



Drabenstott:

WAEM Region can compete globally

Rural economist Mark Drabenstott said despite an alarming trend of losing jobs, population and income in recent years, the West Alabama-East Mississippi (WAEM) region can still compete in the rapidly-changing global marketplace.



Photo By Kenneth Billings/TMI

RUPRI economist and researcher Mark Drabenstott addresses about 120 business, education and community leaders at the WIREd committee orientation held in Meridian on Sept 29.

Drabenstott, director for the Center for Regional Competitiveness at the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) at the University of Missouri, addressed a crowd of about 120 business, community and education leaders at the Riley Center for Education and the Performing Arts in Meridian, Miss. On Sept. 29.

The gathering of West Alabama-East Mississippi "Enterprise-Ready" Initiative participants was the initial meeting of the "Enterprise-Ready" goal committees co-chaired by eight community and junior college presidents

in the region.

Drabenstott and RUPRI will be providing assistance and support for the WAEM WIREd Region as implementation of the \$15 million Department of Labor grant moves forward.

Drabenstott said change will not come over night, but the economic backdrop in the region can change.

He said globalization in the economic landscape has necessitated a regional approach to economic development in rural areas, such as the 37 county WAEM region, in order to level the playing field.

Regional initiatives, he said, provide the critical mass, scale and clout needed to compete in the economic development race.

By developing a competitive strategy based on markets and assets and driven by entrepreneurship and innovation, the West Alabama-East Mississippi region will be able to gain a competitive edge in the global marketplace.

Drabenstott said there are three strategies to gaining a competitive advantage: the stay and fight strategy; the middle-road strategy; and the "pioneer" discovery strategy.

RUPRI's role in the WAEM region's implementation process will be four-fold.

Developing an economic base line will be the first step in the process and will identify the distribution of

current employment resources.

The second step, helping map assets in the 37-county region, will help identify and define the things which set the region apart and make it special.

Identifying these assets will help in transitioning to the third phase of RUPRI's assistance which is helping identify possible new sources of competitive advantage.

Ultimately, RURPI will use the information gathered in the first three steps to implement the final step which is crafting the regional competitiveness strategy.

Drabenstott said a great deal of hard work lies ahead but by working together it is possible to craft a world-class strategy to help the WAEM Region compete in the global economic race.

Becoming *Enterprise-Ready*

Thanks to the vision and leadership of Governors Haley Barbour and Bob Riley, the people of West Alabama and East Mississippi have a wonderful opportunity to improve their mostly rural region. The two Governors got the region a \$15 million

Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grant from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). This grant gives the region the resources to do a number of innovative things over a three-year period.

The grant proposal talks about "economic transformation" and "workforce innovation." Mike Ellis, a CCJC facilitator with East Mississippi Community College (see Page 1), says grant leaders prefer to use the word "building."

"This initiative is about building a better regional workforce, building a stronger regional economy, building entrepreneurial capacity, building better communities, and more," said Ellis.

Joey Kenna, a facilitator with East Central Community College explains, "You see, building better things is different from fixing things. Many initiatives of this nature want to fix things that are broken or don't work well. 'Here's a problem, let's fix it,' they say. Fix-it people see what's wrong. Build-it people focus on what can be done with the assets and strengths they have. They thrive on creating and building." Kenna is one of the CCJC facilitators (see Page 1).

The "build-it" mission statement of the WAEM initiative is to "build *Enterprise-Ready* people, places, programs, and regional identity."

A common question to CCJC facilitators is, "What does that mean, especially the *Enterprise-Ready* part?"

*"Can we become
"Enterprise-Ready?"
Absolutely.
Yes we can!"*

WAEM WIRED
Commissioner
Susan Miller



"ENTERPRISE-READY"

IS A PUBLICATION OF THE WEST ALABAMA-EAST MISSISSIPPI WIRED INITIATIVE AND IS MADE POSSIBLE BY A WORKFORCE INNOVATION IN REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (WIRED) GRANT FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR.

Jones County Junior College facilitator Regina Kitchens says, “An *Enterprise-Ready place* is a community with the infrastructure, workforce, and incentives ready to attract new industry. Likewise, *Enterprise-Ready people* means workers have skills and credentials needed to keep and attract growth industries and high-paying jobs.”

