



WAEM

WestAlabama-EastMississippi

Enterprise-Ready

October 2007

Mayors Come Together for Collaborative Regional Network

LIVINGSTON, AL -- Recognizing that 160 Mayors speaking with one voice carries far more weight than individual voices, a group of West Alabama – East Mississippi (WAEM) Mayors agreed to move forward to form a WAEM Mayors Network. A group of 25 Mayors from across the WAEM Region gathered at the University of West Alabama on October 12th to discuss regional opportunities.

“I sense the urgency in this region, right here in the Blackbelt region, for a regional strategy,” Mayor Cecil Williamson of Demopolis stated.

“We are behind everyone else. In order for this to work, a group of people have to take charge and move forward with it.” The Blackbelt Mayors Association sponsored this initial meeting along with the WAEM Regional Initiative.

Dr. Mark Drabenstott, director of the national RUPRI Center for Regional Competitiveness kicked off the Mayors conference, summarizing economic research he conducted for the region.

“Developing and implementing an economic strategy assists a region in identifying its competitive advantage,” emphasized Drabenstott. “In order for a regional strategy to be successful, the strategy must engage leaders, like Mayors.”

WAEM Initiative director Bill Crawford told participants, “The strongest champions for local development are community mayors. As a region, we need to find a way to collectively capture each Mayor’s experience and share this in a network.” Crawford then posed the question, “What is your interest in standing up a Mayors Network or some type of association to work together on regional issues?”

Mayor Roy Dobbs of Berry, Alabama shared his thoughts. “Having a broader mind and a broader vision is the meat that can hold a network together,” Mayor Dobbs stated.

The Mayor then asked his own question to Dr. Drabenstott, “How do we pull together?”

“There have to be champions in the communities,” Drabenstott answered, “who are willing to risk their standing in the community to express the importance of coming together as a region.”

Mayor Eddie Woods seemed to sum it up best, a WAEM Mayors Network “is a great way for this region’s Mayors to collaborate for the needs of the region. It is also an incentive for each of us to work together for the common goal of the region and our people.”

The event may have concluded; but thoughts of regionalism, building up communities, and coming together as a network were on the minds of the Mayors as they made their way home. As a next step, the WAEM Initiative will reach out to other Mayors in the region and seek their input.



Mayor Cecil Williamson, Town of Demopolis, addresses attendees.

Governor Barbour says new “anytime, anywhere” training system gives WAEM Region “a big leg up”

MERIDIAN, MS -- “This region is building one of the most innovative, accessible, advanced manufacturing training systems in the United States” Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour said today. He was announcing a new “anytime, anywhere” job training system and eight-college training alliance the West Alabama – East Mississippi WIRED Initiative is putting in place.

“Governor Bob Riley (AL) and I jointly sought the WIRED grant to help make this area of West Alabama and East Mississippi a globally competitive region, creating an innovative, regional workforce education and training system to address key skill needs in the region,” Governor Barbour said.

A new WAEM Alliance of eight community and junior colleges in the region will oversee the operation of the virtual, Internet-based training system, Governor Barbour said. “This alliance is intended to last far beyond the WIRED grant period,” he added.

“This training system is going to give us a big leg up,” the Governor said. Alabama Southern, Beville State, Shelton State, and Wallace–Selma are the Alabama colleges joining the alliance. East Central, East Mississippi, Jones County, and Meridian are the Mississippi colleges.

Joined by Gov. Riley’s representative, Bill Johnson, executive director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, Governor Barbour said the WAEM Alliance will provide the platform for these colleges to:

- Support regional economic development projects across the state line and throughout the region;
- Establish and award a regional credential for advanced manufacturing and other high-tech industries;
- Align credit and non-credit career and technical training programs to regional priorities – such as those highlighted at the WAEM Summit in May; and,
- Jointly acquire and implement innovative training systems.

