

OVERVIEW

Place Matters

Place matters. But, in the rural South, place matters more. So much so it often takes on mystical qualities.

Consider the late Samuel Mockbee, the Alabama architect who unveiled magic in the most forlorn rural communities. Or, Mississippi writer Clifton Taulbert whose tender portrayal of rural *place* verges on the metaphysical. Or, Midsouth change agent Ken Hubbell who challenges us to find the *soul* of every rural place.

Southerners attach themselves to *place* and seldom let go. When asking or asked, “where’re you from?” we Southerners expect the comeback to reveal that heartfelt, soul-bound, deep-rooted, magical, mystical *place*...not a current address.

No matter its factual circumstances, our mystical *place* – be it a crick, holler, woods, farm, home, room, backyard, neighborhood, crossroads, or downtown – was and ever shall be a *good place*. This reflects our cultural predisposition to unearth as little as the sparrow’s portion of merit from our magical, mystical *place* and, thereby, consecrate it a *good place*. Willie Morris called it our “profound feeling for communal origins.”

As Mockbee and Taulbert would admit, very many of the regions and communities wherein these *good places* exist, on the whole, were not and are not *great places*. How easy it is to let the magic and mystery obscure poverty, bigotry, injustice, and shabbiness. Will Campbell declared, “dream on Mississippi, but dare not forget the nightmare.” Parker Palmer teaches we must cope with the *shadows* as well as the *light*.

The challenge for us in the rural South – black, white, and transplanted – is to be less content with wee, poignant *good places* and to mindfully build and rebuild *great places*. How wonderful it would be for the magic and mystery to extend to whole communities...to entire regions!

It is as John Gardner said, the challenges of contemporary life erode and tear apart communities...*good places*...even *great places*, so “we can never stop rebuilding.”



The Place Paradox

While Southerners mentally cling to *magical places*, we also have the paradoxical tendency to forsake them. When Gardner’s life forces erode place, we more often flee than stay and rebuild. So, once great neighborhoods decline...thriving downtowns become abandoned. Whether it be white flight or economic flight, the consequences are the same. Subdivisions spring up on the outskirts of town, then outside town. Strip malls overtake the downtown.

There is an ebb and flow to all *places*. They build up, they decline. *Great places* learn to break the cycle...they preserve, they rebuild, they sustain.

Great cities learned this lesson. “Urban renewal” transformed declining cities into freshly rebuilt *places*. Strong, renewable civic and business leadership preserved and sustained core downtowns. Rural towns struggle. They lack the capital, the technical resources, and the human capacity of the great cities.

Besides white flight, another flight issue looms over rural areas...the flight of rural population to urban centers. This decades long trend has brought another paradox to *rural places*. Those near booming urban centers grow, but lose their rural nature to subdivisions, shopping centers, thoroughfares, and industrial areas. Many, then, become absorbed by the urban center.

Jack Schultz says there is evidence the flight to urban areas may be turning. In *Boomtown USA*, he points to a trend for urban talent to move to *great rural places*. Auburn *Urban Studio* director Cheryl Morgan says many young, successful retirees are drawn back to home places “and want to give back.” Perhaps this is but the next flight pattern, if you will, but it provides opportunity for *rural places*...if they are *great rural places*. Schultz says one in three have the chance to be such.

The Rural Place Challenge

What does it take to build and maintain a *great rural place*? While building and rebuilding *place* is the task of communities, the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) at the University of Missouri, and the U.S. Department of Labor *Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED)* argue it takes more than that to succeed. In today’s global economy, *rural places* cannot divorce themselves from the *region* in which they exist.

“Communities today face challenges in workforce, transportation, housing, open space, and social inclusion that cannot adequately be addressed by traditional boundaries and jurisdictions,” writes the Alliance for Regional Stewardship.

Dr. Mark Drabenstott, director of the RUPRI Center for Regional Competitiveness, says rural places are in a global Olympics “like it or not...You’ve got to develop *critical mass* and *clout* to compete.” In rural America, it takes a region to do that.

The Department of Labor’s innovative WIRED Initiative challenged rural and urban places to “establish and build a regional identity across political jurisdictions.”

Looking at all this from the “glass half empty” perspective can be overwhelming. Many, if not most, *rural places* are challenged on a daily basis to do what they do now. Or, as Cheryl Morgan, one of Alabama’s great **rural place builders**, says “We are not always used to seeing our assets, but we are quick to see and acknowledge our problems.”

How are *rural places* to build themselves into *great rural places* and at the same time build *competitive regions*? Even those communities with great resource partners, like the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), find the challenge daunting.

Professor Morgan operates Alabama’s *Small Town Design Initiative*, begun as an ARC program to help struggling communities. She helps them turn from the glass-half-empty approach. Like Mockbee, she sees *magic* in the most rural of places. “It’s time we began to see, acknowledge, and celebrate just how special we are,” she tells citizen leaders.

In the early 1990s the Ford Foundation assessed the challenge facing *rural places*. Ford found them “facing some tough challenges....Creating quality jobs, giving kids a shot at a good education, providing decent health care, providing opportunities for more people to take an active role in shaping the future of their communities, and creating hope for the future represent just a handful of the key issues facing many rural communities today.” Ford sought *place-oriented* institutions to join others committed to *rural advocacy and development*. Such institutions not only promulgate programs for rural America, but employ facilitators who put their *hearts and souls* into their work.

Rural Community Colleges

What Ford found was rural community colleges “because of their commitment to building both people and places, rural community and tribal colleges are ideally positioned to become catalysts for regional development.” Based on this, Ford in 1993 created *The Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI)* and invested millions of dollars in developing a rural development program to be delivered by rural and tribal community colleges.

Of particular import to the West Alabama – East Mississippi (WAEM) area, a number of rural-community-college-oriented *place* and *region* development entities and experiences grew out of this successful Ford demonstration:

- The Rural Community College Alliance became a national policy network;
- The Midsouth Partnership for Rural Community Colleges at Mississippi State University became a leadership development platform;
- The Montgomery Institute (TMI) became a regional catalyst, intermediary, and implementer;
- Four WAEM colleges participated in RCCI, five participate in RCCA, and all have faculty and staff involved in Midsouth Partnership programs.

The work of these entities comes to fruition, in part, through the WAEM Regional Initiative. All played key roles in preparing the partners and the programs involved in this initiative.

The WAEM Regional Initiative, through eight rural community and junior college partners and TMI, puts rural college engagement in *rural place building* to the test. It challenged them to help over 150 communities become *great rural places* and a collection of 37 counties and their communities become a *competitive region*.