Angelis Smith, a campus director with Alabama Southern Community College, says, “*Enterprise-Ready places* can also mean communities with the training, coaching, financing, facilities and other things ready to support entrepreneurs who grow our community-based jobs and bring wealth to our communities. And *Enterprise-Ready people* can mean students who graduate from high school ready to take on technology-based jobs as well as leaders with “can do” attitudes, who find assets to build on and opportunities to seize.”

Meridian Community College facilitator Michael Gibson says, “*Enterprise-Ready programs* are those programs that help people and places become *Enterprise-Ready*. An *Enterprise-Ready region*, then, is one full of *Enterprise-Ready* places and people, communities, workers, entrepreneurs, students, and leaders...with an array of *Enterprise-Ready* programs to support them. *Enterprise-Ready* is what we want to become region-wide so we can better compete in this new global economy.”

While a key focus of the WAEM initiative is on region-building (see Page 2), there is an equal focus on developing the 100 or so communities in the region. What CCJC staff call “place building.”

Shandra Smith, a facilitator with Wallace Community College – Selma, explains. “Building better homeplaces is as critical to building an *Enterprise-Ready* region as anything else. We want to lift our sense of region without diluting our



sense of place. So, we will engage with every community in all our counties to help them build and improve.”

The work of the WAEM initiative is the responsibility of eight community and junior colleges in the West Alabama-East Mississippi region – Alabama Southern, Beville State, East Central, East Mississippi, Jones County, Meridian, Shelton State, and Wallace Community College-Selma, along with The Montgomery Institute in Meridian, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, and the Mississippi Development Authority.

This work is divided among four goals.

“Goal 1 is about developing this “build-it” “*Enterprise-Ready*” approach and getting buy-in from local and regional leaders,” says

Jones County Junior College facilitator Jason Dedwylder. “It’s about identifying our key assets, strengths, and opportunities and building on those.”

Thomas Burgett, a facilitator with Beville State Community College, says, “Goal 2 is about entrepreneurship, about growing more globally competitive community based businesses.”

“Goal 3,” he says, “is about building a skilled, trained workforce throughout our region to compete for high wage, high skill jobs and to

retain the major employers we already have.”

Felecia Pettway, a facilitator with Wallace Community College – Selma, says Goal 4, “is about building an *Enterprise-Ready* future. We will work with our schools and youth programs to make sure their output creates an *Enterprise-Ready* workforce for tomorrow.”

“Can we become *Enterprise-Ready*?” asks WAEM Commission member Susan Miller from Shelton State Community College. “Absolutely. Yes we can!” she answers.

Editorial

And what's a region?

By Bill Scaggs

The bad news is no universally accepted definition of “region” exists. On the other hand, the good news is no universally accepted definition of “region” exists.

The West Alabama/East Mississippi “*Enterprise-Ready*” region is “self-selected.” That is, the eight community and junior colleges serving our collection of 37

counties comprising around one million people voluntarily agreed to join together to advance our “regional” workforce capacity.

Certainly most regions like our WAEM area are defined by existing governmental jurisdictions. States, counties, districts, towns and cities are convenient markers in describing



regions. And that is why the leadership of Governors Haley Barbour and Bob Riley and our college presidents is vital to our WAEM initiative work. Their ability to see beyond state lines, college district lines and city limits is fundamental to our success in “region building.”

At our most recent WAEM Wired Commission

meeting, the observation was made that for workforce development purposes, region may be defined as a work centered commute of around 50-60 miles. For those of us in rural America this is an especially powerful concept. The work-centered commute rather than residence or political jurisdiction can define a region.

A similar definition of region can be cast by asking rural people questions like “where do you go for health care” or “where do you go to shop.” The circles on the map multiply. And it should be very clear that we share many “sub-regions.”

Both the “where do you work?” and the “where do you shop?” approaches suggest a common issue: transportation. Roads and rails; rivers and canals; ports, terminals, and airports are fundamental regional development opportunities.

Helping people move with ease from homeplace to workplace to markets is a continuing challenge for our mostly rural region.

We know our highways and waterways and airways are major assets. They are the connections upon which our future can be built. How can we build upon these pathways to prosperity?

Bill Scaggs is the President of the Montgomery Institute and Chairman of the WAEM Commission.

The WAEM Commission

An eight-member commission appointed by Governors Haley Barbour and Bob Riley will provide the advisory leadership for the West Alabama-East Mississippi (WAEM) “Enterprise-Ready” Initiative.

Four voting members from Mississippi and four voting members from Alabama serve on the commission with the president of the Montgomery Institute appointed as the ex-officio and non-voting chairman.

