



**November 19, 2013**

### **Alabama College, Economic Developers Check Out MSCC Facilities**

Representatives of Bishop State Community College, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, and an engineering/architectural firm visited Mid-South Community College campus on Nov. 13 to gather ideas for a new training facility.

Members of the group included Dr. Kathy Thompson, Dean of Technical Education at Workforce Development at BSCC; Dr. Betty Leslie, BSCC Carver Campus Director; Marshall Runderson, BSCC Division Chair for Drafting & Design; Richard Everett, Division Chair for Auto Body Repair; Jimmy Lester of the Appalachian Regional Commission, Delta Regional Authority/Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs; and Jim Walker, Director of Architecture for Goodwyn, Mills, and Cawood Engineering and Architecture.

“We are working collaboratively with Washington County and the area chamber to develop a campus as part of our service area,” Dr. Thompson explained. “We were



advised to come to Mid-South Community College to take a look at what Dr. Fenter and his team have done to transform this community college to meet industry needs. It's our responsibility to create a campus that meets the needs of students and business and industry in our geographic area."

"We carry out the vision of our president, Dr. James Lowe, and this campus in Washington County is part of that. It's very exciting because we've seen now what has been created at Mid-South Community College and will be able to think about how we can design something like it."

Lester said the group traveled to West Memphis at the suggestion of the Washington County director of economic development who is involved with the Delta Regional Authority, a strong supporter of MSCC.

"Austin Monk, an economic developer from South Alabama, organized and spearheaded this trip for us to come see what Mid-South Community College is doing here in the hopes that we might be able to replicate it in southwest Alabama," Lester said.

"The city of Chatom donated some land, and we're hoping to integrate this type of learning facility model in an area that is just outside of Mobile."

Monk said he learned about MSCC's efforts while participating in the Delta Regional Authority Executive Academy.

"One of our stops was in Memphis, and we shot over to West Memphis to see the great workforce development, technology training, and partnerships that were being embraced by Mid-South Community College," Monk said. "I saw the potential of taking that model and adapting it to the area I serve, and come to find out, MSCC and Bishop State had already been discussing workforce training."

"The Alabama Industrial Development Training organization has been working to increase the quality of workforce development opportunities in rural areas while creating an education continuum from pre-K through post-secondary education. Everyone agreed this was a perfect time to embrace the model that MSCC has created."

Dr. Leslie said Washington County desperately needs accessible higher education.

"We had an off-campus site in Washington County years ago at Chatom High School, but at the time, many of the people there had not finished high school. So we were having a very difficult time getting those classes to make."

“They are now at the point where they do have people who can take college courses, so this is a perfect time for them. I think it’s going to work because there’s such a need for education in Washington County.”

Runderson said Washington County is very similar to Crittenden County in terms of its economic and workforce situation. After touring MSCC, he said it is a great example to follow.

“We are reaching out to poor people who have nowhere to go,” he said. “We’re doing all we can to fulfill the needs for all our students, plus the employers, too. That’s what we’re trying to do, fill that gap like Mid-South Community College has done.”

“We’re trying to create additional training opportunities that our students can use to get good jobs,” Everett said. “By coming to Mid-South Community College, we’re trying to get some ideas to take back to Alabama. Hopefully we can grow something like this in our area.”

Walker said MSCC’s buildings and commitment to workforce development are impressive.

“Mid-South Community College is obviously doing something right, and word is getting out that you have a good model that’s working,” Walker said. “What you have been able to do in roughly 20 years is just amazing to me from an architectural standpoint. I think the way you have your technical programs integrated and tied into the overall classroom space is extremely valuable.”

Bishop State Community College is a state-supported, open-admission, urban institution in Mobile. The College consists of four city campuses, dedicated to serving the residents of Mobile and Washington counties in southwest Alabama. The College is part of the Alabama College System, the state-supported network of two-year community, junior, and technical colleges that serves the state’s residents.

Much like MSCC, Bishop State offers university transfer programs as well as one- and two-year career programs that can put students on the fast track to rewarding jobs.

On the heels of the Alabama visitors, a delegation of principals from Cabarrus County Schools, located outside of Charlotte, N.C., came to MSCC with a specific interest in the Renewable Energy/Alternative Fuels labs. The group, which participated in

the “Pathways to Prosperity: Sector Initiatives in the Mid-South” conference in Memphis, is in the early stages of implementing an academies approach to its K-12 system, similar to the work being proposed by the West Memphis School District.