Guided by its Ford Foundation heritage, RUPRI, WIRED partners, the Southern Growth Policies Board, the Mississippi Development Authority, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, the Phil Hardin Foundation, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and its own field experience, TMI focused the work of its eight college partners in three areas:

- 1. Building great rural places;**
- 2. Building economic wealth through entrepreneurship; and**
- 3. Building a competitive region.**

The WAEM Regional Initiative also better defines the *advocacy and development* roles rural community colleges can play in *rural place* development. These roles are best described as *coaching* and *connecting*.

BUILDING GREAT RURAL PLACES

Who builds...and maintains... *great rural places*...and how do they do it?

They come from all walks of life. Jack Schultz’s stories of successful rural towns in *Boomtown USA* give credit to forward thinking mayors, small business entrepreneurs, industry executives, public-private boards, economic developers, chamber executives, private developers, newspaper editors, and a

women's club. In each case, one or more citizens stepped forward to play key leadership and development roles.

Thomaston, Alabama, population 375 or so, is one of those *rural places* that is north, south, east, and west of somewhere significant. Or, it once was. In 1987 Mary Jolley, now retired director of economic and community affairs for the University of Alabama, and former Thomaston mayor Patsy Sumrall had an idea. Thomaston, they agreed, had numerous rural assets that should be preserved and built upon. In 1990, they formed the Alabama Rural Heritage Foundation, took over the old school building, then got a federal grant to fix it up. More grants and buildings later and with help from Auburn's Rural Studio, the Rural Heritage Center now features Mamma Nems Restaurant, the Heritage Shoppe, and all sorts of neat, rural craft and entrepreneur activities. "This is important to us because it's economic development in a little town that does not have a lot of economic development," says Gayle Etheridge, the center's director and chief civic entrepreneur.

"Making somewhere out of nowhere," Mary Jolley describes what Thomaston leaders have done.

In Greenwood, Mississippi, in the center of the impoverished Mississippi Delta, the Alluvian Hotel has risen from the ashes of an older facility. Building the Delta's most attractive hotel was not entrepreneur Fred Carl's intent...nor was the downtown renaissance that followed. He simply wanted a *decent place* for his Viking Range sales people to stay in while they trained on his products.

"Our salesmen came from all over to Greenwood to learn about our high-end products," Carl told *Inc.com* magazine, "and we'd put them in flophouses out on Highway 82 because that was all there was. The Alluvian doesn't make money, but the PR impact is huge. Once that got under way, it hit me: We need to renovate buildings, not just for our company but also for our town." Today, Viking Range has a real estate section that buys, renovates, and leases downtown buildings, twelve in all.

"What really tickles me is that businesses that left in the '70s and '80s are returning," Carl says.

Chris Chain only wanted somewhere to live in downtown Columbus, Mississippi.

"I bought a building to play with because I was single and wanted to live in it," said Chain. I considered it a good investment and an opportunity to rent some space out, but after I finished, it was like a field of dreams. People came and wanted to rent it, so I moved out and started another one, then another, until I was up to 20 or so. Before I even finished a building, people heard about it and wanted to put deposits down."

"After getting some people living down there, restaurants came back, retail popped up, there's all kinds of nightlife coming back," he said. "It's unbelievable what a difference it has made." Today, Chain owns Renovations of Mississippi, Inc., and is a sought after expert on how to invigorate downtown living.

Rural Place Builders

There are builders who see opportunities and seize them. We call them **entrepreneurs**.

There are builders who manage already built good things and keep them viable and ever renewed. We call them **stewards**.

There are **entrepreneurs** and **stewards** who not only build and maintain for themselves and their organizations, but with great passion for *place* also build for their communities. We call them **place builders**. Vibrant urban areas find them with regularity. *Rural places* do not. Yet, they are the champions small communities must find, empower, and support if they are to become *great rural places*.

Rural place builders have in their hearts that southern *sense of place* plus an unwillingness to pull out, leave, or abandon. They build, maintain, and rebuild and thereby create and maintain *great rural places*. They persistently practice what Gardner preached – “we can never stop.” They put *heart and soul* into their work.

Several of the **rural place builders** described above selected themselves. No community building or strategic planning process found them. They were not elected at any gathering. As with most **entrepreneurs**, each saw an opportunity and seized it.

But, if rural communities must wait on **place builders** to emerge at will, some may fall apart or vanish before anything good happens. Can **rural place builders** be recruited, trained, and nurtured? Can any **entrepreneur** be recruited, trained, and nurtured? WAEM agrees with those who say “yes.”

Dr. John Wheat has developed one of the great *rural advocacy* programs at the University of Alabama. His Rural Health Leaders Pipeline programs, he says, “develop rural doctors you can build community around.” Wheat believes rural physicians not only bring healthcare and jobs to rural communities, but also leadership and investment. He is intentionally recruiting, nurturing, and training **rural place builders**.

“This is hard for some to buy into,” he says, “because the pay-off is 12 years down the line.” Wheat’s program begins by seeking out 9th graders in rural communities with the potential to become health leaders. Those who progress to his Community and Rural Medicine program must first complete a one-year pre-matriculation “rural health” program. This year-long program is designed to orient students to rural public health issues, agro-medicine, and more, while maintaining their ties to *rural places*.

“Our students visit with farmers to learn directly about health issues related to pesticides, farm equipment accidents, and such,” says Wheat. “They stay grounded in rural Alabama.”

This multi-year process, touts Wheat, is now putting **place builder** physicians in *rural places*. His *rural advocacy* is having impact.

“One of the most effective new bodies of leaders we are finding in Alabama small towns are folks who are ‘coming home,’ says Cheryl Morgan. “Their experiences and success in other places help them see the opportunities and have confidence in what might/could be.”

Morgan and her University of Alabama colleague, Nisa Miranda, lead another program that grows **rural place builders** in Alabama. The program is *Your Town Alabama*.

Each year, five dozen or so community leaders gather at Camp McDowell near tiny Nauvoo, Alabama, to learn how to build better *rural places*. For 10 years, *Your Town Alabama* has been developing **rural place builders** by immersing them in asset-based planning and small town design with skills taught by an amalgam of artists, foresters, architects, developers, planners, and others committed to *rural advocacy and development*.

“*Your Town* teaches people how to see the assets their communities have and how to better use those assets to build towns into vibrant, sustainable communities,” says Patrick Scoggin, a 2008 attendee from Jones County Junior College in Mississippi.