The function of the WAEM commission is to provide advisory oversight and leadership for the initiative.

Appointed by Alabama Governor Bob Riley to serve on the WAEM Commission are: Tim Alford, Director, Office of Workforce Development; Phillis Belcher, Director, Greene

County Industrial Development Board; Vickie Locke, Project Manager, Alabama Black Belt Commission; and Susan Miller, Workforce Development Director, Shelton State Community College.

Appointed by Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour are: Tommy Dulaney, President, Structural Steel Services; Wade Jones, President, East Mississippi Business Development Corporation; C.D. Smith, Regional Manager, East Central-Golden Triangle District, BellSouth; and Dr. Wayne Stonecypher, Executive Director, Mississippi State Board for Community and Junior Colleges.

Dr. Bill Scaggs is the President of the Montgomery Institute and will serve as the WAEM Commission chairman.

CCJC facilitators begin training; hit ground running in communities

New staff members assigned to the WAEM initiative from the community and junior colleges in the 37-county West Alabama-East Mississippi region wasted no time getting out in the communities after beginning their training last month.

Sixteen community leadership and entrepreneurial facilitators from seven of the eight ccjc’s in the region (ASCC is still in the process of designating their staff) kicked off eight weeks of training with a three-day training session at Alabama Southern Community College in

Demopolis, Ala., to be followed by weekly one-day training sessions to be held on the campus' of each school.

Grant project director Bill Crawford said holding the training sessions at each of the schools helps orient facilitators with their counterparts' areas while familiarizing them with the regions composition of people and places.

The CCJC staff will assist communities in building on their assets and strengths while helping the region build the needed infrastructure to thrive on innovation and to seize opportunities within the new economy.



Photo By Kenneth Billings/TMI

Jones County Junior College Civic Leadership Facilitator Regina Kitchens, right, speaks during team presentations as part of the first training session for new hires hosted at Alabama Southern Community College in Demopolis, Ala. The session was the first of eight to be held weekly at each community college campus.

Meet the staff

Civic Leadership Facilitators (from left to right): Shandra Smith, Wallace Community College-Selma; Joey Kenna, East Central Community College; Thomas Burgett, Bevill State Community College; Regina Kitchens, Jones County Junior College; Marlo Dorsey, Jones County Junior College; Bruce Hanson, East Mississippi Community College; Michael Gibson, Meridian Community College. Not pictured: John Harvard, Shelton State Community College.

Community Entrepreneurial Development facilitators (from left to right): Ken Dupre, Meridian Community College; Jason Dedwylder, Jones County Junior College; Felicia Pettway, Wallace Community College-Selma; Karla Quesenberry, Bevill State Community College and Mike Ellis, East Central Community College. Not pictured: Danny Avery, East Mississippi Community College; Janina Nobles, Shelton State Community College; and Gwen Magee from Jones COunty Junior College.



WAEM Commission appoints goal committees

The West Alabama-East Mississippi Commission has appointed eight community and junior college presidents to chair four goal committees. The Commission also approved community, business and education leaders from the 37-county region to serve on those committees.

The four committees coincide with each of the four goals of the grant implementation plan and will provide advisory input as the WIRED initiative moves forward in the region.

Goal 1 is to “fashion an *Enterprise-Ready* regional identity and civic culture from persistent engagement of leadership in enterprise and innovation based planning and development activities.”

The objective of Goal 1 is to “spur and sustain rural economic transformation through a regional, integrated-system approach to economic and community entrepreneurship.”

Goal 3 members will work to “credential, certify, and transform to a regionally-branded workforce.”

Goal 4 will “engage K-12 schools and youth development programs in regional branding and *Enterprise Ready* activities.”

The Goal 1 committee is co-chaired by Dr. James Mitchell, President of Wallace Community College - Selma and Dr. Jessie Smith, President of Jones County Junior College. Approved committee members are: Sara Blackmon, Demopolis, Ala.; Chris Chain, Columbus Miss.; Sam Covert, Monroeville Ala.; Marty Davidson, Meridian, Miss.; Sheldon



Kenneth Billings/TMI
Goal 3 committee chairman and MCC President Dr. Scott Elliot (far left), ECCC Workforce Development Director Roger Whitlock (second from left) and WIRED Commission Chairman Bill Scaggs look on as BSCC Workforce Director Charles Ireland makes a point during committee meetings held on Sept. 29 at the Riley Center in Meridian, Miss.

