

**FROM CHANCELLOR  
JIMMY H. BAKER**

Hi [INSERT NAME],

At the Alabama Community College System, our goal is simple: to make life better for every Alabamian through smart, innovative education and strong partnerships.

We're continuously refining our programs to address the dynamic needs of Alabama's job market, ensuring that our offerings align with both current and future workforce demands. By providing a range of training and educational opportunities, we help residents gain the skills they need to succeed and contribute to our state's economic growth.

In this edition of the Alabama Minute newsletter, you'll see how our approach is not just about personal success but also about driving community and economic development. We're thrilled to share how our efforts are making a tangible difference.

*Photo: Ziyun McCowan, Central Alabama CC CDL graduate*

## Alabama's community colleges report highest enrollment in decade, positive outlook for employers across Alabama

Record numbers of Alabama residents are enrolling in community and technical colleges, to pursue opportunities for academic and workforce training.

The Alabama Community College System (ACCS) reported over 170,000 residents enrolled in academic courses or registered for workforce training between August 2023 and July 2024. Of these, 122,867 are in credit-based academic programs, while the rest are pursuing job-ready workforce credentials.

"The slogan of the Alabama Community College System is that we make life better, and the challenge to do so successfully is evident in the support of Alabama's leaders and in the number

of Alabama residents achieving their goals through the colleges' training," said Jimmy H. Baker, Chancellor of the Alabama Community College System.

The commitment of Alabama's community and technical colleges to align programs with the needs of local and regional employers ensures graduates are job-ready and equipped with the skills required to thrive in today's competitive job market.

"This enrollment milestone is a testament to the hard work of our faculty and staff, the relevance of our programs, and the trust that students and their families place in us," said Olivier Charles, President of Bishop State Community College in Mobile.

Initiatives of the ACCS, such as scholarships, flexible learning options, and support services, have been instrumental in making college more accessible to underserved communities.

"Alabama's future is bright, and our community colleges are at the heart of it," said Dr. Neil Scott, ACCS Vice Chancellor for Student Success.

"As we celebrate, we remain focused on our mission to empower students, strengthen communities, and drive economic prosperity across the state."

## ***BuildSubmarines.com* employs Alabama workers to forge our Navy's future**



Photo courtesy of General Dynamics Electric Boat

Alabama is a key player in the global maritime market, employing thousands of skilled workers and driving job creation and supporting local economies. Recruitment and training are crucial for workforce development and ensuring a steady supply of trained professionals in Alabama's shipbuilding expansion to include submarine production and sustainment.

The U.S. Navy has projected the need for 140,000 skilled workers in defense manufacturing over the next decade to achieve its 1 + 2 mission: building one Columbia-Class and two Virginia-Class submarines annually.

*BuildSubmarines.com* is the central hub for recruiting and training the workforce needed to build and sustain Navy submarines. Powered in part by ZipRecruiter, the site connects candidates with thousands of job opportunities and advanced training available through career profiles. *BuildSubmarines.com* also partners with government, state and industry leaders

to highlight the critical need for skilled labor workers across the State of Alabama and the roles they play in supporting the Navy's national defense efforts. The site connects candidates with thousands of job opportunities and advanced training available through career profiles.

*BuildSubmarines.com* and Alabama are producing the next generation of skilled tradespeople ranging from welders and electricians to pipefitters and machinists. Driven by this commitment, it is ensuring that Alabama's workforce remains competitive, prepared for the advanced manufacturing challenges of the future, and positioned to lead in the global maritime industry.

Through these efforts, Alabama is not only securing its place as a manufacturing powerhouse, but also making significant strides in workforce development, ensuring sustainable growth for the state's economy and expanding national defense production with underwater defense platforms.

## **'What If You Knew?': Student-led podcast tackles substance abuse and mental health**

At Coastal Alabama Community College's Fairhope campus, a group of students is stepping into the spotlight to tackle society's toughest issues. They're not just raising their voices—they're amplifying them through season two of their podcast, *What If You Knew?* By addressing heavy topics like substance abuse and mental health, these students are sparking crucial conversations that resonate far beyond campus.

"I joined the podcast because I witnessed an overdose when I was 16, and it stuck with me," said podcast co-host Jenn Johnston. "I want people to know that if you experience something like that, you're not alone—resources are available to help you."

The podcast, a collaboration between the students and the Baldwin County Community Alliance, was fueled by a grant from the Alabama Department of Mental Health to address the opioid epidemic among young adults. Fairhope Campus



Photo: Coastal Alabama's "What if you Knew?" Podcast team

Director Mandy Bezeredi has seen firsthand how the show has inspired the students to make a real impact.

