



August 25, 2011

## **USDA, DRA, SBA Officials Visit, Tour MSCC Campus**

Representatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Delta Regional Authority, and Small Business Administration visited Mid-South Community College Thursday for informal discussions about the region's future and an announcement about a DRA-SBA partnership.

Doug O'Brien, Deputy Under Secretary for USDA Rural Development; Marie Johns, Deputy Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration; and Delta Regional Authority Federal Co-Chairman Chris Masingill participated in the discussions and news conference in MSCC's Workforce Technology Center.



***Participants included, from left, Dr. Gibson "Sunny" Morris, MSCC Liaison for Special Projects, Arkansas Delta Training & Education Consortium; MSCC President Dr. Glen Fenter; Marie Johns, Deputy Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration; Delta Regional Authority Federal Co-Chairman Chris Masingill; Doug O'Brien, Deputy Under Secretary for U.S. Department of Agriculture (Rural Development); Linda R. Nelson, Arkansas District Director of the U.S. Small Business Administration; and Chuck Davis, Public Information Officer/Business Development Specialist for the Arkansas District of the SBA.***

The DRA and SBA formally announced a new partnership aimed at recruiting financial institutions to the Delta to help businesses in the region. They signed a memorandum of understanding to pool their information and resources to meet the needs of people who can boost the economy if given the opportunity.

“We recognize that small businesses are the backbone of the Delta’s economy,” Masingill said. “We know that over 95 percent of the state employers come from small firms. We also know that in the Delta almost half the private sector jobs come from small businesses.”

“Small businesses are the ones who grow our community, help us create opportunities for our people, and it is important that do everything we can to support that.”

Marie Johns, Deputy Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration, said the partnership made sense on a number of levels.

“It was an easy ‘Yes’ to talk with Chairman Masingill and decide to go down this road of a stronger partnership with the Delta Regional Authority,” Johns said. “President Obama has insisted that federal agencies work more collaboratively on behalf of all citizens.”

“We are partnering with a great organization to make sure that the information and resources we have at the SBA will be joined with the resources and information at the Delta Regional Authority so that every individual interested in starting or growing a business will have what they need from their federal partners.”

Johns praised MSCC for its efforts to train workers and to develop entrepreneurs. She said such vision is needed to move the region and the nation forward.

“It’s not so much that we have poverty, but it’s been a poverty of vision, and a poverty of creativity that (MSCC) President (Glen) Fenter and Dr. (Gibson ‘Sunny’) Morris are showing can be overcome. We can change regions of this country. We can change people’s families if we provide the education and access to information that they need to be part of this new economy. ”



***Mid-South Community College's Kyle Wagner and Dr. Gibson "Sunny" Morris presented Marie Johns, Deputy Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration, with a machining project that she helped start during a tour and demonstration in the Workforce Technology Center.***

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“I am so inspired by the great facilities at this college,” she continued. “It gave me goose bumps to hear about the magnificent opportunities that are available here and about the plans to expand those opportunities. Small businesses are the true engine of our time, and it’s wonderful that as students are learning the skills of the new economy they’re also

going to be learning the skills of entrepreneurship.”

Masingill said institutions like MSCC will be key players in the effort to turn around the economy.

“You can’t separate education and economic development,” he pointed out. “What this college does for the region, this community, and this state is so vitally important. This is where our future entrepreneurs will come from.”

He said the DRA-SBA partnership will help “grow our entrepreneurs by providing them with the support system to make sure that they can be successful. When you give them resources, get out of the way, and let them do what they do best, they create jobs and grow the economy.”

“And when you create additional collaborations and partnerships with such great entities as the SBA, with tremendous resources and support programs, we can make a difference on our communities and our region.”

Prior to the news conference, Dr. Fenter and Dr. Morris shared the vision of the college and Arkansas Delta Training and Education Consortium with the visitors. MSCC’s president thanked the officials for their interest in what is happening in eastern Arkansas.

“This is exactly what we need, and we need more of it,” Dr. Fenter said. “We need leadership to have the opportunity to see the great things that are happening on community college campuses.”

Other participants in the discussions and announcement included Linda R. Nelson, Arkansas District Director of the U.S. Small Business Administration, and Chuck Davis, Public Information Officer/Business Development Specialist for the Arkansas District of the SBA.