



# WAEM

WestAlabama-EastMississippi

# Enterprise-Ready

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## Wallace-Selma Graduates Get “Ready to Work”

SELMA, Al – “Anything I can do to better myself and better my future, I’m going to do it,” said Lawrence Simmons, an electrician laid off from Bush Hog, Inc. Simmons recently graduated from the Ready-To-Work program at Wallace Community College – Selma (WCCS).



Simmons and 42 other Ready-to-Work graduates were honored at a special recognition ceremony this week. WCCS, using funds and systems provided by the WAEM Regional Initiative, augmented Alabama’s Ready-To-Work program to give Simmons and his fellow graduates their best chance to find employment. WCCS added the Modern, Multi-Skill, Manufacturing (M3) Credential and the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) to create a unique, stackable credential training program for participants. Participants also had the option to receive entrepreneurship training during the intensive seven-week program.

“It was very enlightening,” said Brindle Gordon. “This has prepared me for the workforce and has given me the confidence to continue on.” Gordon received an M3 Production Level I Credential, a CRC Bronze Credential, and an Entrepreneurship certificate. Laid off from her manufacturing job, Gordon learned real life manu-

facturing skills from the Amatrol Anytime Anywhere e-Learning System used in the M3 training. “Even though I was in manufacturing, the Amatrol modules were very educational,” she said. “They really added to my knowledge.”

Another M3 graduate, Natasha Williams, did not have a manufacturing background when she entered the program. A former cashier at WalMart, Williams said the

Amatrol Anytime Anywhere e-learning System was a little tricky at first. “After a few tries, I got the hang of it,” she said.

“The online modules made it easy to learn.” Williams was also complementary of the Entrepreneurship course. “The Entrepreneurship course gave me confidence and showed me I have more skills than I thought I had.”



**Brindle Gordon receives her WCCS Ready-to-Work Certificate from WAEM Coordinator Shandra Smith**

The WCCS Ready-to-Work program provides basic work skills as the foundation to support the credential programs. “The students also learn communications, teamwork, team-building, work ethics, and job acquisition skills,” said Alice Logan, Workforce Director at

WCCS.

In all, participants were awarded 33 Ready-to-Work certificates, 31 CRC Credentials, 14 M3 Production Level I Credentials, 10 M3 Production Level II credentials, and nine Entrepreneur certificates.

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## EMCC Class Helps New Businesses Save Time

DEKALB, MS – Making it easier for entrepreneurs to grow new businesses in Kemper County is the goal of a new East Mississippi Community College (EMCC) class.

“I wish I had done this [course] before I started my business,” said June Aust, owner of The Hollow Log Gift Shop in DeKalb. “I could have saved myself a lot of time and extra steps. Everyone who wants to start a business needs this course and, thanks to EMCC, it is available in Kemper County.”

EMCC, working through the WAEM Regional Initiative has begun offering “How to Start and Run a Business,” at the college’s Scooba campus. Eight students enrolled in the 12-week course, which began in mid-October.

“We have students who believe that they can make a difference in their community by starting and running a business in DeKalb, the county seat of Kemper County,” said Bruce Hanson, WAEM staff member at EMCC and the course instructor.

Class members include potential entrepreneurs as well as existing business owners who want to learn how to more effectively run their companies. “We have students who already are running a restaurant, a gift shop and others who plan to operate a Bed and Breakfast and a bakery,” said Hanson.

Plans for a new hospital from Rush Health Systems and a \$2.2 billion lignite coal power generation plant from Mississippi Power Company have created a “boom” psychology in Kemper County...an attitude conducive to entrepreneurship. “There is a great amount of interest,” said Hanson. “We have received many phone calls

asking about the next class start date and have already signed up nine students.”

The innovative curriculum for this course was developed by Dr. Brent Hales of the Trent Lott National Center of Excellence in Economic Development and Entrepreneurship at the University of Southern Mississippi. The instruction provides students with practical basic tools of how to start and run a business. Developing a business plan and coaching of the students is an essential part of the course.

“Entrepreneurship should be taught in schools and colleges,” said Dr. Hales. “It is vital to expose students to business opportunities. Too many brilliant business-minded young people are leaving the state; we have to train them to reverse that trend and increase opportunities for them to stay here.”

EMCC will also offer the class at its Golden Triangle Campus in 2010.

Enterprise-Ready is a publication of the WAEM Regional Initiative. For questions, comments, ideas and/or stories about this publication contact:

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# 120 Students Board Dream Train

MERIDIAN - - Over 120 students from four high schools in two counties boarded the “Dream Train” at Meridian Community College (MCC) last week. While on board, they learned firsthand about the possibilities of owning their own business.

“This is outstanding,” said Charles Black, a counselor at Southeast Lauderdale High School.

