



# WAEM

WestAlabama-EastMississippi

# Enterprise-Ready

March 2009

## Free MCC Class Gives Hope to Dislocated Workers

MERIDIAN - - Tim Pigford worked for Remy-Reman for five years – working up to second shift shipping supervisor. Then, the recession hit.

The 31-year-old Collinsville resident lost his job, a prospect some 2,450 Lauderdale Countians are facing. “They told me I lost my job and the economy like it is – well, there is not a lot of opportunity in Meridian right now,” Pigford said.

Colleague Donald Creekmore, 37, from Russell, also worked at the facility. He, too, was laid off.

But when Debbie McWhorter from Meridian Community College (MCC) visited the company as a part of a Rapid Response team, a sense of hope was restored. “When the lady from MCC came out to Remy-Reman to talk to us, and we saw the college was offering a free welding class, a couple of us signed up and here we are,” Pigford said.



*Tim Pigford (green jacket) and fellow classmate Jack Creighton adjust the cutting torch during the free welding class offered through MCC.*

“MCC is striving to assist people who have been laid off due to the current economic situation and those who need new skills to help with their job search efforts,” said Dan Talley, assistant dean for community and business development

“The free Dislocated Worker Program class, offered through the West Alabama-East Mississippi (WAEM) Regional Initiative and funded by the Department of Labor,” he explained, “is just one way in which the College is offering a hand up in these down times.”

According to Jim Dilley, instructor for the class and recently hired through the WAEM Regional Initiative, the class is for individuals who want to learn and have a basic understanding of welding practices. The 8-week class will include some classroom time and shop time.

“Upon completion of the class, students will know if welding is a trade they would like to pursue. If students are willing to pursue welding as a career, they can enroll in a new one-year certificate program, Welding and Fitting, MCC will offer in the fall.”

Looking for a good career, Robert Fluker, 23, of Meridian is another individual who learned about the welding class. “I was at the WIN Job Center and they sent the brochures around and I saw the welding class and it was something that I always wanted to do. I feel like it’s an opportunity so I did it,” Fluker said.

“I want to try and get a basic understanding of welding and how to do it. And after this, I hope to pursue my dream of going on to become a welder,” he said.

Creekmore was also appreciative of the welding class. “It gave me a feeling of security ... something I can fall back on that I know will pay the bills.

“And to me,” he added, “it’s a perfect opportunity. I’ve wanted to go back to school and do other things and I’d love to get certified in welding – and get me a better job.”

# We Will Not Perish

FAYETTE, AL - - The small Alabama town of Fayette is facing hard economic times. Mayor Ray Nelson sees the risks.

“Where there’s no vision, people will perish,” he said. “We will not perish.” Bevill State Community College and the WAEM Regional Initiative are helping make sure the Mayor can back up his statement.

Before the Mayor took office, the Lanier and Oneida textile mills closed. In 2000, auto supplier Arvin shut down. In 2001, The Cotton Mill shut down. Hundreds of jobs were lost.

The town brought in help. The Mayor had heard about the Small Town Design Initiative program at Auburn University. Cheryl Morgan, the program director, came to Fayette, spent time with community leaders identifying assets and opportunities, and helped the town develop a set of development strategies. The master plan was completed in 2005.

But, the daily challenges facing Fayette kept attention away from the master plan...until the WAEM Regional Initiative and Bevill State Community College (BSCC) came to town. In July of 2007, BSCC’s Karla Quesenberry met with Mayor Nelson to discuss the community’s future.

“Karla came to my office and asked what we were doing with our strategic plan,” explained Mayor Nelson. “I said it was sitting on a shelf. Karla said let’s give it new

life. She helped to energize me and together we began to excite the community.”

Quesenberry went through the city’s plan and realized the community had accomplished some of their goals already.

“It took someone like Karla to go through the plan and acknowledge the community had accomplished A, B, and C,” stated Cheryl Morgan. “This encourages people to want to continue to do more for their community.”