Through the WAEM Regional Initiative with WIRED funds a version of *Your Town* was held at Lake Tiak O’Khata in Mississippi – WAEM Town. Virgil Culver’s *Community Action Team* at Mississippi State University and Joy Foy’s Asset Development Division at the Mississippi Development Authority are taking this program statewide and will sustain it.

The list of individuals committed to *rural advocacy and development* in both Alabama and Mississippi is long. Myrtis Tabb at Delta State University says “this is my passion.” Yet, rural communities in both states continue to struggle.

Perhaps this is because each *place* is different. Each *place’s* assets and opportunities are different. Each *place’s* leadership is different.

Or, perhaps this is because so many rural communities do not or cannot latch onto one of these *rural advocates* or development programs. They do not understand the need. Or, as is true in too many cases, they do not have the resources.

Herein lies the need Ford sought to fill...finding *place-oriented* institutions to stand with *rural places* over time and help them congregate into regions and amass sufficient resources to take action. Here, then, is a vital new role – a *rural advocacy and development* mission – for rural community colleges.

Place Coaching and Rural Community Colleges

Rural advocates within the Ford Foundation and the Kellogg Foundation, as well as many individual practitioners, have found that rural communities need coaches to implement and sustain **place building** processes. Jack Russell has done yeoman’s work in many of the Appalachian region’s distressed rural communities. Jack provides insight into the **place building** situation in this excerpt from a report to the Appalachian Regional Commission office in Mississippi:

“The Vision to Action model for strategic planning has been completed for Marshall, Montgomery, Webster and Noxubee counties and the town of Sturgis. This effort is an integral part of the Mississippi Distressed Counties Program. The initial assumption that the counties and town would take the ‘Plan’ and run with it was partially correct. Most counties are not ready, and those that are could take up to three years to get projects underway. The issue is one of capacity. The counties have few nonprofit organizations and fewer philanthropic and business resources. In addition, local governments are small and have few specialized staff.

“In order to get the counties to ‘get off the dime’ and act, they must be taken by the hand, ‘coached’ and cajoled to be true to their vision and achieve the plan goals.”

Using the football analogy, *coaches* don’t block or tackle, run or throw the ball, or execute the game plan. They get the team ready to do those things. They develop a playbook, then, develop each game plan based on the team’s strengths. And, most importantly, *coaches* are there, in the game, with the team.

There are a number of institutions and organizations that provide strategic planning and development to *rural places*. State agencies, universities (particularly land-grant institutions), regional planning organizations, and economic development organizations are the most prevalent. Few, if any, however, provide day-in and day-out coaching. The regional planning and economic development organizations often do excellent jobs helping communities plan, seek resources, and develop projects. But that is not *coaching* as envisioned here. *Coaching* is more about teaching, training, motivating, and nudging than facilitating and planning.

Katherine McLennan in “The Neuroscience of Leadership and Culture” provides a useful perspective on coaching individuals within organizations. The same applies to communities.

“A stand alone training program (or planning retreat) is not sufficient to create significant behavior. One study, for example, showed that a training program for the public sector increased productivity by 28%. However, if you added follow-up coaching, which acts to sustain attention on the behavior change and allow the individual to build on their own insights, the productivity rose to 88%.

“The training program is useful in the introduction of new ideas to the participants, but the participants must adapt these ideas in their own world, play with them, generate their own insights, and continue to pay attention to the ideas over time.” (Parenthetical remarks and underlines added for emphasis.)

Rural institutions already engaged in teaching and training, that have vital and vested interests in the success of their *rural places*, are rural community and junior colleges. Workforce training, technical training, and concept teaching from the student to the worker to the supervisor to the manager level occurs everyday at community and junior colleges.

The challenge is to transform some of this capacity into competency at *coaching* their *rural places* to achieve success.

The WAEM WIRED Initiative, following on the concepts developed in Ford’s *Rural Community College Initiative*, is pioneering this transformation. Presidents at Alabama Southern, Beville State, East Central, East Mississippi, Meridian, Shelton State, and Wallace-Selma Community Colleges and Jones County Junior College committed their workforce directors and hired staff to develop these *coaching* competencies. They have begun the growth and development of **rural place coaches** to serve the WAEM Region.

Dr. Randy Goldsmith, former director of the Mississippi Technology Alliance, gets it. He sees the college’s **rural place coaches** as “feet on the ground” that state and regional programs can engage to better help rural communities over the long haul.

The Work of Rural Place Coaches

Rural place coaches, drawing on the capacities of their colleges, serve as *coaches* to help teach, train, motivate, and support citizens and organizations engaged in **rural place building**. In this process, they draw on, work with, and support:

- regional planning and economic development organizations’ strategic planning and development activities;
- state agency, university, and private foundation planning and development initiatives;
- local economic and community development programs; and
- *rural advocates*.

Rural place coaches can draw on a rich variety of planning programs and *rural advocacy and development programs* in Alabama and Mississippi – Alabama’s *YourTown* program, Mississippi State University’s *First Impressions* program, the Auburn Urban Studio’s *Small Town Design Initiative*, Mississippi’s *Main Street* program, *Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE)* program, the Alabama

Industrial Development Training Division workforce strategic planning programs, the Mississippi Development Authority's Asset Development Division mapping programs, local development district programs, and local economic and workforce development agency programs.

Effective **rural place coaches** also draw from within, not just from their experiences and expertise, but also from their principles, their heart, their commitment. Clifton Taubert in *Eight Habits of the Heart* says "a *nurturing attitude* is a critical asset in the building of community," adding that whoever and wherever we are, "the opportunity to build a good community is there."

David Dodson in his paper *Creating Communities That Work Well for Everyone* drew on the longtime community development experience of MDC, Inc. to develop the following principles:

- Pay attention to competitiveness AND equity.
- Face history or continue to stumble.
- Welcome the stranger.
- Nurture leaders who can cross boundaries.
- Adopt a "seventh generation" perspective...consider long-term impacts.

The late G. V. "Sonny Montgomery," The Montgomery Institute's namesake and a highly respected and effective Congressman, said *staying the course* was his most important leadership trait and was the key to his effectiveness.

Unless the **rural place coach** commits heart and soul, he or she may only bring technical competency to a community...and that is too often not enough. Building and rebuilding *great rural places* require different attitudes and approaches than problem-based and solution-oriented planning and development. The latter are often described as "fix-it" approaches. People come together, identify problems, create strategies to fix the problems, develop action plans to accomplish the strategies, and get to work. The initial and driving focus of this approach is problem-solving.

