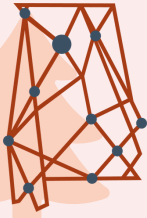


December 2024



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# PULSE CHECK



# 31,000+

ENROLLED



Skills for  
Success

## »»» PILOTS LAUNCHED THIS MONTH

The **Nursery Landscape Worker** course was piloted with **Wallace State Community College Hanceville**, and led by Horticulture Instructor, Jason Bynum. Students learned safety, tools, basic plant needs, plant identification, pruning, pest and disease identification, mower operation, planting and mulching and basic irrigation principles.



# MERRY CHRISTMAS

## NEW COURSE!



**Nursery Landscape Worker**

## NEW COURSE!



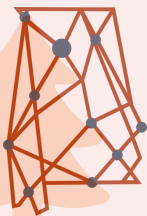
**Machine Operator**

The **Machine Operator** course was piloted by **Southern Union State Community College**, and led by Instructor Alvin McCormick. Students learned how to identify components on a milling machine, safety, operations of a CNC machine, basic mathematics and conversions, and geometric distancing and tolerancing (GDT).

## AVAILABLE COURSES

[TrainForAlabama.com](http://TrainForAlabama.com)





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▶▶▶ **PILOTS LAUNCHED THIS MONTH CONTINUED...**

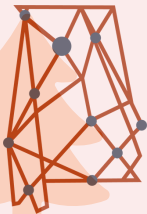
**SECOND CHANCES BEHIND THE FENCE: A UNIQUE LEARNING JOURNEY**

*WRITTEN BY: TOM CHAPPELL*

What does it mean to truly seize a second chance? Tom Chappell, our Career Readiness Coordinator, recently experienced this in an unforgettable way. He attended the **Plumbing Assistant** pilot course at Ingram State Technical College, a place where every student is looking to turn their life around. With his gift for storytelling, Tom shares a raw and moving account of his time behind the fence—learning alongside eight incarcerated individuals who are determined to rebuild their futures. We invite you to read Tom’s story, reflect on its powerful message of redemption and growth, and join us in celebrating the transformative opportunities we’re creating this holiday season.

Have you ever made a bad decision or been "at the wrong place at the wrong time?" I can't count the number of these decisions I have made, nor can I count the number of times I have been somewhere I didn't need to be at a particular time. Because of this, I am so thankful that my God gives me second chances every day to "get it right this time!" I believe that my God also gives these same second chances to anyone who ask for them. I also believe that sometimes we get second chances even when we don't ask for them or even when we don't deserve them. We may not even realize at the time we are being given a second chance. That is what this brief story is about.

Several weeks ago, Houston asked me if I could go to the "Pilot Lab" for the upcoming Plumbing Assistant course. I told him absolutely; I would love to go. I always enjoy going to any and all labs and was especially looking forward to this one. Being the DIY guy I am, I thought selfishly that I could learn some plumbing tips that might help me out around the house. Little did I know how much I would learn! Oh yeah, as it happened, I actually learned a little plumbing as well. When he asked me to go, I also didn't pay attention to where the lab was going to be held. It wasn't until Julie mentioned to me at the ACCA Conference that Lashonda Hails needed a copy of my driver's license for a



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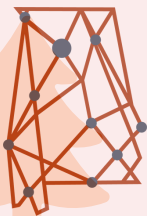
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background check. What! I'm going behind the wall! I had no idea that the course was being held at Ingram State Technical College. I didn't even know where ISTC was located. For those of you that don't know, Ingram State Technical College is located in Deatsville AL, in Elmore county. It is one of Alabama's 24 Community Colleges and the only college in the US that 100 percent of its students are incarcerated. It is located adjacent to the old Draper Correctional Facility and is also adjacent to the new billion-dollar, 4000 inmate facility being built. At this point, I am a little nervous but excited.

