer of METI Inc., an El Paso-based technology and systems engineering company that specializes in federal contracts, said he gave his employees the choice of taking Martin Luther King Day off Monday or taking Tuesday off to watch the inauguration.

"It was about a 50-50 split; my corporate office (Tuesday) is about half full," he said. "At this moment, you should allow your employees and their families to share in it in whatever way they want."

Johnson said he took significant pride in Obama's inauguration as "both an African-American and as an American."

"It's a great moment for all Americans," he added.

Ray Hernando, president and owner of transportation broker RHO Logistics Inc., said his employees watched the inauguration together in the company's conference room and had coffee and dessert.

"Everyone was so fired up about what was happening," Hernando said. "I felt it was

necessary to allow my employees to watch this. It's very important; it's historic. It's something we can tell our kids and grandkids about."

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