"The most rewarding part has been watching the students transform," said Bezeredi. "For example, after learning about Narcan at the CADCA 2024 National Leadership Forum in Washington D.C., the students were determined to bring that knowledge back to Fairhope. They quickly organized Narcan training

for our campus community." Returning castmates were recently sent to Chicago for another conference to learn more about new drug trends and prepare for season three.

"These are experiences that could happen to anyone," said podcast member Oliver Jackson. "When listeners tune in, they should remember that these are real people with real challenges, and those challenges could affect any of us."



## ACCS students crush competition in Clash of Trades Championship

The 2024 Project MFG Clash of Trades Championship was more than a national competition – it was a showcase of skill, precision, and the future of American manufacturing. Calhoun Community College secured a first-place finish, while Central Alabama Community College claimed third, proving Alabama community colleges are a force on the national stage.

“The teams were judged on time, cost, and quality,” said Project MFG Marketing Manager Amy Moyer. “By including time in our evaluation, we mimic the industry’s fast-paced demands.” This real-world focus gets students ready for careers in advanced manufacturing.

The championship featured a \$100,000 grand prize, split between the winning team and their school, and what’s more, the competition is free for all participating schools. Project MFG even covers travel costs to the competition. This means every school has a fair shot at competing.

This year, every moment of the competition was captured on YouTube, giving a global audience a front-row seat. “We wanted to document the whole journey, from regional challenges to the national finals,”



Photo courtesy of Project MFG: Austin Kidd (CNC Machinist/CNC Programmer), Ben Blanton (Welder), and Ty Whitson (CNC Machinist/CNC Programmer)

said Moyer. “By showing every step, we were able to highlight the amazing talent of all the participants, even the ones who didn’t win.”

The championship also works to shift how we view skilled trades. “We’re challenging the old stereotype of trades as dark, dirty, and dangerous. Today’s manufacturing facilities are often clean, high-tech environments,” said Moyer.

Clash of Trades not only showcased the top skills of today’s students but also confirmed that the future of manufacturing is in talented and innovative hands.

**Correction:** An earlier version of this article misstated that Coastal Alabama Community College claimed third place. The correct information is that Central Alabama Community College claimed third place in the national Clash of Trades Championship.

## WE BUILD GIANTS

The U.S. Navy is on a once-in-a-generation journey to transform its submarine fleet.

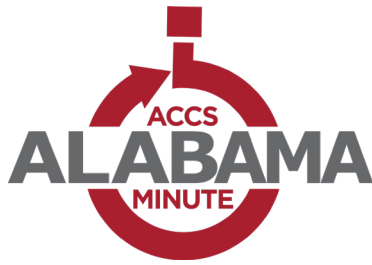
This journey requires tens of thousands of skilled workers to ensure success.

Visit [BuildSubmarines.com](https://BuildSubmarines.com) to explore well-paying and stable careers in next-generation manufacturing.



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## Trooper's kindness shifts Bevill State student's career into high gear

A routine traffic stop on Highway 78 turned into a life-changing encounter between a state trooper and a young woman searching for her path.

Two years ago, Alabama Law Enforcement Agency Senior Trooper JT Brown pulled over Abbie Rutledge for speeding. Abbie was working for another company, but as they talked, it became clear her dreams lay elsewhere.

Trooper Brown, recognizing a young person at a crossroads, chose to offer more than just a warning.

"She had only ever been stopped, like, one time," said Trooper Brown. "I was like, 'You know what? I'm going to give this young lady a break. She seems like she's working hard and needs a chance.'"

He shared his story, explaining how he once pursued a different career as a surgical technician before finding his true calling as a state trooper. His message was simple: it's okay to fail, but it's more important to try.

Abbie took his words to heart and, after their conversation, took a step to enroll



*Photo: Sr. Trooper JT Brown with Abbie Rutledge at Bevill State's pinning ceremony*

in the next surgical tech class. She called her mother, Tammy Guthrie. Surprisingly, Guthrie was the teacher in the surgical tech program Trooper Brown had attended at Bevill State Community College.

"He did something in 10-15 mins that I had been struggling to help her with for 20 years!" Guthrie posted via Facebook. "I am forever grateful!"

In 2024, Abbie graduated from that program, holding the warning Trooper Brown had given her as a reminder of the day her life changed course.

In a twist of fate, her pinning ceremony fell on the exact date of their encounter.

"When I saw him, I wanted to burst out in tears because it felt like a sigh of relief knowing that he was there seeing my accomplishment that he made possible," said Abbie.

Trooper Brown's words not only guided Abbie but also transformed her future, proving that sometimes, the most unexpected moments can change our lives forever.