*Bolling Pharmacy, located in downtown Fayette, before the \$2.1 million downtown revitalization and streetscape improvement objective of Fayette’s master plan.*

Elements of Fayette’s master plan include:

1. Capture the opportunities of location:
  - Natural Recreation Areas
  - Sipsey River
  - County Seat
  - Butterfly and Natural Flora Gardens

2. Celebrating Fayette’s Strong Small Town Character and History:

- Spring clean-up campaign
- Historical Museum established in old train depot
- Adult Leadership Program developed with Bevill State Community College

3. Strengthening downtown: the heart of the community:

- Downtown Revitalization
- Downtown Merchant’s Association
- Benches and landscaping placed for relaxing and enjoying the downtown area



*The city experienced the growing pains during the construction and revitalization in and around Bolling Pharmacy.*

• F l a g Park

Accomplishments of the master plan include:

- Children’s water and RV parks developed
- City Hall relocated to the historic Post Office in downtown
- Youth and adult leadership programs established
- Community marketing brochure developed
- \$2.1 million d o w n t o w n revitalization and streetscape

unteer force can do for a community,” said Ron Davis, Plant Manager at ZF Lemforder and chairman of the beautification committee. “Both the Mayor and the WAEM staff (Karla) have been very active and engaged in this process. People are having fun and buying in. The results have exceeded my expectations.”

“WAEM and BSCC are helping us make small steps toward a better life,” Mayor Nelson said. WAEM has made a difference not only in Fayette, but in all 37 counties in the West Alabama – East Mississippi Region.”

Mayor Nelson went on to explain “small towns can’t do it alone. I am so glad I have the common sense to realize this. We aren’t just competing with other communities, we are competing globally.”

“Fayette looked at partnerships outside of their community to help give them a new perspective, to tell them the hard truths about their community,” said Morgan.

“Mayor Nelson listened to this feedback and forged ahead. Fayette found the things that are good within the community and is determined to make these things be all that they can be.”

improvements

- Established a beautification committee



*Bolling Pharmacy after revitalization.*

“It is amazing what rolling up your sleeves with a vol-

# SMART Activities for Teachers and Students

THOMASVILLE – Teaching students to be SMART using a REAL program? No, this is not a trick question. A group of Career Technical instructors at Thomasville High School recently learned a new use for Smarties Candy.

On February 16, 2009 these teachers participated in a “S.M.A.R.T.” goal setting activity which teaches students the importance of setting Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timed goals.

The SMART activity was one element of training conducted by Alabama REAL (Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning). REAL provides students with opportunities to learn entrepreneurial skills while having fun and interacting with other students through a variety of team-building activities.

Alabama REAL and the West Alabama - East Mississippi



*Smarties candy used to teach students, S.M.A.R.T., Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timed goals for entrepreneurship was just one of the activities in the Alabama REAL training.*

(WAEM) Regional Initiative have collaborated together to bring this training to high school teachers in the region. The REAL program addresses WAEM’s Youth Enterprise-Ready Activities by encouraging entrepreneurship training across existing curricula in the 59 schools in the WAEM Region. REAL can be incorporated in most course offerings in Mississippi

and Alabama schools to encourage the entrepreneurs spirit for this generation of high school students 16 years and older.\*

“Alabama REAL grew out of the conviction that public education programs needed more hands-on activities, and students in rural communities could develop entrepreneurial skills allowing them to become more engaged in local business formation,” expressed Tommie Syx, Alabama REAL Program Coordinator at the University of Alabama.

The Alabama REAL training prepares educators to teach the REAL Entrepreneurship Curriculum in the classroom. The curriculum has a guide of core activities and supplemental resources for setting up hands-on programs for schools and organizations. It includes group and individual activities, business planning journals, an integrated technology component, and a course program planning section.

For more information on Alabama REAL training, please contact Tommie Syx at [tsyx@cba.ua.edu](mailto:tsyx@cba.ua.edu).

\*REAL also offers separate curriculum and training programs for K-8.

# Augmented Ready-to-Work Program Boosts Phifer Retention

TUSCALOOSA, AL – Phifer, Inc. gets excellent results from the augmented Ready to Work Program provided by Shelton State Community College (SSCC).

“We are in our second year of hiring exclusively through the Ready to Work Program,” explained Russell Dubose, Human Resource Employment Manager for Phifer, Inc. “We can honestly say that the program has improved our hiring process. As a matter of fact, our attrition rate for 2008 was less than 9%. That is the best retention rate we have had since 1992.”

Ready to Work is a five-week pre employment program that prepares workers seeking high skills and better paying manufacturing or technical careers. SSCC augmented Ready to Work with the Anytime, Anywhere Amatrol e-Learning Program developed by the West Alabama – East Mississippi (WAEM) Regional Initiative.

Dubose said Ready to Work (RTW) “has improved the hiring process by validating skills through WorkKeys assessments and teaching manufacturing skills through Amatrol such as precision measurement and statistical process control. In addition, RTW validates desire and motivation by measuring punctuality and attendance and provides instruction in workplace behavior and conflict resolution. By combining hard and soft skill instruction, RTW, has prepared new employees for the rigors of 21st century manufacturing in a LeanSixSigma environment.”

