



WAEM

West Alabama – East Mississippi

Enterprise-Ready

December 2007

Community Involvement Key to Entrepreneurship

Experts agree. Community involvement in entrepreneurship is key to the WAEM region's future economic competitiveness. A number of experts gathered at the MSU Riley Center on November 29th & 30th for the inaugural WAEM Entrepreneurship Conference to discuss entrepreneurial opportunities in the region.

"This is not something a bank president, chamber of commerce, or economic development organization can do by themselves. We need to expand people's vision and expand their thought processes about what they are capable of doing. You will be surprised by how many motivated, interested, passionate people there are in your community who want to get involved in the entrepreneurial development process," stated Pete Hodo, Community Bank President of BankFirst Financial Services in West Point, Mississippi.

"Building business has to be a grass roots effort. West Point is going to become Enterprise-Ready," Hodo expressed.

Enterprise-Ready is the foundation of the WAEM Regional Initiative. To transform a mostly rural collection of people and places into an enterprising region known for its innovative programs in entrepreneurship, workforce development, and wealth creation is being Enterprise-Ready.

The traditional economic development strategy of bringing a factory to town is less and less effective. For many rural communities and regions a viable

new strategy is growing local entrepreneurs and businesses.

A strategy of this nature would require a collective approach. Communities that support, grow, and rally around entrepreneurs have a great opportunity to gain market share.

According to William Campbell, State Director of Alabama's Small Business Development Consortium, "The vision of America to meet global competition is the entrepreneur."

In Alabama, 97% of Alabama businesses are small businesses; 67% of age growth comes from businesses with less than 500 employees; and 75% of all jobs created in the last 10 years were by businesses with less than 500 employees.*



Dr. Randall Goldsmith, President and CEO of Mississippi Technology Alliance, visits with Bill Scagg, WAEM Initiative Chairman, during the MyBiz Networking Reception.

Bill Johnson, Director of Alabama's Department of Economic Development and Community Affairs said, "In order to compete globally, we must act locally. Most jobs are created by small companies. We want to be partners with entrepreneurs in creating their own economic opportunities, which in turn help our region."

Other partners in the region, such as community colleges, want to meet the economic challenges by growing entrepreneurs.

"Getting involved in our communities means taking on roles such as entrepreneurship development," said Phil Sutphin, East Central Community College President. "By working together with other business organizations, we can ensure there are jobs for people in our areas."

In addition to community colleges, there are a number of resources in communities that are available to assist current and future entrepreneurs with their business goals. However, wading through all of these resources can be a challenge.

According to Leslie Scott, Director of the Institute for Rural Entrepreneurship at North Carolina's Rural Economic Development Center, "The alphabet soup of government agencies and resources can be very confusing to an entrepreneur. They don't have the

time to navigate through this maze when they are trying to build a business."

The WAEM Initiative has developed an innovative Internet resource, MyBiz.am, which may help entrepreneurs navigate through this system. MyBiz.am is a joint partnership of community resources and service providers.

Most of the attendees seemed to agree that developing new business in their communities is a good economic growth tactic. They also agreed it necessitates a cooperative effort from communities and the West Alabama-East Mississippi Region.

At the end of the conference, Doug Gurley, State Director of the Mississippi Small Business Development Center left attendees with this message, "Entrepreneurship is our future and we are all in this together."

*www.asbdc.org/faq.htm



"Entrepreneurs are growing in even the poorest communities where they are being cultivated."

LESLIE SCOTT Director Institute for Rural Entrepreneurship North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center



"Our mission is to aid, counsel, assist, and protect the interests of small businesses. The SBA helps people get into business, stay in business, grow, and prosper."

JANITA STEWART District Director Mississippi Small Business Administration



"If you haven't started the entrepreneurial process in your community, I encourage you to start now. It is never too late."

PETE HODO III Community Bank President BankFirst Financial Services



"Those people who are in the beginning stages of business need someone to bounce ideas off of. People like this are invaluable and there are not enough of them available to aid the entrepreneur."

ERIK PEDERSEN Operations Manager Kansas Center for Entrepreneurship



"Small business is the engine of economic growth. Anything you can do to help small businesses, helps the American Economy."

WILLIAM CAMPBELL State Director SBDC Alabama



"Entrepreneurship is our future and we are all in this together."

