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## STATE WORKFORCE BOARD UPDATE – October 16, 2007

(WAEM WIRED was designed and operates as a “capacity building” initiative for a mostly rural 37-county region that needs to upbuild its workforce to attract and retain high wage/high skill jobs.)

### **Recent Events**

- Oct. 15 – Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour and Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs Exec. Dir. Bill Johnson announced the following:
  1. Formation of the “WAEM Alliance” of eight community and junior colleges in West Alabama and East Mississippi. Intended to last far beyond the WIRED Initiative, this Alliance will provide the platform for these colleges to:
    - i. Support regional economic development projects – across the state line and throughout the region,
    - ii. Establish and award a regional credential based on “authentic skills assessment” for advanced manufacturing and other high-tech industries,
    - iii. Align credit and non-credit career and technical training programs to regional priorities – such as those highlighted at Riley and Barbour’s WAEM Summit in May, and
    - iv. Jointly acquire and implement innovative training systems.
  2. Purchase of an industry-proven, region-wide, virtual advanced manufacturing training system. This anytime-anywhere Internet based, on-line system, will support:
    - i. technical training at colleges and allied high schools;
    - ii. on-site training for business and industry; and
    - iii. individual skills training at home, at work, or anywhere there is broadband Internet access.

Unlimited access to this Amatrol system for over two years will provide opportunities:

- a) for colleges and high schools to experiment with using virtual advanced manufacturing training in existing classes;
- b) for colleges to develop innovative on-site, off-site, and instructor-led training and training support for businesses, and
- c) to identify best practices for anytime, anywhere training for incumbent workers and others who have difficulty attending traditional classes.

The Amatrol system was selected by career and technical deans, workforce directors, and advanced manufacturing instructors from the eight participating colleges. Among its capacities, it provides for authentic (hands-on) skills assessment based on national, industry-approved standards.

3. Part one of a \$4 million investment in college training systems. Each college will now receive \$350,000 to develop and/or enhance training related to advanced manufacturing and other opportunities targeted at the WAEM Governors Summit. An additional \$150,000 will be made available next fiscal year.

All of the above is part of WAEM Goal 3.

- Oct. 12 – The first WAEM Mayors Conference was held at Livingston, AL. Twenty-five mayors attended and unanimously agreed to move forward in forming a WAEM Mayors Network. The network will select and promote development initiatives important to the entire 37-county region. This is one of the initiatives within Goal 1 of WAEM WIRED, which has the mission of developing “regional identity.”

### **Upcoming Events**

- Nov. 29 – 30 – The first WAEM Entrepreneurship Conference, part of WAEM Goal 2, will be held at the Riley Education and Conference Center in Meridian. The theme of the event will be “Connecting Entrepreneurs, Communities and Service Providers.” Featured speakers include:
  - Leslie Scott – North Carolina Rural Entrepreneurship Institute
  - Eric Pederson – Program Manager for Network Kansas
  - Janita Stewart – Mississippi State SBA Director
  - Michael Ricks – Alabama State SBA Director
  - Don Macke – RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship
  - Chris Gibbons – Director, Littleton CO Chamber of Commerce – Economic Gardening
  - Dr. Randy Goldsmith (invited) – CEO Mississippi Technology Alliance
- TBA – Gov. Bob Riley and Gov. Haley Barbour will announce the creation of [MyBiz.am](http://MyBiz.am) entrepreneur resource network, another Goal 2 initiative. In beta testing at this time, the [MyBiz.am](http://MyBiz.am) website will connect entrepreneurs throughout the region to:
  - existing support provided by numerous agencies, colleges, and programs;
  - local resources provided by communities in the WAEM region;
  - on-line education and training support; and
  - events and networks in the region.

The “resource navigator” will show users the closest place to obtain needed help via a menu of offerings. It will also connect them to on-line resources. This unique tool is driven by a system developed for KC Sourcelink in Kansas City in collaboration with the Ewing Kauffman Foundation.

WIN Centers, community organizations, and colleges can become “navigators,” trained to guide existing and potential entrepreneurs through the MyBiz network.

### **Ongoing Work**

- Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) training is a targeted outcome of WAEM WIRED. Through Sept. 30, 1,157 CRCs had been awarded in the WAEM Region, 610 in Alabama and 547 in Mississippi.
- Building on the virtual, regional training system, the WAEM Alliance is developing a “modern multi-skill manufacturing” M3 credential. As noted above, the credential will require “authentic assessment” to be awarded. East Mississippi Community College is piloting a program combining the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) with the M3 training to prepare dislocated workers for higher skill jobs.
- Youth programming in WAEM Goal 4 includes a WAEM Lego League competition for middle schools and more effective sharing of information re dual enrollment practices in Alabama and Mississippi. Jones County Junior College established a pilot entrepreneurship class at Laurel High School. This class is composed of fifteen 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders and provides students with basic information on starting and running a business.
- The WAEM Governors’ Summit highlighted regional development opportunities in wood products and tourism:
  - Exploration of “cluster development” opportunities in the forest products and timberlands sector is being driven by the University of Alabama and Mississippi State University. This sector has many strong components and agencies. Regional alignment of these could help the cluster better develop. Included in this focus is cellulose-based alternative fuel development.
  - WAEM staff is working with other partners to develop a plan to more effectively support regional tourism.
- College WIRED staff continue to work with communities on asset mapping, entrepreneur development, youth programming, and regional linkages.