



RURAL JOBS ACCELERATOR GRANT PUTS MISSISSIPPI ON FASTTRAC FOR JOBS GROWTH

Accelerating Jobs and Innovation through Community and Economic Development in Rural Mississippi is a grant created to provide a series of action programs to spur job growth and stimulate new capital investment in Mississippi. Over one million dollars was funded to a consortium of MSU organizations by the federal Economic Development Administration, the United States Department of Agriculture, Delta Regional Authority, and the Appalachian Regional Commission to execute the action programs. The target goal is to create and retain over 500 jobs along with the accompanying economic development impact of over \$30 million, including private investment and cost savings to rural and economically distressed areas in Mississippi. The grant covers 61 counties that make up the combined Delta and Appalachian regions in the state. The sub-regional hubs for the program include Greenville, Natchez, Starkville, and Tupelo.

The four fundamental objectives of the multifaceted program include **strengthening communities, growing companies, developing entrepreneurs** and **expanding business and manufacturing clusters**. The component aimed at strengthening communities is primarily funded by the US Department of Agriculture and encompasses activities

that will strengthen community leadership and utilize value chain and/or econometric cluster analysis to identify regional opportunities. Cooperators will work with local economic and community development entities to facilitate business start-ups, entrepreneurial training, and existing business retention/expansion to help communities address the opportunities and challenges that come with progress.

Assistance to encourage growth of companies is funded by the Economic Development Administration (EDA), the Delta Regional Authority (DRA), and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). Technical assistance and professional development workshops which focus on exploiting growth opportunities will be available to local businesses. Attention and support will be given to cluster anchors and other significant businesses with a high likelihood of expanding regional and local supply chain businesses.

Encouraging and developing entrepreneurs is a major thrust also funded primarily by EDA, DRA, and ARC. Offerings will include the Kauffman Foundation's FastTrac Entrepreneurial Training Programs and business "start-up" weekend activities in each of the four major program hub areas. Mentoring

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Bill Martin, Director



2013 starts on a positive note for Mississippi's furniture manufacturers

FurnitureToday recently reported that H.M. Richards is adding 85,000 square feet to the company's factory in Saltillo, increasing the total to more than 800,000 square feet. Comfort Revolution officially opened a nearly half-million square-foot manufacturing operation in Belmont in early January, where

the company will produce mattresses, mattress toppers and pillows. Southern Motion opened a new facility in Baldwin and several other manufacturers have added additional lines in the past few months. Chromcraft Revington announced that it will consolidate its Delphi, Ind. distribution center into its Senatobia manufacturing and distributions operations during the first half of 2013. The Tupelo Furniture Market reports that more than 50 new vendors will participate in the Spring market.

On the national front, a recent survey of residential furniture manufacturers and distributors by Smith Leonard indicated positive signs. Orders were up 6 percent October 2012 compared to October 2011 and year-to-date orders were up 5 percent over 2011. Inventories were in line with current volumes and factory and warehouse payrolls were up 5 percent from the same time last year. The number of employees was also up 4 percent from last year. Armistead, Mann & Epperson reported in their December Furnishings Newsletter on the expected rebound in housing, an increase in energy production, and an increase in the use of credit by American consumers. They also mentioned that the U.S. has \$2.4 trillion in cash in American corporations and another \$3 trillion being held in banks to be loaned. Let's not forget about the 23 million American workers seeking jobs. This represents a tremendous amount of capital just waiting to be used! As reported by Epperson, new household formations in 2012 are predicted to reach one million (still being tabulated), a steady increase from 635,000 in 2011; home prices rose 4.9% in the past year; average home prices increased by \$4,000 and home equity loans were up 30% in 2012. The one dark spot on the horizon is the consumer confidence level which took a major hit in December, declining six points to 65.1, primarily due to "fiscal cliff" negotiations.

As the industry picks up speed, there has never been a better time to utilize the services of the Institute. Don't forget that we can help you with education, training, technical assistance, and testing. Several of our services are described in detail in this issue. Don't miss the annual Manufacturing Summit co-hosted by AHFA, FFI, and the Mississippi Manufacturers Association, on March 27 at the Franklin Center. This year's program will provide an update on TB117-2012, and will cover transportation issues, consumer buying attitudes and behavior, labor pool solutions, and a panel discussion on health care issues and concerns brought about by the new health care regulations.