In **place building**, people come together and identify assets and opportunities, create strategies to build on these assets and opportunities, develop innovative action plans to accomplish these strategies, and get to work. The initial and driving focus of this approach is building and rebuilding.

Problem solving is a "technical approach," using the parlance of Ron Heifetz. **Place building** is an entrepreneurial, innovative, "adaptive approach" – Heifetz. Both have value. But, the pendulum has swung far toward the technical problem solving approach. The **rural place builder** approach seeks to move more toward the entrepreneurial building approach, particularly for *rural places* that have little control over trends and events that cause them problems.

GTE Telephone president Tom White well explains the difference:

"We often concentrate enormous resources on correcting problems. But when used continually over a long time, this approach leads to a negative culture.... or a slip into a paralyzing sense of hopelessness. Don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating mindless happy talk....We can't ignore problems - we just need to approach them from the other side."

Good **rural place builders** get it. Many of the best strategic planning programs do not. Leland Speed, entrepreneur and founder of two New York Stock Exchange listed REITS and former Executive Director of the Mississippi Development Authority, championed this approach during his volunteer service as director.

“Build on what you have,” Speed often said, “not what you don’t have.” His successor at MDA, Gray Swoope, tells communities, “Not every community has the assets needed to attract a Toyota assembly plant, but every community does have assets it can build on.”

“Start by looking at what is good in your community,” says Cheryl Morgan. “What is distinct? What makes your place special? What makes you proud to call this your hometown?”

Will Campbell didn’t mince words, “And so when we come together and talk about ‘sense of place,’ we are not talking about some romantic nonsense...we are talking about survival in a technological and post-technological world.”

Few **rural place coaches** can succeed as mere technical advisers. The heart and soul of *rural advocates* and commitment to a “build-it” approach are required.

Build-It Asset and Opportunity Mapping Process

If every *rural place* has assets, how does it go about identifying them and building on them? There is a method for this called “asset and opportunity mapping.” While “mapping” sounds like dots or lists placed on maps, the methodology of asset and opportunity mapping for **rural place building** is not so simple.

Building on rural assets and opportunities requires a diverse array of technical knowledge as well as community engagement. A potential asset for one *place*, for example a casino, may be viewed as a liability by another. Abandoned downtown buildings can be viewed as a liability by many, but a developable asset by an entrepreneur like Chris Chain or Fred Carl.

So, *place* and entrepreneurial valuation of potential assets are as important to the process as technical identification. Gaining acceptance and usage of rural asset and opportunity mapping methodology by local leaders and citizens is one of the many challenges **rural place coaches** face. This is not the traditional strategic planning process. It is a “build-it” process. It takes more time, more homework, and more imagination.

“A comprehensive asset-based strategy builds community capacity, encourages citizen involvement, and fosters collaboration among business, government, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations to act as catalysts for community and economic development,” said Gov. Bob Riley in his 2008 ARC strategy statement for Alabama. “Successful leadership/civic capacity projects allow a community to rise up to meet the increasing demands of growth and change.”

Some communities can draw on asset mapping programs like Joy Foy’s at MDA. But as MDA’s success grows, demand outstrips its capacity. Many communities will need to go it alone.

Brian Dabson, Executive Director of the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) at the University of Missouri, provided a framework for building on rural assets and opportunities in distressed counties for the Mississippi Appalachian Region. This rationale for the framework, intended to advise the WAEM Regional Initiative, is excerpted as follows:

Asset mapping involves documenting tangible and intangible resources of a community viewed as a place with assets to be preserved and enhanced, not deficits to be remedied. One of the challenges that all (asset mapping) approaches face is to find ways in which communities can be encouraged to explore unrecognized and under-used assets. Providing

a structure for systematic exploration allows community people to value a range of social, economic, and physical aspects of their environment.

The WAEM Regional Initiative recommends that communities look first to programs like Foy's *asset mapping* initiative, Cheryl Morgan's *Small Town Design Initiative*, or Virgil Culver's *First Impressions*. For those who must go it alone, Dabson's essential elements form the foundation of the WAEM "Build-It" Place Building process and are presented below.

1. **Assess rural place readiness**...Each *rural place* is different with different degrees of readiness for building on assets and opportunities, and attracting the **stewards** and **entrepreneurs** to do the building.
2. **Identify champions**...A core group, including both potential **stewards** and **entrepreneurs** should be identified to drive the process. An inventory of *rural place* stakeholders should be created so that the perspectives of business, finance, healthcare, non-profits, education, economic development, and others can be sought and included.
3. **Establish the baseline**...Unless there is a sound appreciation of the *rural place's* current standing then it will not be possible to develop appropriate strategies and build-it plans.
4. **Map assets and opportunities**...This can be a highly focused or broad-based process; it can be a rapid assessment or a lengthy in-depth exploration depending on the resources and energy of the core group. A sustainable *great rural place* will wish to regularly revisit this process to generate new ideas and explore new opportunities for *place building*.
5. **Clarify outcomes**...The more effective initiatives will use "appreciative inquiry" which focuses on (building) the hopes and dreams of the people, rather than on identifying and solving (fixing) specific problems. The *rural place* should be encouraged to pay particular attention to competitive advantage and economic opportunity outcomes – jobs, job quality, entrepreneurship, income, and wealth creation.
6. **Agree on priorities for action**...Asset and opportunity mapping should generate a long list of possibilities. The next task, which should be participative and engaging, is to sort and prioritize these possibilities into a limited number that will yield tangible results.
7. **Assign responsibility**...Once priorities are set, someone or some group in the *rural place* must take responsibility for accomplishment. Preferably, these would be **entrepreneurs** or **stewards** included in the core group. If not, the *rural place* will be challenged to find and empower the right leaders to take charge.

The purpose of the "Build-It" Place Building Process is: *To build great rural places by building on assets and opportunities, using strategies that create competitive advantage and generate economic engines and wealth.*

The WAEM "Build-It" Place Building Guide is provided in Appendix II.

BUILDING ECONOMIC WEALTH THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Essential to effective **place building** are *economic engines* and *wealth creation*. Economic engines create the wealth needed to provide the resources and amenities for communities to function, build, and grow. **Entrepreneurs** build most *economic engines* that *create wealth*.