At the May 14 “Governors’ Summit” in Monroeville, AL, regional leaders picked advanced manufacturing as a top



From Left, ECCC President Phil Sutphin; Executive Director ADECA Bill Johnson; BSCC President Neil Morrison; SSCC Representative George Pratt; Alabama Southern Community College Dean of Academic Support Services Angelis Smith; WAEM Initiative Director Bill Crawford; MCC Representative C.D. Smith; Governor Haley Barbour; EMCC President Rick Young; The Montgomery Institute President Bill Scaggs

“With the Amatrol system, we can reach anyone with access to a computer...”

*Neil Morrison
President
Beville State Community College*

regional priority along with healthcare.

Governor Barbour said he particularly liked the “lifelong learning” aspects of the new virtual training system.

Consisting of more than 450 advanced manufacturing training modules, the anytime, anywhere training system is being purchased by the WAEM Alliance from Indiana-based Amatrol, Inc.

This Internet based, on-line system, will support:

- technical training at the WAEM colleges and allied high schools;
- on-site training for business and industry; and
- individual skills training at home, at work, or anywhere there is broadband Internet access.

Bill Johnson said the new regional training system will be supported by “\$4 million in WIRED investments to stand-up and upgrade advanced manufacturing training at the eight colleges. This is a very exciting partnership and we look



East Mississippi Business Development Corporation President Wade Jones, Governor Haley Barbour, George Pratt, and Angelis Smith in conversation at the training announcement.

forward to announcing it today.”

College presidents were excited about the potential of the new system. Neal Morrison, new president at Beville State Community College said, “With the unemployment rate in Alabama less than four percent, we must look at qualifying those who are not normally involved in hi-tech manufacturing or who cannot attend a traditional setting, as well as those graduating from our secondary school

system. With the Amatrol system, we can reach anyone with access to a computer with high speed access using regional manufacturing skill standards to qualify them by preassessing, upgrade training if needed, and proving their skills.”

East Central Mississippi Community College President Phil Sutphin echoed Morrison’s remarks, saying, “For our region to be competitive in the world economy, we must provide the means to develop the highly skilled workforce that will be required to retain and attract jobs to our region.”

“A system like this is going to help us with an existing industry that has about 300 people,” said Dr. James Mitchell, president of Wallace Community College - Selma. “Their pay scale will be based on how well they complete the modules and go towards their advanced manufacturing credential. We have a few industries who are ready for this now.”

“Our two state effort enhances the skills of our citizens so that they can participate in this thing we call the American Dream,” said Dr. Raj Shanauk, workforce director at East Mississippi Community College. “Individuals can take the training online or they can go to any of the eight community colleges or their centers to learn the basic skills, then learn the technical skills needed to participate in this 21st century economy.”

“I firmly believe the WAEM region is on the cutting edge,” said Chris Crawford, Amatrol representative for Mississippi. “I know of no other place that has implemented this type of training. I applaud you for this.”

The announcement was held at the new equipment testing center for Loblolly, Inc. Loblolly is a locally-owned, \$140 million new technology wood products company making engineered beams from juvenile pine trees.

Governor Barbour said Loblolly represents the sort of advanced manufacturing facility the WAEM Region needs to attract and keep.

“Loblolly will use a high-tech, totally automated manufacturing process that will require workers with advanced manufacturing skills” he said. “It will draw these workers from both West Alabama and East Mississippi, and draw raw materials from the same region. “This builds on the region’s assets to create high-skill, high paying jobs, a top goal of the WIRED Initiative.”



Enterprise Ready is a monthly publication of the WAEM Initiative. For questions, comments, ideas, or stories for the publication; please contact the Communications Director, Jolie Woods.

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Advanced Job Training Offers Brighter Future

MAYHEW, MS - - The sun seemed to be setting for Margaret Brewer, age 40. Margaret worked for Sara Lee/Bryan Foods in West Point for six years. She lost her job in February when the plant closed. With no other food manufacturing opportunities in the area, Margaret's employment future was bleak.