“Amatrol opens many doors for pre and post-employment training,” Dubose added. “Our goal is to expand

Amatrol training to the current legacy workforce as we

prepare employees for technical jobs.”

The Ready to Work program has been a part of the Workforce Development Center for the past five years. SSCC designed a pre-employment program that aids Phifer in the selection process of potential employees. Phifer has been working with SSCC since January 2006.

“We have formed a powerful partnership with Phifer that allows our RTW program to train individuals for entry-level positions,” stated George Pratt, Assistant Director of Workforce Development at SSCC. “Phifer is ahead of the curve when it comes to pre-employment training as they take the time to recruit and identify candi-

dates that have the potential for a successful career in contemporary manufacturing.”

“We are currently designing training and selection programs for technical positions

and the Anytime, Anywhere Amatrol e-Learning System is our cornerstone. We will implement two “proof of principle” training programs this spring with Amatrol serving as our distance-learning component.”

The Anytime, Anywhere Amatrol e-Learning System consists of approximately 500 industry-proven training modules that can be delivered as virtual modules on-line or as enhancements to instructor-led training.

The WAEM Regional Initiative is a three-year workforce transformation project funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor and the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs. SSCC is one of eight Alabama and Mississippi community colleges participating in the initiative.



# Students Learn Ins and Outs of Being the Boss

MAYHEW - - Courtney Washington found her role model in Jubilations owner Tammie Craddock. “I learned how she started in her own kitchen and what gave her the vision to start her own bakery,” said Washington. She was one of 40 students from three high schools who participated in the Southern Entrepreneurship Program (SEP) Second Retreat.

“In America, most jobs are created by small business,” Dr. Raj Shaunak said in his welcoming remarks. Dr. Shaunak is Vice President for Workforce Development at East Mississippi Community College (EMCC) which hosted of the program. “In order to have a business that is successful, you’d better start a business you know something about, something you have a passion for,” he added.

Three High Schools — Bay Springs, Stringer and Columbus — were represented at the SEP Retreat, “I Am My Own Boss,” on January 22, 2009 at EMCC’s Mayhew campus. The Southern Entrepreneurship Program is the creation of Dr. Brent Hales of the Trent Lott National Center of Excellence in Entrepreneurship and Economic Development at the University of Southern Mississippi. The West Alabama – East Mississippi (WAEM) Regional Initiative sponsors SEP across its 37 counties.

The participants heard from several panels — the first covered how to get funding to start a business. Speaking

on behalf of the Small Business Development Center, Sonny Fisher said eight educational institutions statewide have business development centers that assist budding entrepreneurs.

“We see about 350 people a year in our office in Starkville,” Fisher said. “Credit is really, really important; you need to know that when you’re young.”

Rhonda Fisher, representing the U.S. Small Business Administration, advised students to be realistic in their business plans.

“So many people underestimate what their expenses are going to be and therefore overestimate profitability,” Fisher said.

The panel stressed the importance of a solid, well-contrived business plan.

“A business plan is your thoughts and ideas in some kind of organized mechanism someone can look at,” said David Kittrell of Bank First. “It tells who it is, what it is, where it is and how much it is.”

Banks, Kittrell continued, “are not in the business of judging character.” Their concern is a demonstrated ability and willingness to repay debt.

John Bean, owner of Harvey’s, the Grill and Peppers



*Students participating in the Southern Entrepreneurship Program at EMCC listen to valuable information from speakers, including Dr. Raj Shaunak (left), about becoming an entrepreneur.*

Deli, admitted that he did not have a business plan when he first started his business. Bean was a member of a second panel, which spoke to the students about their own experiences as entrepreneurs.

Bean said he had to sell his idea to his mom and a family friend, who were his first financiers. “If any of you want to start your own business, start saving today,” he advised. “You’ve got to have some money of your own to put in to start your business.”



To have a viable business, Bean continued, “You’ve got to fill a niche that’s not in that market. If you recognize something that fills a niche, you’ve got a real leg up and a real opportunity to be successful.”

In the way of obstacles, Jubilations owner Tammie Craddock said, “I had a lot.” When she started, she had no credit or any credit cards in her name. To finance her endeavor, “I put in every penny of our savings,” she said; which included cashing in a life insurance policy.

Statistics show, the panelists said, that roughly 80 percent of all upstart businesses fail within the first five years. Those that do succeed don’t necessarily make money right away.

“We were profitable in our second year,” Bean said. “When you own your own business, you should learn from your mistakes very quickly.”

The speakers also encouraged the students to surround themselves with successful, knowledgeable people and to make sure they enjoy what they do for a living.