The global economy has eliminated manufacturing plants as wealth generators in many small communities. Gone forever are numerous major rural employers and economic engines. Trends indicate most small communities will not get new manufacturing plants unless local **entrepreneurs** start them. More and more, *rural places* must depend upon retail, commercial, distribution, healthcare, and homegrown businesses as their *economic engines*. Consequently, **place builders** must learn to broaden school and development programs that taught people to *take a job* at the local factory to programs that also teach people to *make a job* for themselves.

Prosperous and growing *rural places* learn to start and grow their own businesses. They develop a *culture of entrepreneurship*. They become *enterprise-ready*.

Just as there is a strategic process for *rural place building*, there is a strategic process communities can and should use to sustain their existing economic engines and to grow new ones. It starts with understanding how economic engines work.

Economic Engines

Economic engines bring money and jobs that continually create and distribute wealth in a community. Apply this simple test to determine if a business, organization, or program is an economic engine:

- Does it employ lots of people and pay good wages, particularly to those who live in the community? Jobs are the primary means of distributing wealth in a community, particularly good-paying jobs.
- Does it purchase goods and services in the community? This is the other way economic engines distribute wealth.
- Does it bring more money into the community than it takes out? A business may sell a substantial amount of its products or services outside the area so that it brings money into the community. A service organization or county hospital may attract outside funds to benefit local residents.
- Does it attract people from outside the community who spend money at other local establishments? Tourism, plants, and retail centers can bring people to town who shop, eat, and purchase commodities at local businesses.

It is important for rural communities to know how their economic engines are doing. Are they growing, stable, or shrinking? What are the long-term prospects? Community stewards need an ongoing process that works to keep economic engines viable and seeks opportunities to establish new ones.

Building Enterprise-Ready Communities

The WAEM Regional Initiative has adapted a successful process developed by the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship to the region's diverse needs. The process is called the **WAEM Enterprise-Ready Development System (ERDS)**. It helps rural community **place builders** better understand the economic engines they need to sustain (steward role) and implement development strategies to grow new ones (entrepreneur role).

At its core, the ERDS is about communities moving from a reliance on *take a job* workforce development to a balanced approach using *make a job* enterprise development, about shifting economic development practices from "bringing jobs" toward "growing jobs."

Rural place coaches work with communities to determine the level of ERDS they want to establish. It is the degree of local support that will cause an ERDS to vary from community to community.

The ERDS planning process is not unlike a business model. The community:

- analyzes its market of economic engines and local **entrepreneurs**;
- identifies the resources it has and needs to service its market;
- decides what services it will provide; and
- implements those services.

What services will the community provide? To help rural communities with this answer, the WAEM Regional Initiative developed a community certification process. Communities achieving these standards will be certified as an



Enterprise-Ready Community.

To become a certified ***Enterprise-Ready Community***, the community must have a written Enterprise-Ready Plan and have implemented the following components:

1. An analysis of the community’s economic engines, target markets, and resources it can draw upon to support entrepreneur development;
2. A “first champion” empowered to promote enterprise-ready activities in the community.
3. A “connector” or “network navigator” to help connect entrepreneurs to services.
4. *Start It!* cards and a card distribution process.
5. Access to education, training, and technical assistance.
6. Help for entrepreneurs to gain access to debt and equity capital.
7. The local unit of government has officially acted to orient community regulations, permits, and programs so that they are entrepreneur friendly.
8. An annual review of *enterprise-ready* activities to remedy performance weaknesses and identify new opportunities.

The WAEM ERDS provides a process communities can use to shape their Enterprise-Ready Plans. For example, each community can shape the “market basket” of **entrepreneurs** it wants to serve to align with the economic engines it wants to preserve or grow.

Some market baskets target **entrepreneurs** in multiple stages of development, e.g., those with just a dream, those with developed business plans, those in business wanting to grow, and youth **entrepreneurs**. Others include struggling businesses, businesses in transition, and growth-oriented **entrepreneurs**. Still others emphasize “niche” **entrepreneur** programs...Internet-based **entrepreneurs**, specialty-shop/tourism **entrepreneurs**, light manufacturing **entrepreneurs**, or value-added agriculture **entrepreneurs**.

The market basket may be as simple or complex as the community desires and has the resources to support.

Services provided should align with the market basket, i.e., training, capital access, entrepreneur-friendly ordinances and regulations, should be appropriate to the type of **entrepreneurs** included in the market basket.

The WAEM ERDS relies heavily on community and junior colleges to help communities develop Enterprise-Ready Plans and implement Enterprise-Ready Development Systems. Community colleges are flexibly structured, geographically positioned, and legislatively commissioned to effectively perform this role. They have the trust of their communities and a successful track record in economic and workforce development. WAEM community and junior college presidents committed their support to ERDS development in their communities. The coordinating entity for the regional ERDS support is The Montgomery Institute.

Don Macke, Director of Practitioner Programs for the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, provided technical assistance for development of the WAEM ERDS. RUPRI is the *Rural Policy Research Institute* at the University of Missouri with outreach arms in Nebraska, North Carolina, and Kansas.

ERDS stages are further described in Appendix II. An *Inventory of Potential ERDS Components* is included in Appendix III.

Regional Entrepreneur Network

Most states have some sort of **entrepreneur** network. It may be the network of Small Business Development Centers in the state or a more expansive network. The rural community colleges in the WAEM Region built on disjointed networks from Alabama and Mississippi and created a comprehensive MyBizAM Network. This network consists of SBA, SBDCs, Mississippi Technology Alliance, Alabama Entrepreneur Research Network, the University of Alabama, the University of Southern Mississippi other state and federal agencies with **entrepreneur** support programs, other university and community college programs, and community-based **entrepreneur** programs.

The WAEM Regional Initiative, with help from Dr. David Hale's Management Information Systems Program at the University of Alabama, developed a region-wide, web-based **entrepreneur** support system. Located on the Internet at www.MyBiz.AM, the website serves as the "entrepreneur SourceLink for Alabama and Mississippi." It consists of both a **Resource Navigator**, developed by KC SourceLink, as well as connections to many on-line resources. The **Resource Navigator** helps **entrepreneurs** identify local, regional, state, and national services they may need. Every community in the WAEM Region (and others throughout Mississippi and Alabama) can *connect entrepreneurs* to this system.

Basic Entrepreneur Support

The smallest and poorest rural communities in the WAEM Region may not have the resources and capacity to develop full-fledged **entrepreneur** support systems. So, the WAEM partnership of rural community and junior colleges and The Montgomery Institute developed a basic **entrepreneur** support level for these communities.