“The interaction with the speakers, seeing their point of view – that information is something you wouldn’t normally get in a high school setting,” stated Betty Fox, a Student Services Counselor for Lauderdale County Schools.

“A lot of kids can say they want to go into business, but this gives kids a realistic view of what it takes to succeed,” said Counselor Elaine Webb, a Student Services Counselor for Lauderdale County Schools.

The second annual MCC Youth Entrepreneur Business Camp was held Friday, November 20, 2009, as part of Global Entrepreneurship Week, an initiative to inspire young people around the world to embrace creativity and innovation. The “Dream Train” is a concept where groups of students make “stops” at different locations at the college. At each stop, students meet entrepreneurs and facilitators to discuss a different aspect of going into business. This year’s stops were:

\* Stop 1 Eureka! - assists students in creating business ideas based on their interests and skill levels

\* Stop 2 Know Your Market - learn about supply/demand, competition and positioning your business

\* Stop 3 Business Regulations/Cha Ching - discuss regulations, taxes, legal matters and financing your business

\* Stop 4 Build a Support Team - develop a business and operational plan that includes leadership, employees and inventory

\* Stop 5 Computer Lab - visit interactive web sites to learn more about entrepreneurship

\* Stop 6 Meet the Entrepreneurs - question and answer sessions with young entrepreneurs that are currently in business



Tineshia Evans, a student at Newton High School learned the importance of determination and staying the course. “Starting a business isn’t easy. You’ve got to be dedicated, overcome setbacks, and stay strong.”

Southeast Lauderdale High School student Morgan Fuller said, “The speakers were very captivating.” “It’s an opportunity for our kids to talk to people who have experienced the American Dream,” added counselor Black.

WAEM Regional Initiative staff from Jones County Junior College, East Central Community College, and The Montgomery Institute joined with MCC staff to facilitate the camp.

“It’s great that these institutions work together like this,” said Ken Dupre’, WAEM Program Coordinator at The Montgomery Institute. “You would not have seen this type of cooperation prior to the WAEM regional initiative.”

## Marion Glimpses Unique Future

For years, the town of Marion has struggled with its identity. A small town of 1,500, it is often overshadowed by its bordering city, Meridian (pop. 39,968). This past Thursday evening, however, Marion citizens gained a glimpse of the future might hold, a future with Marion having its own unique identity.

“That was awesome,” declared Mayor Elvis Hudson, one of 45 people in attendance.

branding and marketing strategy as well as a design strategy. This presentation shows them, visually, things that they can do in their community and short-term and long-term plans,” said Jan Miller, regional director of Mississippi Main Street.

“We’ll also have some organizational information on how to take these plans and develop them over the next few years.”



Randy Wilson of Community Design Solutions addresses Marion residents

What he heard was a presentation from Mississippi Main Street wrapping up a three-day intensive design-oriented revitalization workshop. Sponsored by Meridian Community College and the WAEM Regional Initiative, the Main Street charrette team began gathering information from over 40 community leaders and townspeople on Tuesday, November 10. By Thursday evening, the team had created a presentation featuring rendered drawings of a transformed Marion based on the public’s input and suggestions.

“That was a magnificent presentation,” said Hudson. I’m as proud as a new parent.”

“This [charrette] gives the town of Marion a

Particularly striking was the logo developed by charrette team member Ben Muldrow. The logo is a multicolored “M” made to look like woven threads in fabric. “I wanted to combine the themes of the diversity of the town with the idea of a common thread binding them together,” explained Muldrow.

“The logo took my breath away,” Mayor Hudson said excitedly. “I’m going to have shirts made with that logo as soon as I can.”

The WAEM Regional Initiative has sponsored similar charrettes in 14 other West Alabama and East Mississippi communities.

# Alabama Southern Receives \$366,810 for M3 Training

Alabama Southern has received \$366,810 for the Modern Multi-Skill Manufacturing (M3) Training Program from the Governor's Recovery Act Skills Training Program.

"This type of training is a necessary component of the recovery program for the recession that has devastated Monroe County and the surrounding counties in the Alabama Southern service area," said Dr. William O. Blow, Interim President. "Alabama Southern appreciates the opportunity and the support we have received to provide this short term occupational training."

The Modern Multi-skill Manufacturing (M3) Credential is a product of the West Alabama – East Mississippi (WAEM) Regional Initiative. The WAEM Regional Initiative results from a Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grant from the U.S. Department of Labor.

The M3 Credential was developed by the workforce directors and career tech leaders at the eight WAEM Alliance colleges with input from local employers after a summit hosted by Governors Bob Riley and Haley Barbour chose advanced manufacturing as the WAEM region's top priority.