“You’ve got to like to be out front; you’ll be the face of your business,” Bean said. “Ultimately, it all falls back on you. No one in your business who works for you is going to outwork you.”

As the retreat concluded, Tony Jeff of Mississippi Technology Alliance, explained that investors will not typically fund ideas, products, hobbies, patents, lifestyle companies and family businesses.

“Investors want to get their money in and get it out with a return,” he said. They tend to look for proprietary technology, processes or business models.

Jeff also explained the difference between debt funding, which can come from friends, family or lending institutions and requires repayment starting almost immediately, versus equity funding, in which investors get partial ownership and are generally paid back when the company is sold or publicly traded.

The students appeared to leave the daylong program with a greater understanding of what it takes to start a business. Columbus High student Terrell Jackson, 17, said he’d learned more about how loans work and the importance “of keeping your credit score balanced.”

If Jackson were to start a business, he would operate a film studio. “I want to give people different chances to read my scripts,” he said. “I plan to direct and act in these movies as well.”

Courtney Washington, 16, of Bay Springs High School said her reason for wanting to open a bakery was relatively simple.

“We really need one in Bay Springs,” she said.

*Excerpts re-printed with permission from Jennifer Gentile, Daily Times Leader, West Point, MS. [www.dailytimesleader.com](http://www.dailytimesleader.com)*

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

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West Alabama - East Mississippi

This product was funded by a grant awarded under the Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) Initiative as implemented by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment & Training Administration. The information contained in this product was created by a grantee organization and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor. All references to non-governmental companies or organizations, their services, products or resources are offered for informational purposes and should not be construed as an endorsement by the Department of Labor. This product is copyrighted by the institution that created it and is intended for individual organizational, noncommercial use only.

# SBA Applauds Stimulus Bill, Planning Underway for Broadest, Quickest Small Business Impact

WASHINGTON – The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act contains a package of loan fee reductions, higher guarantees, new SBA programs, secondary market incentives, and enhancements to current SBA programs that will help unlock credit markets and begin economic recovery for the nation's small business sector.

“The tax incentives and credit stimulus elements of the Recovery Act will truly help small business owners affected by the credit crunch, and will provide financing opportunities to help them create new jobs in their communities,” said Acting SBA Administrator Darryl K. Hairston.

“There's a lot to digest in the legislation, and SBA has established teams to tackle a wide variety of policy decisions, system modifications, regulatory changes, legal requirements, and new program launches authorized by the President and Congress,” said Hairston.

The bill provides \$730 million to SBA and makes changes to the agency's lending and investment programs so that they can reach more small businesses that need help. The funding includes:

- \$375 million for temporary fee reductions or eliminations on SBA loans and increased SBA guaranteed shares, up to 90 percent for certain loans
- \$255 million for a new loan program to help small businesses meet existing debt payments
- \$30 million for expanding SBA's Microloan program, enough to finance up to \$50 million in new lending and \$24 million in technical assistance grants to microlenders
- \$20 million for technology systems to streamline SBA's lending and oversight processes
- \$15 million for expanding SBA's Surety Bond Guarantee program
- \$25 million for staffing up to meet demands for new programs
- \$10 million for the Office of Inspector General

The bill also authorizes refinancing for certain SBA loans so borrowers can expand their businesses on favorable terms, and expands leverage capability for Small Business Investment Companies.



“We are going to be part of the solution, and this bill gives us specific tools to make it easier and less expensive for small businesses to get loans, give lenders new incentives to make more loans, and help restore healthy SBA secondary markets to boost liquidity,” Hairston said, noting also that more details on implementation will be coming over the next few weeks.

The stimulus bill takes a comprehensive approach and attacks several problems facing small businesses at once by reducing fees, guaranteeing a greater share of certain loans, expanding capacity in the Microloan program, providing new loans to help small businesses keep their doors open through economic hardship, as well as new mechanisms to help unfreeze the secondary markets for SBA-backed loans.

Declines in SBA lending volume last year, which are continuing in FY 2009, reflect problems in the broader credit markets, and present hurdles to small businesses that are seeking credit in the current economy. The financial crisis has created a variety of conditions that impact small businesses, including a lack of liquidity in the banking system, a reluctance of many lenders to extend new loans, tightened credit standards, weaker finances at small businesses, and uncertainty about taking on new debt on the part of many entrepreneurs.

The Recovery Act addresses small businesses' lending problems, and addresses key investment and contracting issues. The bill helps Small Business Investment Companies better leverage investment capital to reach more small companies. The bill also increases the current contract limit for SBA's Surety Bond Guarantee program, which will help small businesses compete for contracts.