This MyBizAM basic **entrepreneur** support level requires three things from a community:

1. A “first champion.”
2. A “connector.”
3. A *Start It!* card.

The **rural place coach** will help the community find its “first champion,” recruit its “connector,” and develop its *Start It!* card.

The *place building* role of the “first champion” is to champion entrepreneur development in the community, to work with the community college to identify a “connector,” and to create the information to go on the *Start It!* card. The community college will rely upon the “first champion” to represent the community.

The purpose of the community “connector” is to have a designated person and place that potential entrepreneurs in the community can access to connect to needed support. The “connector” links an **entrepreneur** to the next level of support, i.e., to a “network navigator” which may be in the next town, at a regional service center, or the community college. The “connector” will also be responsible for maintaining and distributing the *Start It!* cards.

“Network navigators” are trained individuals who know about available services and are able to direct **entrepreneurs** to them through the MyBiz Alabama-Mississippi Network and the MyBiz.AM web portal.

The *Start It!* card lists the people and places a potential **entrepreneur** must deal with to go into business – license and permit authorities, utility options, and other contact information the community wants on its card. A sample *Start It!* card is included in Appendix III.

Rural communities who establish these basic services are encouraged to develop an Enterprise-Ready Plan, implement an ERDS, become an **Enterprise-Ready Community**, and begin growing **entrepreneurs**.

Growing Entrepreneurs

The **Enterprise-Ready Community** certification program shows the basic ERDS components communities need to grow **entrepreneurs**: training, technical assistance, access to capital and community support. Communities may elect a basic plan or a plan as complex as *innovation-led economic development* or *economic gardening*.

Entrepreneur training can vary with the market basket targeted by the community.

In Mississippi, community colleges adopted the innovative *Southern Entrepreneur Program (SEP)* developed by Dr. Brent Hales at the University of Southern Mississippi. The SEP curriculum, based on the work of the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), can be adapted for high school use as well as for college use. In Alabama, WAEM community colleges adopted the Rural



Be Enterprise-Ready!

Get Your Business Connected in West Point, MS

Start It!

West Point/Clay County Community Growth Alliance

THE GROWTH ALLIANCE
THE WEST POINT/CLAY COUNTY COMMUNITY GROWTH ALLIANCE

A legacy of Gov. Haley Barbour, Gov. Bob Riley, and the WAEM Alliance. 100% funded by the U.S. Department of Labor under the WIRED Initiative.

Entrepreneurship through Action Learning (REAL) program, which can also be adapted for high school use.

Communities can partner with colleges for these programs or select their own. Programs can range from general “how to start your own business” training, to how to set up *QuickBooks*, to specialized training on such things as how to transfer business ownership from one generation to another.

Technical assistance can be obtained from Small Business Development Centers, niche organizations like the Mississippi Technology Alliance, or local organizations offering mentoring, coaching, and job shadowing. Technical assistance is often incorporated into services offered by incubators.

Access to capital – probably the hardest service to provide – can come from loan programs offered through local banks, revolving loan funds operated by local development districts or community development corporations, local investment pools, and regional “angel networks” for venture capital investments.

Growing **entrepreneurs** also takes entrepreneur friendly ordinances and regulations. Fees, permits, and other requirements can encourage business development or hinder it. Community leaders should be made aware of the impact of its ordinances and regulations on business start-ups and given opportunities to make them entrepreneur friendly.

Having programs and support, however, mean nothing unless potential entrepreneurs know about them and have access to them. The ERDS plan and basic support services are designed to recruit, inform and connect **entrepreneurs** to available services.

Innovation-Led Economic Development and Economic Gardening

Aggressive *Enterprise-Ready Communities* will be interested in innovation-led economic development and economic gardening programs. These programs seek to grow “second-stage companies.” Second-stage businesses show rapid growth and employ 10–99 employees. This approach can be politically challenging if communities do not also offer services to all businesses and entrepreneurs. However, research suggests that second-



stage companies benefit most from the resources and services provided by innovation and economic gardening programs as well as having the greatest potential for job growth.

“Communities are attracted to this approach for several reasons,” says the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. “It requires fewer public resources than traditional economic development strategies and keeps those resources in the community by investing in locally owned businesses. In addition, small businesses

are important drivers of job growth, as indicated in the research by Birch and the Kansas City FED. (This approach) is clearly a strategy that allows local communities to capitalize on their unique assets and to leverage their existing strengths for future growth.”

Once rural communities become *enterprise-ready* and provide strong support for new start-ups, they can focus on second-stage companies without political hiccups. All small businesses attract wealth and create jobs in communities. Second-stage companies are those that can expand and add more new jobs.

For more information on Innovation-Led Economic Development and Economic Gardening, talk to the Mississippi Technology Alliance, search the Internet, or go directly to:

1. <https://www.technologyalliance.ms/services/communities.php>
2. [http://innovation.ic.gc.ca/gol/innovation/site.nsf/vDownload/CommunPDF/\\$file/deck_montana_v2_e.pdf](http://innovation.ic.gc.ca/gol/innovation/site.nsf/vDownload/CommunPDF/$file/deck_montana_v2_e.pdf)
3. <http://www.littletongov.org/bia/economicgardening/>
4. http://www.sba.gov/advo/research/sbe_06_ch06.pdf
5. <http://www.ruraleship.org/content/pdf/IADG.pdf>

BUILDING A COMPETITIVE REGION

Declining resources and growing demands can either devastate **rural places** or lead them to *regional collaboration*. Dr. Mark Drabenstott, director of the RUPRI Center for Regional Competitiveness, says **rural places** are in a global Olympics.

“Globalization has made *regions* the new athletes in the global economic race,” explains Drabenstott. “Unlike the real Olympics, global economic Olympics are conducted in real time and take place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. *Rural regions* are in a global economic race, ready or not!”

That *rural regions* are challenged by the global economy is not news. The 1992 comprehensive review of rural development in the South, *Coming out of the Shadows* by MDC, Inc., stated, “There’s a new economic game coming to town and the rules are changing...global competition.” The report went on to suggest statewide efforts could best meet this “potentially devastating threat to the rural South.”

Despite many well-intentioned statewide “rural development” initiatives in southern states, the depiction of **rural places** in the 1992 report continues to be generally truthful today – “there are two Souths – one urban and prospering; the other rural and languishing.” Drabenstott and others see statewide programs as too structured and focused on high growth areas, while local efforts are too fragmented, to help rural areas develop *competitive advantages* in the global economy. He points to combinations of rural communities and counties into *rural regions*, particularly in the Midwest, as the way to become *competitive*.