The M3 training program will allow WIA eligible adults and dislocated workers identified by the Alabama Career Center System the ability to acquire the necessary industrial maintenance skills needed by new employees in an advanced manufacturing environment. By introducing the participants to the ten week course, these individuals have the opportunity to acquire the technical skills necessary to meet the employment demands of regional business and industry.

"In our partnership with Alabama Southern, the Alabama Career Center System agrees to identify dislocated workers for potential training," said Hal Clements, Coordinator of the Monroeville office of the Alabama Career Center System. "The M3 pro-

gram will meet the standards of regional business and industry. With high unemployment and drastic layoffs and plant closures, it is vital to the economy of our area to have a trained workforce in order to prepare and attract new industry."

The M3 Training Program is intended to demonstrate a participant's degree of mastery over technical skills based on regional business and industry needs. The training program uses over 20 disciplines ranging from basic computer skills to mechanical drive system skills to educate the participants on the abilities needed to be competitive in the workforce.

"Alabama River Pulp is excited about the M3 Training Program funding," said Pete Black, Executive Vice President/General Manager of Alabama River Pulp. "The idea that Alabama Southern is partnering with the Alabama Career Center System to identify and train dislocated workers in an effort to produce well-trained workers and assist in creating a larger qualified technical labor pool further solidifies the notion that efforts are being made to remedy the economic issues facing Monroe County and other surrounding counties."



# LOCKHEED USES MCC'S ADVANCED TRAINING TO ACHIEVE 100% RETENTION RATE

MERIDIAN - - Business leaders agree success can be credited to solid partnerships. Take, for example, one between a local educational institution and a multinational aerospace manufacturer.

Meridian Community College and Lockheed Martin began a partnership a year ago teaching basic aircraft assembly skills at the college's new Workforce Training Center. The pre-employment training program, conducted by retired Lockheed Martin employees, was the first offered in the new facility.

"This program is win-win for everyone," said Joe Mercado, plant manager for the Lockheed Martin facility located in the Northeast Industrial Park outside Meridian. "We knew last fall that we were ramping up on the C 130 program and would need mechanics. We also knew there was a limited amount of trained people in the area and it (the program) just worked out perfectly in terms of being able to get the folks."

"And it says a lot," he added, "that people took the time and effort to go through the training. It already tells you something about their character - that they were interested in bettering themselves and getting a good opportunity."

William Green, hired by Lockheed Martin in February 2009, agrees.

"The pre-employment training program was important because while there were no promises we would be hired upon completion, it was expressed that it would be to our benefit to successfully complete the course," said Green.

"The program was also insightful and the class structure very well thought out. Having an instructor that at one time served as both a mechanic and inspector was so helpful," he added. "We were given the view points of what a good mechanic should be and what an inspector is expecting in a finished product by Instructor Frank Darcy, who was both patient and knowledgeable."

Green, along with 34 others that completed the training, was hired on at Lockheed Martin over the course of the last year, with a 100 percent retention rate - a statistic that Mercado says is just phenomenal.

"When we hire someone, they have to go through a 90-day evaluation. We get an opportunity to go over their performance and see how they do and how they are catching on. Some folks get here and this is not the environment for them. So for various reasons, during that early phase, we will have attrition and have to start over. But we were saved a big hit through lost time and productivity going this route," he noted. "I mean a 100 percent retention rate for those that went through the training- it's hard to say anything more than that."

"That's why this partnership has worked so well," stressed MCC Workforce Project Manager Lynne Thrailkill, who helped put together the training program. "We (MCC) take care of the attrition and Lockheed Martin gets good trained potential employees."

"For example," said Thrailkill, "one hundred and twenty nine people completed the pre-employment training over the past year and 46 percent of those were successful. An additional 20 individuals never showed up after we registered them and 20 more dropped out during the training."

"Lockheed Martin only had to deal with the ones who finished. There would have been absolutely no way they would have been able to pare that initial number down by just arbitrarily calling people in, interviewing them and putting them on the job," she added.

To be eligible for the two-week, 80-hour program, participants had to achieve a Career Readiness Certificate (CRC). They then received customized training in measurement techniques, blueprint reading, hand tools, power tools, and other skills as designated by Lockheed. MCC's partnership in the West Alabama

– East Mississippi (WAEM) Regional Initiative supported the equipment and systems utilized in the training.

Initially, only a “bronze” level in the CRC was required. This fall the pre-requisite CRC score has been increased to silver. Mercado hopes the tougher qualifications for entering the program will help increase the success rate of the participants.

And although the company is not looking to ramp up again at the level they did last year, they are looking to keep some prospective employees trained and ready.

“I will continue to work closely with Julia Stevens, Lockheed Martin’s human resource manager,” said Thrailkill, “to make sure the pool of prospective employees doesn’t get too large.”