I woke up Tuesday morning as I do most any morning of the week. The only difference was that it was a little earlier than usual! It was also different because I was leaving for the rest of the week. The plans called for me to be gone until after our Christmas Party Friday afternoon. I took my time getting ready and packing for the week. As usual, I had waited until the last minute to pack! I showered, drank my coffee and talked with my wife as I got ready to leave for the week. I got to choose my clothes, changing my mind a couple of times. As I do most mornings, I got distracted and got involved in something else causing

me to have to rush to gather everything together and hit the road in order to be at Ingram when the class started. My wife is good at reminding me every morning that I need to focus on what I am doing so this sort of thing won't happen! Again, I make bad decisions every day! I looked through the refrigerator for something to eat, settling in on a piece of cold, left-over pizza to go with my coffee. I hit the road in one of the state-owned fleet vehicles issued to me and headed south to J.F. Ingram State Technical College. I even stopped on the way and had a break.

One hundred fifty miles south of me in Elmore County is the Frank Lee Community Based Facility and Community Work Center. There, while I am heading to Ingram, are eight guys getting up with a couple of hundred other guys. They are rolling out of their dorm-style bunks and into the restrooms that they share with the same couple of hundred other guys every morning. After going through their daily hygiene routines, they will all put on the same state issued khakis with elastic waistbands, white t-shirts and khaki work shirts. After they all parade into the same kitchen, they will all have the same breakfast they have every day.



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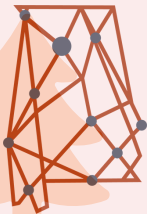
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Because it is cold this week, they will put on their state issued khaki, quilted jackets. Some have toboggans to cover their heads to save some of their body heat. Thats it! No choices, same routine every day; however, today it's different. Weeks ago, these eight inmates chose to enroll in the pilot lab course for our new Plumbing Assistant course. The pilot lab is to be held at Ingram State Technical College at the Draper Instructional Service Center, five miles from their location. They will get on the state-owned bus and head to ISTC. Oh yeah, they wanted this opportunity so bad they knew they would have to be strip searched when they returned each day! These guys are ready to learn!

Most, if not all of you probably don't realize that I really like prison movies, documentaries and history related to the subject. I love movies like "Cool Hand Luke," "The Longest Yard," Shawshank Redemption," and "Escape From Alcatraz." When my wife and I went to San Francisco, my favorite experience was touring Alcatraz. Some of you may have also seen these movies or others like them and noticed that the characters are always similar. It was no different Tuesday morning in Mr. John Thompson's plumbing shop inside

the razor wire topped fences of Ingram. Into the shop paraded eight guys I have seen in every movie! There was Pops, the older gentleman with graying hair coming out from under his toboggan. I can visualize him on the yard in a group surrounded by younger inmates discussing who knows what. There was the "Pretty Boy." Clean cut, athletic build, award winning smile! I can see him on the weight yard. Next, the tough guy! Athletic build, stern face, no smile. I would be nervous to be alone with him. Oh yeah, here comes the Hispanic guy covered in tattoos. The next pair, I would refer to as "wannabes" (no disrespect meant.) They were smaller in stature but very "wirey" looking. They moved about as if to look as if they were much more than they seemed. The other two were of-average build and no real features that made them stand out in any way. What happened in the next couple of hours and the next two days was amazing and I believe God had his hand in the middle of it!

Mr. John Thompson, whom I met when I first arrived at the college, was the instructor. He made introductions and went over some guidelines and allowed the guys to get some warm instant coffee before the course started.



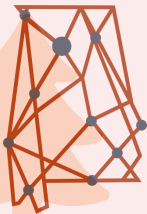
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As the course began, he told them what we were going to be doing for the next two days. There were stares and nods and some looks of I'm not sure I want to be here even though they all chose to be here. John has been a plumber for over 30 years and an instructor at Ingram State for around 7-8 years. Physically, he is smaller in stature than most of the students, but you can tell he definitely takes care of himself. Personality wise, he is larger than life! John had told me before the class started there was a different language spoken at the camps; however, he knows he is well versed in that language. Well versed, heck, I think he helped write the language. It wasn't that the words were different, it was the way they were delivered. John is a master instructor as well as a master plumber.