WALTER "DOUG" GURLEY, JR. State Director SBDC Mississippi

MyBiz.am Launches Regionwide

The WAEM Regional Initiative launched the MyBiz.am website on November 27, 2007 at its Entrepreneurship Conference. MyBiz.am is the entrepreneur sourcelink for Alabama and Mississippi.

MyBiz.am is part of the MyBiz Network that connects entrepreneurs, communities and service providers into a comprehensive system of support for seeding and growing entrepreneurs in Alabama and Mississippi. It results from the West Alabama - East Mississippi (WAEM) Regional Initiative funded through the U.S. Department of Labor's WIRED grant program.

The MyBiz Network rests upon a foundation of community and junior colleges. The eight colleges in the 37 counties of the WAEM Region have added trained staff who: help communities connect entrepreneurs to support services; help communities build their own local support systems; and form the

MyBiz.am was founded upon principles developed from U.S. SourceLink. Sourcelink is a proven, cost-effective model that links business development resources to each other and to those that need them. The SourceLink model provides users with multiple avenues of consultation and assistance, both Web-based and person-to-person, for businesses in the community.

“SourceLink is a key component to the WAEM Initiative’s strategy to link rural entrepreneurs to the scattered regional resources available to them to start and grow their business. The off-the-shelf capabilities of SourceLink combine with the staff’s knowledge, professionalism, and can-do attitude to make the WAEM network tangible,” states Chris Reed, Associate Director WAEM Regional Initiative.

MyBiz. am has five key elements. The Resource Navigator connects entrepreneurs to resources on-line and in person. The Finance Fly-By links entrepreneurs to state and federal loan programs. Community Connections provides access to vital information sources in the community. The Dream It/Start It sections provide online entrepreneurship training programs detailing the benefits and processes of starting a business. Network Navigators are knowledgeable of the business development organizations within the community and the services they provide.

All of this information is critical and important to the business development process. With just a few clicks, entrepreneurs can be connected.



backbone of a regional network supporting rural entrepreneur development.

The MyBiz.am website provides a gateway to a unique blend of virtual services. Using Zip Codes, it links entrepreneurs to the nearest provider of desired support. It offers community and junior colleges a location to list their events, training classes and other offerings that assist entrepreneurs grow and expand their businesses. It provides an online tool box for entrepreneur coaches and mentors – putting training guides, research sources, financing vehicles, training providers and more right at their finger tips.





The vision of the Crudup-Ward Women's Business Center is to equip the minority owned business community with tools and resources to enhance and accelerate business accessibility, growth, and profitability.

The center is committed to providing long term training and counseling to economically disadvantaged women and others who are interested in starting their own business or enhancing their existing business.

Current MyBiz.am Service Providers

Alabama Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
 Alabama International Trade Center
 Alabama Small Business Administration
 Alabama Virtual Library
 Center for Capital Formation – Mississippi Technology Alliance
 Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship – Mississippi Technology Alliance
 Choctaw County Chamber of Commerce
 East Central Community College Small Business Development Center
 East Mississippi Business Development Corporation
 Golden Triangle Planning and Development District
 Hinds County Community College International Trade Center
 Jones County Junior College Small Business Development Center
 Kauffman Venturing
 Legal Services of Alabama, Selma Office
 Meridian Downtown Association
 Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians Small Business Development Center
 Mississippi Development Authority
 Mississippi Manufacturing Extension Partnership
 Mississippi Small Business Administration
 Mississippi State University Library
 Mississippi Virtual Library
 Mississippi World Trade Center
 MSU Technology Resource Institute
 MSU Meridian Small Business Consulting at MCC Webb Center
 Northeast Mississippi Contract Procurement Center
 Selma and Dallas County Chamber of Commerce
 Selma Career Link
 Small Business Development Center Mississippi State University
 SME Toolkit
 Southwest Alabama Chamber of Commerce
 The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama
 Tuscaloosa Career Link
 Tuscaloosa One Stop Business & Learning Center
 University of Alabama Angelo Bruno Business Library
 University of West Alabama Small Business Development Center
 Walker Area Community Foundation
 Walker County Economic and Industrial Development Authority
 Women's Business Center, Mobile, AL
 Women's Center for Entrepreneurship at MUW

Governor Barbour Tours ITTC

After speaking at the Governor's Conference on Workforce Development, October 22, 2007, at the Pearl River Resort, Governor Haley Barbour took time to tour East Central Community College's Integrated Technologies Training Center located nearby on the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians Advanced TechParc. Barbour received information about the various training instruments available to employers and workforce members at the Center from Roger Whitlock, Dean of Workforce Development at ECCC.

