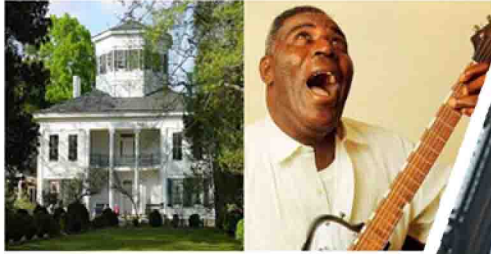


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# Get Your Business Connected in West Point, MS



West Point/Clay County Community Growth Alliance



# Building and Maintaining Great Rural Places



RURAL PLACE BUILDING  
In West Alabama and East Mississippi

**Building and Maintaining  
Great Rural Places**

Bill Crawford  
The Montgomery Institute  
March 16, 2010

A New and Challenging Role  
for Rural Community Colleges

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## Progress

The *rural place building* initiative developed by The Montgomery Institute (TMI) and partners garnered the Southern Growth Policies Board's "2010 Innovator Award." The role of TMI is to gather resources, guide programs, and goad partners to innovate. So, the award truly belongs to the wonderful partners who put this initiative in place – literally and figuratively – through the West Alabama-East Mississippi (WAEM) *WIRED* Initiative and the MyBiz Alabama-Mississippi Network.

The core elements of the *rural place building* initiative are:

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

The highlights that led to the 2010 Innovator Award give an indication of progress in this multi-year, capacity-building initiative:

### **1. BUILDING GREAT RURAL PLACES:**

Through the WAEM Regional Initiative, TMI pulled together eight community and junior colleges, three universities, and two non-profit programs to devise innovative strategies to aid rural communities. TMI and partners:

- Identified *YourTown* Alabama as a best practice and modeled "WAEM Town" after it. These programs bring design and development professionals together with rural leaders at three-day retreats to teach them fundamentals of design and asset building. TMI handed off WAEM Town to the Community Action Team at Mississippi State University beginning in 2010.
- Identified as an innovative practice, the *Small Town Design* charrette process was developed by the Auburn Urban Studio. It applies the principles taught at *Your Town* to individual communities. TMI got Mississippi Main Street to adopt this process. Main Street now offers them statewide in Mississippi. TMI and partners are also working with the Urban Studio to develop follow-up support for Alabama communities. Fourteen WAEM communities have held charrettes, with two to come.
- Coordinated the above programs with other initiatives: WAEM Town and the Main Street charrettes with the Mississippi State University's *First Impressions* program and the Mississippi Development Authority's Asset Development Program; Your Town and Auburn's program with Alabama Communities of Excellence.

### **2. BUILDING ECONOMIC WEALTH THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP:**

TMI pulled together 19 community and junior colleges and three universities to devise strategies to help rural communities create wealth through entrepreneurship. This partnership:

- With technical assistance from the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, developed the innovative MyBiz Alabama-Mississippi Network and the Enterprise-Ready Development System. The goals are to network support services for rural communities that want to create wealth and jobs by developing and implementing "grow your own" strategies as alternatives to plant recruitment. Colleges have worked directly with 391 communities.
- With help from the University of Alabama, developed the [www.MyBiz.AM](http://www.MyBiz.AM) website to help rural communities better link entrepreneurs to the many support programs available. Today, 2,888 registered users can access 213 service providers through MyBiz.AM.

- Developed the Enterprise-Ready Certification program to work in concert with the Enterprise-Ready Development System to recognize communities that engage in strategic planning and adopt strategies to become “enterprise-ready” and entrepreneur friendly.
- Worked with the University of Alabama to win a Project GATE grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. Alabama’s Project LEARN provided entrepreneur training and support for dislocated workers. Working with community and junior colleges, TMI obtained resources to expand the MyBizAM program statewide in Mississippi.
- Initiated a multi-agency workgroup in Mississippi to formulate a set of policy recommendations to enhance entrepreneurship and small business development in Mississippi – Balancing Recruitment With Entrepreneurship (BRWE). These recommendations have been completed and submitted to agencies and policy groups for review.