In stepped East Mississippi Community College (EMCC) with a new training opportunity. Margaret and others who lost their Sara Lee jobs could participate in a new advanced manufacturing training program. She enrolled at EMCC, received a "Career Readiness Certificate (CRC)," and then moved into the Advanced Manufacturing Skills courses. On October 3, Margaret was one of several graduates to receive an Advanced Manufacturing Certification in Avionics and Cabling.

Bryan Foods, which began as Bryan Brothers in the early 20th century, was the area's largest employer. The loss of jobs was dramatic for both the community and the employees.

EMCC, a partner in the West Alabama – East Mississippi (WAEM) Initiative, developed a model training program in response to the plant closure. EMCC coupled CRC training with new advanced manufacturing training to give employees, like Margaret, a chance to obtain jobs at new advanced manufacturing firms in the region like American Eurocopter.

The Career Readiness Certificate demonstrates basic skills and aptitude in three areas:

1. Reading for Information
2. Applied Mathematics
3. Locating Information

This certificate is important to both employees and future employers. For employees, it gives them a base line assessment or where they are and/or where they need to be to secure a job. For the employer, it decreases the unknown abilities of employees. An employer can then turn to the community college, who maintains a list of potential employees, for assistance in recruitment. This was the case with American Eurocopter.

When American Eurocopter first made inquires about moving to the area, they looked to the community college for insight about the skills set of employees in the area. EMCC knew the community had good skilled workers; however, these workers lacked the specific skills for working with avionics. The avionics and cabling course was the outcome of this collaborative effort.

Sammy Pence, Vice President of Commercial Programs for American Eurocopter said, "We need to involve the community and build the workforce from here. We want to build long term employees who can live and work in this area. As a company, we don't need to import from out of state. These employees have the basic skills sets."

The EMCC training program was a model for the regionwide advanced manufacturing training program the WAEM Initiative is putting in place. It is a great example of connecting the community with the needs of new and emerging industries.



Margaret Brewer receives her certificate from Vice President of American Eurocopter Sammy Pence

Margaret and her fellow graduates at EMCC



New graduates, like Margaret, are setting their sights on securing employment at Eurocopter. "I would like to work for Eurocopter, even if I have to live in Germany," Margaret explained. Eurocopter's headquarters are based out of Germany.

"I want to work in avionics and cabling. If I can't get a job right away, I will continue at EMCC to get more training and skills," Margaret affirmed.

American Eurocopter hasn't guaranteed every graduate a job, but has made a commitment to each and every one of them. That commitment is that graduates from EMCC have the opportunity to apply and talk with a representative from the company.

"You have made a commitment to developing your manufacturing skills," said Dr. Raj Shaunak, Workforce Director for EMCC. "Your opportunities are greater now than when you first started. This Advanced Manufacturing Skills Certification improves your chances for a better job."

The primary purpose of the Advanced Manufacturing Skills courses is to create new skill levels in workers, while supplying a stronger and more dynamic workforce for companies. This is what is seen on the outside, but inside these courses are providing a light at the end of what has been a dark tunnel. There is a sense of hope, pride, and accomplishment in these recent graduates. The sun isn't setting on their futures, it is shining bright.

**WAEM Entrepreneurship Conference:
Growing Entrepreneurs, Networks, and Communities
MSU Riley Center, Meridian, MS**

NOVEMBER

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THURSDAY

November 29, 2007

1:00pm - 5:00pm

General Session

- Regionalism
- Policy Development
- Dynamics of Building a Regional Network of Service
- SBA & SBDC Leadership in Network Development
- Official Launch of MyBiz Website



NOVEMBER

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FRIDAY

November 30, 2007

9:30am - 1:00pm

Breakout Sessions

- Connecting Entrepreneurs, Communities, and Service Providers into an Enterprise Development System
- Connecting Entrepreneurs to Marketing Research
- Connecting Service Providers
- Enterprise Ready Development Systems
- Connecting Entrepreneurs to Equity Financing



Get the latest news and information on the WAEM Region