“You’ve got to develop *critical mass* and *clout* to compete,” he repeats.

While the exception, this has occurred in parts of the rural South. Pockets of rural areas in North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi and other southern states have advanced. Why have these few areas succeeded when others have not?

“Well-crafted regional strategies, robust regional leadership, deliberate pursuit of innovation, and **entrepreneurs**,” answers Drabenstott.

Who initiates this work? Who guides it? How is it done?

From Stone Soup to WAEM Gumbo

Bill Scaggs, *rural places*' great ally and sometimes cook, sees the work to get *regions* ready to run in the Olympics to be more about the training table than the event. "Transforming an independent collection of mostly rural people and places into an enterprising, innovative, *competitive region* has more similarities to making great gumbo than running a race," he says.

Bill is past president of The Montgomery Institute (twice), former executive director of the Rural Community College Alliance, and former president of Meridian Community College, and has worked extensively with MDC, the Ford Foundation, the Southern Growth Policies Board, and the Midsouth Partnership for Rural Community Colleges on rural development issues.

"And, there is no single *best* recipe for great gumbo," Scaggs explains. "The best gumbos are made from scratch starting with what you have on hand. *Begin with what you have* is the starting point for *region building* too."

This approach extends the asset focus of **rural place building** (build on what you have) to *rural regions* (begin with what you have). The context changes somewhat, though, as *rural places*, themselves, join the list of regional assets. It is hard to imagine that a *rural region* could be great if none of its *rural places* were great. So, **rural place building** is fundamental to building *competitive regions*.

Yet, a collection of *great rural places* does not automatically make for a *great rural region*. "There is a lot of cooking yet to do," Scaggs emphasizes. "Having an abundance of great ingredients does not give you great gumbo," he says. "Someone has to create the kitchen, bring the pot, turn up the fire, prepare the ingredients, make a roux, and stir over time. Indeed, the cooks and the cooking process become as important, if not more so, than the ingredients."

So, what cooks and cooking process does an area have on hand to initiate a *region building* process?

This applies to the *who* and *how* too. What do you have to work with? Is there a strong regional organization in place to provide leadership and direction? Is there a TVA, ARC, Local Development District, or other regional development organization on hand to provide support?

Xavier de Souza Briggs, director of the Art and Science of Community Problem-Solving Project at the Kennedy School, Harvard University calls such organizations "intermediaries:"

"Intermediaries are people and institutions that add value to the world indirectly, by connecting and supporting – i.e., by enabling others to be more effective. Intermediaries may act as facilitators, educators, capacity builders, social investors, performance managers, coalition builders, and organizers of new groups."

Chuck Fluharty, director emeritus of the Rural Policy Research Institute at the University of Missouri, sees such "intermediaries" as critical players in "capacity disadvantaged" *rural regions*. The intermediary will initiate and guide the work of region building to start with, will recruit the "cooks", and help identify those who can bring "ingredients" to improve the stone soup.

As noted above, TVA, ARC, Local Development Districts, and other organizations can play and have played the intermediary role. But, most *rural regions* start without such an intermediary and must start from scratch.

Or, as Dr. Scaggs tells the story, they start with “stone soup.” The “stone soup” fable has a European origin. The French, Portuguese, and German used different characters, but the story of co-operation transforming scarcity into abundance is constant. The following comes from Wikipedia.com.

Some travelers come to a village, carrying nothing more than an empty pot. Upon their arrival, the villagers are unwilling to share any of their food stores with the hungry travelers. The travelers fill the pot with water, drop a large stone in it, and place it over a fire in the village square. One of the villagers becomes curious and asks what they are doing. The travelers answer that they are making “stone soup”, which tastes wonderful, although it still needs a little bit of garnish to improve the flavor, which they are missing. The villager doesn't mind parting with just a little bit to help them out, so it gets added to the soup. Another villager walks by, inquiring about the pot, and the travelers again mention their stone soup which hasn't reached its full potential yet. The villager hands them a little bit of seasoning to help them out. More and more villagers walk by, each adding another ingredient. Finally, a delicious and nourishing pot of soup is enjoyed by all.

The WAEM *region building* process started with stone soup. There was no bi-state regional organization in place. While TVA and ARC reached into the area, much of the region lay outside their districts. In 2001, the Riley Foundation, with support from The Phil Hardin Foundation, philanthropic foundations located in Meridian, Mississippi, created The Montgomery Institute and charged it with developing strong regional leadership. A key, first initiative of TMI was to partner with area community and junior colleges from both states to form the *Commission on the Future of East Mississippi and West Alabama*. This partnership of TMI and rural colleges became the foundation for an unofficial “intermediary” for the region.

As a result of this growing bi-state association, TMI and partner colleges in 2006 successfully competed for a U.S. Department of Labor *Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED)* grant. The WAEM Region consists of 37 mostly rural counties with over 150 towns and just over one million people.

“Our great challenge has been and continues to be moving the focus from jurisdictions, silos, and programs to places and people,” Scaggs says. “How do we erase the state line and function effectively as a *region*? How do we reach beyond college district lines to operate as a true alliance? How do we get everyone to bring something to the soup pot so we make great gumbo rather than stone soup?”

The WIRED grant brought new, important additions to WAEM's soup making. Two governors and two state agencies provided oversight. A federal agency provided resources. The WIRED process required planning and timelines.

Or, as Dr. Scaggs so well explains, “The Governors created the kitchen; the Commission on the Future brought the pot; DOL brought the fire; now it's up to us to make a roux, add the ingredients, stir over time, and make great WAEM gumbo.”

Making the Roux

Every great gumbo starts with a great roux. The roux is the initial blending of ingredients (fat and flour). Dark gumbo roux takes particular skill. It must be cooked thoroughly, but not overcooked (burnt) in the slightest. Once cooked, other ingredients can be added to make the gumbo.

Building a *competitive region* in rural areas takes a sort of dark roux. The basic ingredients are the initial regional partners. But, as with the roux, it is not the ingredients themselves but the blend that comes from cooking, that matters...that can create *magic*. In other words, the beginning partners, and new partners, must come together, blend actions and functions into one region-wide approach, and begin to simmer. Then, and only then, can great gumbo be made.

Not only must the colleges and TMI connect, but they must be seen connecting to attract other partners and build the sense and identity of the region.