And for those who went through the program and weren’t hired, they now have skills like blueprint

reading and drill pattern layout they can use elsewhere, she noted.

“Everyone who completes the program receives a certificate in basic aircraft structure training from MCC,” explained Thrailkill. “The certificate also has the number of hours spent in the program.”

“If a business is really interested in one of the individuals who completed the training,” she added, “they can call MCC Workforce division to learn more about what skills were taught in the class.

To learn more about the Lockheed Martin pre-employment training program or how MCC’s Workforce Development division can help your company, call 601-482-7445.

Story submitted by Lisa Sollie, Leadership Facilitator at MCC through the West Alabama East Mississippi (WAEM) Regional Initiative.

## JCJC Hosts Young Entrepreneurs

ELLISVILLE – With the desire to start their own business and be their own boss, nearly 150 high school students heard from some of the Pine Belt’s experienced business leaders. This workshop opportunity, which is designed to stimulate the creative process and guide students into business, was offered through the Southern Entrepreneurship Program and hosted by Jones County Junior College.

“We want these students to take ownership of the process of learning how to start a business,” said University of Southern Mississippi assistant professor of economic development and entrepreneurship, Dr. Brent Hales. “Seventeen functioning businesses have grown out of this program. It’s impacting these kids’ lives and it’s impacting the economic development in the state.”

Over the last three years, this program has grown from a small group of four schools participating in the state to more than 15 schools participating. Students from Heidelberg, Stone County, Bay Springs, Stringer, Gulfport, Hattiesburg, Petal, Columbus,

Florence, Richland, and West Bolivar High Schools participated in the first of three workshops for the program. Gulfport High School teacher Cathy McGuffee has been involved in the entrepreneurial program from the beginning.

“It gets better every year,” said McGuffee. “It’s teaching kids to find a passion. They get to learn what they want to do, and discover where that path will lead them. It lets them think outside the box.”

Part of the day is spent inspiring these young entrepreneurs with experienced entrepreneurs. Business owners Ashley Henley of Desinz by Nikki, Rocky Purvis of KaRocks and other ventures, Jacky Spradley of Full Bloom Landscaping and Lawn Care, Sunny Corral of Sunny Webb Design, Rodney Richardson of RARE Designs and Charles Arinder of Caliente Grill, spent the morning sharing their words of wisdom.

150 high school students had the opportunity to learn from some of the Pine Belt’s entrepreneurs at the Southern Entrepreneurship Program hosted at Jones

County Junior College.

“If your only motivation is to get rich, you’ll get broke fast,” said Richardson. “Explore your motivations and challenge yourself. It will help you get through the tough times and enjoy the good times.”

Some of the panelists discussed how education played a role in their success because of the friendships they created and the networking opportunities in school. Purvis also emphasized the need to be bold.

“Get excited about what you do and get to know people. Build those relationships. That’s how I’ve been able to start my businesses, with friends I met while working and in school.”

Henley, Spradley and Corral shared some of the challenges they faced as women in business. “Finances and being a woman in a male-dominated field were some of my biggest obstacles,” said Spradley.

Another challenge panelists shared that might be difficult for teens is being taken seriously. Some said they didn’t know how to start a business but had the drive and desire to figure it out.

“It’s a constant battle,” said Purvis. “Get sound advice and listen to it. Learn from your mistakes and temper your drive with patience.”

Several teens have already started their businesses before entering into this program, but are seeing the benefits of participating. “My teacher has helped me a lot and has given me amazing tips,” said Petal senior, Chelsea Anderson. “I’m learning about the laws involved with businesses so taking the class has helped.”

Anderson has a web based business called Owl by Gypsy.com, that sells clothes she’s designed, artwork and guitar lessons. Javaris Taylor of Gulfport has several business ventures with big plans.

“At everything.com I sell drinks, snacks, or whatever,” said Taylor. “I also want to start a sports pub

and have a game show in the pub. I plan to then put the sports game show on TV one day.”


Taylor said he started his business at the age of 16. “I didn’t know what I wanted to do at first. I’m creative and I’ve met some people who said they’d help me with my ideas.”

Javaris Taylor, 16 years old, listens intently to the entrepreneurs to get some tips for his businesses.

At the end of the year, students will present their business plan and idea to a panel of judges. The best plan will be given some resources to start that business. However, a new facet of the program this year also included a personal challenge from Hales. “I will pay \$500 to whomever or what group makes the most money.”

With that announcement, students from the participating schools were busy thinking of ways to succeed.

The University of Southern Mississippi, Jones County Junior College, The Montgomery Institute, WAEM Regional Initiative, and Bancorp South sponsored the day’s events.



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