Day, Thomasville, Ala.; Carl Exford, Birmingham, Ala.; Bob Forbus, Jasper, Ala.; Walter Gardner, Newton Miss.; David Graham, Hamilton, Ala.; Tanya Gray, Laurel, Miss.; Alan Harper, Aliceville, Ala.; John Hendrix, Choctaw, Miss.; Gerald Mills, Louisville, Miss.; William Oliver, Macon, Miss.; Linda Vice, Thomasville, Ala.; and Judy Young, Tuscaloosa, Ala. Committee resource members are: Bo Beaulieu, Southern Rural Development Center; Mike Bailey, Alabama Technology Network; Nisa Miranda, University of Alabama Center for Economic Development; Robert Ratliff, Tuscaloosa Convention & Visitors Bureau; Jack Tucci, Division of Business & Industry at MSU-Meridian Campus; Pete Walley, Institutions of Higher Learning; and Mary Beth Wilkerson, Mississippi Development Authority, Tourism Division.

The Goal 2 committee is co-chaired by Dr. John Johnson, President, Alabama Southern Community College

and Dr. Phil Sutphin,
President, East Central
Community College.

Committee members are:
Luther Davis, Tuscaloosa, Ala.;
Mark Alexander, Columbus,
Miss.; Rochester Anderson,
Meridian, Miss.; Crystal
Dupre', Meridian, Miss.; Bobby
Harper, Columbus, Miss.;
William Hatcher, Lauderdale,
Miss.; Brian Henson, DeKalb,
Miss.; Donny Jones,
Tuscaloosa, Ala.; Linda Lewis,
Jasper, Ala.; Jerome Merida,
Jackson, Ala.; Stafford Myrick,
Decatur, Miss.; Frankie
Oglesby, Marion, Ala.; Douglas
Ragland, Eutaw, Ala.; Joe
Robertson, Laurel, Miss.;
Danny D'Andre, Thomasville,
Ala. Resource members are:
Paavo Hanninen, University of
Alabama; Roger Roberson,
U.S. Dept. of Agriculture; Rich
Speights, Mississippi Development
Authority; and Bubba Weir,
Mississippi Technology Alliance.

Meridian Community College
president Dr. Scott Elliot and Shelton
State Community College president
Dr. Rick Rogers will co-chair the
Goal 3 committee.

Goal 3 committee members are:
Leola Bell, Hayneville, Ala.; Lee
Jackson, Hayneville, Ala.; Judy
Graham, Jackson, Ala.; Winston
Hayes, Jasper, Ala.; Davis Jackson,
Tuscaloosa, Ala.; Rod Jones, Vance,
Ala.; Gary Lukens, Hattiesburg, Miss.
John Matthews, Camden, Ala.; Rusty
McMillan, Newton, Miss.; James
Mock, Livingston, Ala.; Thomas
Moore, Demopolis, Ala.; William
Ryan, Greensboro, Ala.; Pat Salmon,
Starkville, Miss.; Lex Taylor,
Louisville, Miss.; Lonnie Thigpen,
Louin, Miss.; Vernon Underwood,
Butler, Ala. The goal three resource
member is Jason Pugh, State Board
for Community/Junior Colleges.



Kenneth Billings/TMI
Jones County Junior College President Dr. Jesse Smith, left, and Wallace
Community College-Selma President Dr. James Mitchell look over documents
during their committee meeting on Sept. 29.

The Goal 4 committee will be will
be co-chaired by Dr. Rick Young,
president, East Mississippi
Community College, and Bevill State
Community College president, Dr.
Harold Wade.

Selected to serve on the Goal 4
committee are: Debra Bolen, Grove
Hill, Ala.; Carey Butler, Columbus,
Miss.; Paul Chamblee, Carthage,
Miss.; Niani Colom, Columbus, Miss.;
Pierre Goode, Demopolis, Ala.;
Toreatha Johnson, Lisman, Ala.;
Aaron McCall, Hayneville, Ala.; Ed
McGowan, Lawrence, Miss.; George
Meyers, Meridian, Miss.; Deanna
Morgan, Fayette, Ala.; Charlie
Parkerson, Quitman, Miss.; Frank
Stegall, Greensboro, Ala.; Mitch
Stennett, Laurel, Miss.; Deborah
Tucker, Tuscaloosa, Ala.; David
Vowell, Philadelphia, Miss.; and Don
Willingham, Selma, Ala.

The Goal 4 resource member will
be: Susan Rucker, School of
Education, University of Mississippi.