The Franklin Furniture Institute is an institute of Mississippi State University's Forest Products Department, Forest and Wildlife Research and Extension Service.

The Supervisory Management Training program remains our most popular offering to the industry, providing much-needed education and training in modern manufacturing techniques as well as conflict management, motivation, and leadership. We have developed a new online home furnishings catalog to showcase Mississippi home furnishings products. This service is provided at no cost to manufacturers and suppliers and is a great way to market your products, both nationally and internationally. Export assistance is available through our Export Resource Service. FFI can also help you determine employee and/or customer satisfaction levels through surveys developed specifically for you and your company. And of course, don't forget about the testing and quality assurance program and the wood property and identification services available through the Forest Products Department.

Finally, I urge you to take advantage of the programs and opportunities available through the community colleges and the Mississippi WIN Centers. Please see the feature article in this issue highlighting Itawamba Community College. Remember, by working together, we CAN make it HAPPEN!

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support will be available to advise and encourage potential and current entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurial "competitions" will be held with winners earning the opportunity to present before the Mississippi Technology Alliance's Angel Network.

The cluster component will focus on Mississippi's important strategic clusters including the automotive, furniture, and agri-business industries. Funded primarily by EDA, this thrust will use networking events to connect key cluster anchor businesses with regional clusters. These events will expose entrepreneurs and smaller existing businesses to new business opportunities based on the future needs of anchors and other businesses significant to the clusters.

The Mississippi State University agencies participating in this program include the Center for Advanced Vehicular Systems Extension, the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center, the Southern Rural Development Center, the Office of Entrepreneurship and Technology Transfer, the Franklin Furniture Institute, and the Department of Agricultural Economics. External partners include the Mississippi Development Authority and the Mississippi Technology Alliance. By combining the knowledge, competencies and resources of the cooperating MSU units and external partners, this project should lead to significant growth and strengthening of communities, businesses and living standards in many of Mississippi's economically distressed areas.

Many of the program activities and events are already underway. Watch for more information on training and networking events in your area. For more information on the Rural Jobs Accelerator program, contact Bill Martin, FFI Director, phone, 662.325.3348, e-mail, wmartin@cfr.msstate.edu.



FURNITURE BY THE NUMBERS: 2011

Furniture Manufacturing Employment 17,897

**Furniture Manufacturing Average
Annual Wage..... \$30,054**

Furniture Suppliers Employment 22,166

**Furniture Suppliers Average
Annual Wage..... \$36,279**

Source: 2012 Bureau of Labor Statistics
Data tabulated by National Strategic Planning and
Analysis Research Center (nSPARC), 2012.

EXPORT SERVICES AT MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

Mississippi Home Furnishings Catalog

An online catalog designed to showcase Mississippi-made furniture and promote Mississippi home furnishings manufacturers and suppliers is now available at www.ffi.msstate.edu/export. This catalog provides national retailers and international buyers with information about products produced in the state. Through a visual presentation of furniture made in Mississippi, images of products can be selected by specific categories and, for each product, viewers are able to link to company contact information or the manufacturer's website. By using the 'Furniture Manufacturers and Suppliers List,' the catalog can be used as a tool to locate either an individual manufacturer or to find a specific type of manufacturer or supplier in the state. If you are interested in showcasing your products in the Mississippi Home Furnishings Catalog, contact Debbie Miller at dmiller@ffi.msstate.edu or at 662.325.6787.

Getting To Know Your Export Resources

Are you aware of the many resources available to help your company become a successful exporter? Franklin Furniture Institute's Export Resource Service is holding export seminars to introduce manufacturers to many of the resources available to their companies in exporting its products and successfully competing in overseas markets. These resources can help manufacturers research and find the right market for their products, provide help with marketing their products, offer assistance in trade events, provide trade leads from around the world, help companies finance and insure their export transactions, and assist with logistics such as packaging, labeling, documentation, and shipping requirements. The first of these seminars was held at Delta Community College's Capps Technology Center (Indianola) on February 7, 2013.