Barbour said the facility "is exactly what we need more of in Mississippi because it's very relevant, as you can see from all the companies that are using it. It's also very relevant to what's going on in manufacturing and services... the world is changing and if you cannot get your workforce the skills to be successful in that very technical and changing world, then you've got real trouble."



Roger Whitlock, Dean of Workforce Development, briefs Governor Haley Barbour on the training machines at ITTC.

WCCS Hosts 3rd Annual Black Belt Job Fair

Wallace Community College Selma hosted the 3rd Annual Black Belt Job Fair in the WCCS Gymnasium on Tuesday, Oct. 30, in partnership with U.S. Representative Artur Davis (7th Congressional District, AL) Alabama State Senator Hank Sanders, the City of Selma, Selma Employment Office and Career Link.

A free event for the applicants and employers, the job fair aims to build a bridge between people seeking employment and the business community of the Black Belt Counties.



Dr. James Mitchell, President Wallace Community College Selma, pictured with Representative Artur Davis and Senator Hank Sanders, addresses participants during the 3rd Annual Black Belt Job Fair.

Felecia Pettway, Civic Leadership for WCCS WIRED Team, said that "the Job Fair was a great success, we had over 33 companies to participate in the Job Fair, and all of the companies who participated had immediate openings and were eager to fill these positions from the pool of applicants they received during the Job Fair."

In addition to offering employment opportunities and on-site interviews, WCCS WIRED team trained over 400 individuals in Perry, Wilcox, Lowndes and Dallas Counties, Alabama Southern Community College, assisted with the training in Wilcox County. The training consisted of resume preparation, interview coaching and help with application preparation. These seminars were held in the weeks leading up to the job fair.

With an estimated 800 attendees, the fair accommodated participants from all over the Blackbelt. There were a few companies who interviewed and actually hired participants at the Job Fair.

Event volunteers included: Southside High School JAG program, WCCS Student Ambassadors and WCCS Business Department Students. This variety of young volunteers were intended to greet and help the applicants feel comfortable as they walked through the job fair filling out applications and preparing for interviews.

FIRST LEGO League Tournament

It was an exciting day at Pearl River Elementary School in Choctaw, MS as students gathered from all over the tribal area to compete in the 6th Annual FIRST LEGO League Tournament.

FIRST LEGO League (FLL) is an exciting and fun international robotics program that ignites an enthusiasm for discovery, science, and technology in kids ages 9 to 14. Each year FLL teams embark on an adventurous Challenge based on current, real-world issues while being guided by a team coach and assisted by mentors.

“We hope next year that the WAEM region will be hosting its 1st Annual Qualifying Tournament and have one representative from each of the 57 school districts within the region engaged in the FIRST LEGO League program,” states Mason Bonner, Associate Director of WIRED. FIRST LEGO League can motivate young people to pursue education and career opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and math, while building self-confidence, knowledge, and life skills.

This years Challenge is all about Energy Resources. How do our personal energy choices to heat our homes, fuel our cars, charge our cell phones, or even power

our computers impact environment, economy, and life around the globe? Which resources we should use and why? Explore how energy production and consumption choices affect the planet and our quality of life today, tomorrow, and for future generations.



FIRST LEGO League teams have to find solutions to this global Power Puzzle. The Challenge theme and the related Research Project require teams to investigate current issues facing our modern world. This combined process brings the reality of science and technology to children on a more intimate, hands-on level.

There were 7 teams competing in 3 events. Each event was worth up to 25 points with another 25 points towards teamwork, which was just as valuable as the competitive portions. Throughout the entire day, students were enthusiastic and engaged in the competition. Teammates clapped and cheered each other on. There was also a sense of camaraderie among all the competing teams. In the end it just wasn't a competition, but kids having a good time with one another.

Enterprise Ready is a monthly publication of the WAEM Regional Initiative. For questions, comments, ideas, or stories for this publication contact:

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CALENDAR

OF
EVENTS

JAN 19
FIRST LEGO League AL