### **3. BUILDING A COMPETITIVE REGION:**

Guided by the RUPRI Center for Regional Competitiveness, TMI and its college and university partners accomplished the following:

- Hosted regional summits on entrepreneurship, forestry, and regional competitiveness to help rural leaders understand opportunities and challenges.
- A key regional development strategy adopted by rural leaders focuses on building a competitive, regional, advanced manufacturing workforce.
  - TMI and community colleges formed the WAEM Alliance, developed a regional training framework to guide investments, and crafted a regional advanced manufacturing credential based on national skill standards.
  - After Alabama moved quickly to establish its Career Readiness Certificate program, TMI and partners were a driving force in getting Mississippi leaders to implement a CRC credential aligned with Alabama’s.
  - TMI and partners designed the Modern Multi-skill Manufacturing (M3) Credential to stack on to the Career Readiness Certificate to prepare workers for a variety of advanced manufacturing jobs in the WAEM Region.
  - TMI and partners designed the innovative Amatrol Anytime Anywhere e-Learning System to reach out to workers and students in rural areas who are challenged to travel to out-of-town training programs. Virtual training on over 450 modules allows individuals to access training at home, at the workplace, at libraries, and at one-stop career centers.
  - From April 1, 2008 through December 31, 2009, a total of 7,865 individuals in the WAEM Region received Career Readiness Certificates, 2,262 enrolled in the Amatrol Anytime Anywhere e-Learning System, 1,955 entered advanced manufacturing training, and 568 completed M3 Credentials.
- Established quarterly meetings of mayors from 33 communities to focus on regional issues and strategies.
- Captured resources to implement a regional healthcare training program.
- With support from the Walmart Foundation, initiated activities to establish a WAEM Commission on the Future to succeed the governor appointed WAEM WIRED Commission.
- The Montgomery Institute, headquartered in Meridian, MS, opened an Alabama office in 2009 in Monroeville. This gives TMI, as a regional intermediary, footprints in both states.

## Table of Contents

1. Overview	Page 6
a. Place Matters	Page 6
b. The Place Paradox	Page 6
c. The Rural Place Challenge	Page 7
d. Rural Community Colleges	Page 8
2. Building Great Rural Places	Page 8
a. Rural Place Builders	Page 7
b. Place Coaching and Rural Community Colleges	Page 11
c. The Work of Rural Place Coaches	Page 12
d. Build-It Asset and Opportunity Mapping Process	Page 14
3. Building Economic Wealth through Entrepreneurship	Page 15
a. Economic Engines	Page 16
b. Building Enterprise-Ready Communities	Page 16
c. Regional Entrepreneur Network	Page 18
d. Basic Entrepreneur Support	Page 18
e. Growing Entrepreneurs	Page 19
f. Innovation-Led Economic Development and Economic Gardening	Page 20
4. Building a Competitive Region	Page 21
a. From Stone Soup to WAEM Gumbo	Page 22
b. Making the Roux	Page 23
c. Adding Ingredients	Page 25
d. A Success Story	Page 26
APPENDIX 1 – WAEM “Build-It” Place Building Guide	Page 27
APPENDIX II – Enterprise-Ready Development System Guide	Page 38
APPENDIX III	
Chart 1 – Sample Core Team Selection and Evaluation Tool	Page 40
Chart 2 – Baseline Questions	Page 41
Chart 3 – Identifying Economic Engines	Page 44
Chart 4 – Rural Place Survey	Page 46
Chart 5 – “Start-It” Card	Page 53
Chart 6 – Community Entrepreneurship Readiness Assessment	Page 54
Chart 7 – Clarifying Community’s Entrepreneur Development Goals	Page 55
Chart 8 – Identifying and Mapping Entrepreneurial Talent	Page 56
Chart 9 – Mapping Entrepreneur Development Assets	Page 57
Chart 10 – Identifying Entrepreneur Support Priorities	Page 61
Chart 11 – ERDS Stages	Page 62
Chart 12 – Inventory of Potential ERDS Components	Page 63