The WAEM Region colleges and TMI are doing this in several ways:

- First, they have signed MOAs creating the WAEM Alliance. This formal alliance allows all eight colleges to function as one in supporting industrial recruitment and delivering technical and workforce training.
- Second, they formed alliances with universities in the region, drew on their talent and resources, and added valuable partners and innovative programming. The University of Alabama, Mississippi State University, the University of West Alabama, the University of Southern Mississippi, and Auburn University are now key partners.
- Third, they formed additional alliances with state and regional organizations and initiatives that provide best practices, programmatic resources, and leadership. These include Mississippi Technology Alliance, *YourTown* Alabama, Mississippi Main Street, Alabama’s Project LEARN, the Mississippi Development Authority and WIN Job Centers.
- Fourth, they drafted a regional workforce training framework with the following components:
 - A regional “modern multi-skill manufacturing (M3) credential.” This credential is unique to the region and demonstrates modern manufacturing skills among the region’s workers through authentic skills assessments.
 - A regional, virtual technical training system. This web-based training system called the Amatrol Anytime Anywhere e-Learning System allows students, workers, and the unemployed access to technical skill training from home, work, and other locations at all hours to improve their skills. Also, the colleges operate “open labs” during non-traditional hours so individuals can come in and “prove” their skills to earn M3 credentials.
- Fifth, they have created a regional, web-based entrepreneur support system. This system allows potential and existing entrepreneurs access to online training and support as well as the capacity to sort and find nearby resource providers. The **MyBiz.AM** website also highlights the region’s communities and their entrepreneur support opportunities.
- Sixth, they hold region-wide events such as a quarterly gathering of Mayors to discuss issues of regional importance and to develop a Mayors’ network.



- Seventh, they publish a regional newsletter and weekly “WAEM Blasts,” and promote the “WAEM” name, including development of the *www.WAEM.us* website.

Adding Ingredients

“Now that the roux is beginning to simmer, we expect people and organizations across the region to bring us their favorite ingredients and help us cook up an exotic batch of WAEM gumbo,” Scaggs says. “Just like with the roux, it’s not the individual ingredients or how many that matter; it is the blending that creates the *magic* of a true region.”

Today, over 450 partners are adding ingredients on a regular basis and stirring a great WAEM gumbo.

It is by adding these various and sometimes *magical* ingredients that the WAEM Region will accomplish its long-term vision. This vision is to transform a mostly rural collection of people and places into a *competitive region* known for its innovative programs in rural place building, entrepreneurship, workforce development, and wealth creation. WAEM calls that being “*Enterprise-Ready*.”

The WAEM mission statement to accomplish this vision is “Building *Enterprise-Ready* places, people, programs, and regional identity.” *Enterprise-Ready* ingredients include:

- An *Enterprise-Ready place* is a community:
 - with the infrastructure, workforce, and incentives ready to retain and attract industry;
 - with training, coaching, financing, and facilities ready to support entrepreneurs who grow community-based jobs and bring wealth to communities;
 - where business formation and innovation occur easily and often;
 - with leaders who have a “can do” attitude and find assets to build on and opportunities to seize.
- *Enterprise-Ready people*:
 - have skills and credentials to keep and attract growth industries and high-paying jobs;
 - start new and innovative businesses and become successful business and civic entrepreneurs;
 - are students who graduate from high school ready to take on technology-based jobs;
 - have “can do” attitudes that help them build, innovate, work hard, and move ahead.
- *Enterprise-Ready programs* are those innovative programs that:
 - help people and places become *Enterprise-Ready*;
 - coach people and communities to engage in *Enterprise-Ready* development activities;
 - train and educate students, workers, entrepreneurs, leaders and others in *Enterprise-Ready* skills.
- An *Enterprise-Ready region* 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;
 - that knows, and builds on, its competitive strengths;
 - that engages its diverse citizens and communities around innovative regional opportunities;
 - that builds a regional development agenda with the scale and clout of the whole region behind it.

“*Enterprise-Ready*” can be defined as “prepared for and committed to value-added ‘build-it’ activity,” whether individually based, organization based, community based, or region based. The WAEM “build-it” process focuses on asset-based economic development, enterprise friendly communities with entrepreneur support systems, innovative workforce systems, and skill development as key value-adding activities for *Enterprise-Ready* regional transformation.

A Success Story

In 2007, Sara Lee closed its plant in West Point, MS, terminating 1,600 loyal employees... many with less than a high school education and minimal technical skills. Into the fray jumped East Mississippi Community College (EMCC). Business as usual, the college knew, would not suffice. “The challenge was not to offer training, but to effectively train and get people into jobs in a realistic timeframe,” explained EMCC vice president Dr. Raj Shaunak.

EMCC was and is a strong partner in the WAEM Regional Initiative. EMCC provided leadership to help bring CRC assessments to Mississippi, in forming the WAEM Alliance, in development the M3 Credential, and in designing the Amatrol-based e-learning system.

Faced with the Sara Lee challenge, EMCC drew on its WAEM experience to craft an intensive, modern manufacturing training program with four intertwined elements: 1) preparation for Career Readiness Certificates (CRCs) augmented with Adult Education and Basic Skills training; 2) simultaneous training in basic components of the Modern Multi-skill Manufacturing (M3) Credential; 3) enrollment in the Amatrol Anytime Anywhere e-Learning System; and 4) using “navigators” to move participants from entry, through training and education, and into jobs.

EMCC would now take the lead in implementing a new best practice – the role of “navigator,” a role designed through research at the National Institute for Rural Community Colleges at Mississippi State University (an outgrowth of the Midsouth Partnership for Rural Community Colleges).

Navigators, intensive scheduling, and innovative training systems improved EMCC’s completion rate from 60% to over 90%. Over 50% of Sara Lee workers re-trained got jobs within six months.

Today, Severstal, American Eurocopter, PACCAR, Aurora Flight Systems, and Stark Aerospace depend upon EMCC’s modern manufacturing program, calling it a “solid foundation.”

The Walmart Foundation in January 2010, through its *America Works Initiative*, recognized EMCC’s innovative program and the WAEM regional approach and awarded funds to The Montgomery Institute to implement the navigator program at three other WAEM colleges and to maintain the regional initiative.

WAEM partners adapted this intertwined approach to health care training, coupling 1) preparation for Career Readiness Certificates augmented with Adult Education and Basic Skills training with 2) simultaneous training for Nurse Aid certification and 3) using “navigators” to move participants from entry, through training and education, and onto the first rung of a “career lattice.” In February 2010 the U.S. Department of Labor awarded a \$4.5 million Recovery Act Health Care Grant to the Institute for these partners to demonstrate this approach with health care providers over a multi-county region.

...More ingredients and *magic* to come.