Export Promotion Partnership

FFI entered into an Export Promotion Partnership with the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service to increase export awareness and coordinate export promotion activities. The goal of this partnership is to ensure that the general public is educated on the economic benefits of exporting by building support for exporting activities and creating an awareness of the resources available to the general public. If you are interested in learning more about a trade and export promotion program, contact Debbie Miller at dmiller@ffi.msstate.edu, 662.325.6787, or Jessica Gordon at Jessica.Gordon@trade.gov, 601.373.0784.

"The Franklin Furniture Institute has demonstrated to be a valuable partner to the MS U.S. Export Assistance Center. Through FFI's visionary attitude, tremendous efforts to establish and maintain strong relationships with its clients and partners, and dedication to exploring and expanding market opportunities for the MS furniture and home furnishings-related manufacturing sector, Mississippi firms are better equipped to compete and win both domestically and abroad." Jessica Gordon, International Trade Specialist, U.S. Department of Commerce, MS Export Assistance Center.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY

Itawamba Community College (ICC) and Mississippi's other community colleges, along with the State's WIN Job Centers, offer many services that benefit the furniture industry through both workforce development and training programs. The Workforce and Education Act of 1994 established a State Workforce Development Council to respond to Mississippi's workforce and employer needs. The Council is composed of 24 public and private sector leaders and 15 member District Workforce Development Councils affiliated with each of Mississippi's community and junior colleges and Workforce Development Centers. The charge of the Council is to meet almost any workforce assessment, training or placement services need in the state.

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998, known as WIA, is an initiative which brings public systems providing services such as post-secondary technical training, employment, job search assistance, job training, retraining, adult literacy and other labor market aids together with closer links to the realities of changing job markets. Under WIA, adults and dislocated workers aged 18 years and over receive increasing levels of service through the WIN Job Centers. The intent of the WIN Job Centers is to simplify all programs under a single, comprehensive system. WIN Job Centers are centrally located to provide easy access to many services in one convenient location.

ICC has been especially responsive to the needs of the furniture industry. Skill competencies of the current and future workforce are being improved through their Workforce Development Program. The ultimate goal of this workforce program is to develop a seamless workforce training system that ensures the presence of a highly skilled workforce, thereby advancing the economic prosperity of the region by supporting existing industries as well as creating new high-skill and high-wage job opportunities.

ICC and the WIN Job Centers provide recruiting and screening of job candidates, proficiency testing, and on-the-job training for many industries, including the furniture industry.

SERVICES AVAILABLE TO EMPLOYERS BY THE MISSISSIPPI WIN CENTERS INCLUDE:

- Database of qualified workers
- Internet access to post job listings and review resumé
- Recruiting and screening of job candidates
- Assistance with writing job descriptions
- Proficiency testing for employees
- On-the-job training information
- Private rooms for interviews
- Up-to-date labor market data and wage information
- Information on Work Opportunity Tax Credits (WOTC)
- Upcoming job fair information
- Information on Rapid Response services
- Forms/guidance for filing a NAFTA or Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) petition
- Information on NAFTA and TAA benefits for employees

ICC also provides funding, through the Workforce Development Program, to **pay company supervisors/trainers to teach employees sewing and upholstery skills.** Through this program, ICC pays an in-house company trainer up to \$35.00 per hour (or their current salary) to train manufacturing employees in sewing and upholstery related skills. The funding is for 60 days or less. ICC and the WIN Job Centers do not actually train sewers and upholsterers at the Community College at this time. Several furniture manufacturers in north Mississippi have taken advantage of this opportunity and are very pleased with the results.

For more information on the training opportunities available at ICC, please contact Leigh Oswald, Workforce Development Project Specialist at the Workforce Development Center in Belden. Reach Lee by phone, 662. 620.5221, or email, lgoswalt@iccms.edu

GO THE DISTANCE: IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO COME TO STATE

Have you ever wanted to finish your undergraduate degree but never had the opportunity? More importantly, have you ever wanted to tell your friends and family that you graduated from Mississippi State University and that you are a proud and True Maroon alum?

