



YOUR SPECIAL EDITION NEWSLETTER: ACCS WORKFORCE AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



Photo: AFN Chairman Tom Stackhouse; ADECA Director Kenneth Boswell; Governor Kay Ivey; AFN CEO Terry Metze, Jr.; Ciena VP & General Manager Bruce Hembree; and ACCS Vice Chancellor Ed Lawrence.

Residents complete no-cost training to meet rising fiber optics workforce demand

Millions in federal funding for broadband across Alabama means a greater demand for fiber optics technicians and installers. The Alabama Community College System's (ACCS) Innovation Center has a no-cost training program to get residents ready for these job opportunities at colleges across the state.

"The course interested me partly because of my US Air Force radar experience and a few years managing a small cable TV system in Arkansas," said Alabama resident Robert Holiday.

Holiday recently completed the free Fiber Optics Technician and Installer Course at Coastal Alabama Community College.

"The course was well designed with plenty of equipment, tools and instructors, so prospective students should be confident they will have an opportunity for learning new skills," said Holiday.

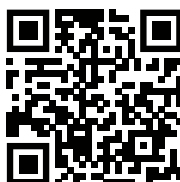
With increasing numbers of students like Holiday receiving training through their local community college, Governor Kay Ivey and regional leaders have recently launched the Alabama Fiber Network (AFN), which aims to provide statewide reliable broadband access.

The ACCS signed a Letter of Intent with AFN to work on creating a stronger network for Alabama's community colleges. This involves ensuring that colleges remain connected to

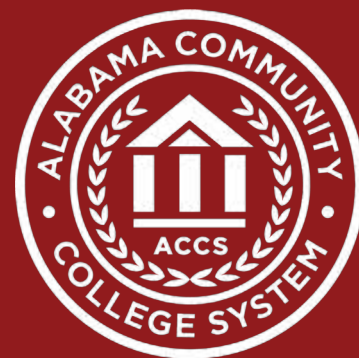
the internet during instruction times and that these connections remain stable even during outages.

"We want to say how appreciative we are of Governor Kay Ivey's vision and initiative to expand fiber connectivity to all Alabamians in all 67 counties and to the Alabama Fiber Network for bringing it to life," said ACCS Vice Chancellor Ed Lawrence.

To register for fiber optics training, call 1-855-206-2671 or scan the QR code to view additional free courses.



<https://innovation.accs.edu>



FROM CHANCELLOR JIMMY H. BAKER

Welcome, Business Council of Alabama! I am excited to showcase how our collaboration can ignite innovation and drive economic prosperity across our state. The Alabama Community College System provides over 1,700 specialized training programs and maintains strong partnerships with more than 5,300 businesses, positioning us as a pivotal educational and economic force.

Nearly half a million students have started their transformative journeys at our community colleges, accessing pathways to higher education and career success. This newsletter delivers insights into how these collaborations are making a tangible impact across all 67 counties and demonstrate how your engagement can broaden your business's influence statewide.

Let's explore together how we can tailor solutions for your industry to make life better for every Alabamian.

Community partnership results in Birmingham student's success as a 21-yr-old homeowner

A partnership between a Birmingham-based community organization and the Alabama Community College System was a gateway to workforce training and homeownership for one Birmingham man.

Torrey Washington, 21, is the first homeowner of BuildUP Community School, a program that helps disadvantaged teens revitalize struggling neighborhoods. BuildUP Executive Director James Sutton said the program is the nation's first and only early-college workforce development high school. Washington praised BuildUP and Lawson State Community College for helping him get hands-on with flipping his first property in Birmingham.

Washington used his advanced manufacturing training to learn more about rehabbing homes, including the one he now owns. During the training, another mission crossed his mind: Washington

became an HVAC specialist helping to build innovative modular structures for BLOX.

"That's when I met Jeffrey Rayford and Brian Moore," said Washington. "They were my instructors at Lawson State. I'm just very grateful I met them. They've both been huge inspirations to me."

"My end goal," said Washington, "is to get to the point where I'm financially stable and able to truly stand on my own two feet and help others the same way my teachers, instructors, and co-workers have helped me."

"Having Torrey as the first is a great impact on the school," said BuildUP Executive Director James Sutton. "It gives young high schoolers in Birmingham a vision of



Photo: Courtesy of BuildUP Community School.

success and a picture of finishing what you start, carrying something all the way through from beginning to end."



Photo: Tennessee Valley BEST Robotics Competition at Calhoun Community College.

Alabama's focus on expanding STEM education points to the necessity of training for high-skill positions in the state's tech industry.

A unique group of students competing at Alabama's community colleges may be the players the industry needs to keep up with demand. Engineering design students like Gabby Zaragosa recently participated in the Tennessee Valley BEST Robotics Competition at Calhoun

Community College. She became a robotics mentorto her former high school team, and now she's one of the lead volunteers for the competition.

"I knew I wanted to do something with my hands," said Gabby. "I wanted to be involved because I love robotics."

The high school teams that participate in this free program develop technical skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities that

ACCS robotics education opens the door to STEM careers

prepare them for the workforce and gain certifications at community colleges like Calhoun.

"It's very exciting," said Faith Plunkett, an instructional technology coach at Decatur City Schools. "Why go to a four-year university when this is right here and it's affordable and accessible to our students?"