Jobs, families, or other reasons may have prevented you from finishing your four-year degree in the past on a university campus, but there is now another way. If you cannot take classes on our Starkville campus but want to be a graduate of MSU, you now have the opportunity. Keep your job. Don't uproot your family. Become a member of the Bulldog Nation. You can do it today, and you can do it online with the Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies (BSIS) degree program.

How does it work? It's simple:

The first part of the program requires that you complete the core curriculum, most of which can be done through distance education at MSU, at an accredited community college, or at any accredited four-year university. The academic courses leading to the Associate of Arts degree at most community colleges meet MSU's core requirements for the BSIS degree program. Students may transfer up to 61 hours of community college course work to MSU.

What's next?

The second part of the program requires that you complete 36 hours of MSU, upper-level concentration classes through distance learning from two or three of the following fields:

- Communication
- Criminology
- General Business
- General Technology
- Geosciences
- History
- Psychology
- Social Work
- Sociology
- Technology (Business or Instructional)

The concentration areas must include 18 hours from two concentrations or 12 hours from three. At least two of the concentrations must be from different academic colleges within the university. For more information, please visit the following website: <http://www.distance.msstate.edu/BSIS/concentrations.html>.

To graduate with a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies, a student must attain 122 hours and maintain a 2.0 MSU GPA and a 2.0 overall GPA.

Distance@STATE can help!

Are You Ready to Join the Bulldog Nation?

If you are interested in the program and would like someone from the Center for Distance Education to look over your transcripts to see how close you are to earning a four-year degree, they can provide you with an obligation-free evaluation. Simply send an unofficial transcript of all of your college course work to Mrs. Glenna Sullivan at gsullivan@distance.msstate.edu.

MSU STUDENTS AWARDED HOME FURNISHINGS SCHOLARSHIPS

Four Mississippi State students in the university's College of Architecture, Art and Design are being honored by major organizations representing the home furnishing industry.

Sophomore interior design majors Emily C Hardin of Calhoun City and Cristen N. Richard of Star, along with junior art/sculpture major Sarah G. Kilpatrick of Mathiston, are receiving individual \$11,155 scholarships from the American Home Furnishings Alliance.

Sophomore interior design major Marguerite Johnson of Ridgeland is this year's selection for the Southeastern Home Furnishings Association's \$2,000 Michael Gilchrist Memorial Scholarship.

AHFA is the world's largest and most influential trade organization serving the home furnishings industry. SHFA is an affiliate of the National Home Furnishings

Association, the country's largest organization representing home furnishings retailers.

"The institute is pleased to be able to secure scholarships for students interested in pursuing a career in the furniture and home furnishings industries," said Bill Martin, director of MSU's Franklin Furniture Institute.

"Given the importance of Mississippi's furniture manufacturing sector, it is important to develop future leaders in one of the state's largest employers," he added.

To qualify, students must be enrolled in the colleges of Architecture, Art and Design, Business, Forest Resources, or Bagley College of Engineering, all partners of the furniture institute. An essay on how they will use their degrees to work in the furniture and home furnishings industries also is required.



(left to right) Bill Martin; Beth R Miller, Director, Interior Design; Cristen Richard; Marguerite Johnson; Emily Hardin; Robert Long, Professor of Art; and Sarah Kilpatrick.

Discrimination based upon race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information or veteran's status is a violation of federal and state law and MSU policy and will not be tolerated. Discrimination based upon sexual orientation or group affiliation is a violation of MSU policy and will not be tolerated.

SAVE THE DATE

Manufacturing Summit

sponsored by American Home Furnishings Alliance

Franklin Furniture Institute

March 27, 2013, Franklin Center, MSU

Featured Speaker: Jack McDougle, Senior Vice President, Council on Competitiveness - the flagship initiative on U.S. Manufacturing Competitiveness, designed to attract, retain and grow manufacturing enterprises in the United States
Panel Discussion on Health Care Issues and Challenges led by Jay Moon, President and CEO of the Mississippi Manufacturing Association

Topics Covered:

Transportation and Labor Issues
Consumer Attitude and Purchase Behaviors
Effect of New Health Care Regulations

Register at <https://www.ahfa.us/registration/mfgsummitregform.html>