Experts say robotics careers in the manufacturing industry pay 30% more than entry-level non-robotics manufacturing jobs, and some foundational elements required for these roles stem from the skills that students learn in robotics competitions.

Students get to experience a sport they enjoy. And when they graduate – employers get to recruit the talent they need.

The dual advantage: community college graduate on fast track to career after Auburn



Photo: Braxton Clines, a Northeast Alabama alum, receiving his white coat at Auburn University.

The transition after high school graduation is a pivotal moment for any student.

Some are jumping directly into the workforce, while others are gearing up to further their

education at universities this fall. Dual enrollment graduates are often able to transition with a distinct advantage over their classmates.

Before even receiving his high school diploma in 2023, Braxton Clines had already crossed the stage at Northeast Alabama Community College (NACC).

"I really enjoyed the way that I could adapt my schedule around my classes because most were available online," said Clines.

By securing a head start, he not only saved time and money but also swiftly earned his white coat at Auburn University's Harrison College of Pharmacy. It typically takes up to seven years of schooling, but he found a way to reduce it by three years when starting at an Alabama community college.

"I am extremely grateful," said Clines. "Dual

enrollment has shaped the way that I've learned material and has been a necessary part of my training for pharmacy school."

Over the past decade, Alabama's community and technical colleges have served as the launching pad for over 400,000 transfer students. Clines is among the 14% of ACCS students who transferred to a four-year institution and entered a health care program.

"I really enjoyed the faculty at NACC," he said. "There were so many teachers and advisors that helped my education flourish in a meaningful way."

The path to success frequently starts within one's own community. Students, regardless of their future goals, can lay a strong foundation for their journey at any Alabama community college. This solid groundwork supports them no matter where their academic and professional pursuits may lead.

Breaking bread: college students fight food insecurities with Alabama food banks

The Alabama Community College System has joined forces with local food banks to ensure that students can devote their resources to school instead of worrying about their next meal.

Colleges like Chattahoochee Valley and Jefferson State have set up food pantries, stocking shelves with non-perishable food and boxing them to give away to students throughout the year.

Although some people believe that college students are taking care of themselves, factors such as being a first-generation student, juggling school with work, and providing for their families mean that some students struggle with food insecurity.

"When students go hungry, they lose their ability to focus in class," said Chattahoochee Valley Community College Associate Dean Vickie Williams. "The impact of food insecurity on health and academic performance is long-lasting."

According to Feeding America – a network of nationwide food banks – the

most common approach to addressing college hunger is direct food distribution. Jefferson State psychology student Jaden Ledbetter has spotted a surge in foot traffic since the college opened its food pantry, which is housed inside the Student Success Center at the main campus.

"I give time because I love the thought of giving back, especially if it's someone that's in a bad situation," said Ledbetter.

Research shows that food assistance helps improve graduation rates, and the Heart of Alabama Food Bank CEO agrees. Michael Coleman said his team serves over half of Alabama's counties, and much of his coverage area includes rural communities.

Coleman said rural, lower income residents are trying to improve their lives, but when cost-related challenges arise, education is "one of the things they end up splicing out of their life." He doesn't want to see any



Photo: Jefferson State Community College Food Pantry work-study students Jaden Ledbetter and Blayne Whisenhunt.

students sacrificing their dreams.

"What they need is our support and our encouragement to help them overcome their barriers," said Coleman.

To help end college hunger, connect with your local food bank.

Students with learning disabilities make their mark on the workforce

As the state and nation confront the scarcity of today's workforce, Alabama's community and technical colleges are taking charge. Among them, Lurleen B. Wallace Community College (LBW) stands out for helping individuals with learning disabilities close the gap with the Alabama RISE Program.

"Throughout our state, most individuals with disabilities are not in the labor force," said LBW President Brock Kelley. "With the right resources, they are proven to be good employees with the ability to produce quality work."

The Alabama RISE Program tailors its curriculum to fit the needs of each student to support and advocate for themselves. One avenue is mentorship.

"I learned how to do down payments on a car, how to pay for a mortgage on a house, and how much money to spend, save, and set aside," said RISE student Conner Kelley.

Conner primarily took high school classes online, but his mother said that he stepped out of his comfort zone and started attending classes in-person thanks to LBW.

"For my son to do the RISE program was such a blessing," said Jan Kelley. "Everyone was so friendly, and it gave me peace of mind that he could be successful."

The RISE Program has not only afforded the opportunity for students with disabilities to excel. The program also enlightens employers on the benefits of hiring these talented individuals.

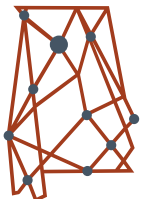
"We gained an employee who has now worked full-time for just over two years," said Chace Sauls, an accounting and office manager of Andalusia Distributing Company. "It has been personally and professionally rewarding to be a part of RISE because we've been able to witness the growth in confidence as the students realize their potential for the workforce."



Photo: LBW RISE student Sarah Sanders with Career Pathways Specialist Jeanni Sanders.

ELEVATING ALABAMA'S WORKFORCE

The ACCS Innovation Center, a division of the Alabama Community College System, brings together the state's community colleges, business and industry, and community partners to deliver rapid, industry-recognized non-credit training within some of the state's most in-demand career fields.



ACCS
INNOVATION
CENTER



For more information:
<https://innovation.accs.edu>