As I said previously, what I saw over the first few hours amazed me. Pops didn't know a thing about reading a tape measure, much less anything about quarters and halves. We learned pretty quickly that Pops learned better by touching and seeing than listening and reading and really caught on quickly. We learned that the "Pretty Boy" was actually very smart and experienced as well. He was very well spoken and acts

as an inmate ambassador for the college when VIPs visit. He is also in the HVAC program at the Frank Lee Camp Main Campus adjacent to Frank Lee Work Release. We saw the tough guy open up and actually smile and talk. He is enrolled in the Barbering program at Main Campus. We learned that the "Hispanic guy" was a tattoo artist from Texas and had done a little plumbing before coming to Alabama. We learned the one of the two "wannbes" worked as a baker in the kitchen and was taking Cabinetry courses. The other one was good with fire! He has an arson charge! The two other "average guys" were not so average after all. One worked on boats in the "Marine Technology" course and the other had worked with his grandfather in the plumbing business many years ago while in the free world. You want to talk about some learning this week!! There was also a lot of plumbing that was learned as well. The guys were identifying plumbing tools, they were soldering copper tubing with silver. They cut and glued PVC pipe and learned how to "set toilets." They learned how to connect PEX tubing and even how to thread black iron pipe. I'm sure they can now find a water leak in the house, and some will even remember how to repair it. It was an awesome two



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days!

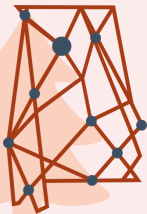
What started as a pilot lab also ended as a pilot lab (by the way, the course is going to be a good one.) More importantly, for me, it was two days of breaking through some barriers. Yes, these guys have made some bad decisions in their lives. Some have even made many really bad decisions, repeatedly! Guess what, so have I. We provided them with an opportunity to learn some skills that will help them when their time is over behind the fence, and they are free to make choices again. I am hopeful that some of the comments I heard, some of the lightbulbs I saw click on and some of the stern faced, hardnosed features I saw go soft with remain in their minds.

What started with some intense stereotypes ended with handshakes and gratitude for allowing us to offer our course to them and gratitude from them for allowing them to take our course. We made lives better Tuesday and Wednesday at Ingram State Technical College.

I also heard (and more importantly remembered ) something that John (instructor) told them, and I really liked

it. I told him I was going to borrow it. He told them when asked about certain plumbing questions and situations, **IF YOU KNOW BETTER, DO BETTER!** We are providing opportunities for students to know better so they can do better!! This can apply to all phases of my life. Yours too probably.

**WHEN GIVEN THE  
CHANCE TO KNOW  
BETTER, WE CAN ALL  
DO BETTER—AND IN  
DOING SO,  
TRANSFORM LIVES,  
INCLUDING OUR OWN.  
THIS HOLIDAY  
SEASON, LET’S  
CELEBRATE THE  
POWER OF SECOND  
CHANCES AND THE  
HOPE THEY BRING  
FOR BRIGHTER  
FUTURES.**



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▶▶▶ **PILOTS LAUNCHED THIS MONTH CONTINUED...**

The **Forklift Operator** course was piloted with **Wallace Community College Dothan**, and led by Gill Soley. Students from Dale County High School learned how to load and unload materials using a forklift along with inventory management skills and securing freight inside of trailers.



**NEW COURSE!**



**Forklift Operator**

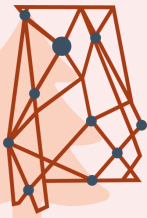
**COURSES LAUNCHING IN 2025**

**Pilot Phase - Launch in Progress**

- Concrete Mixer Truck Driver - Chattahoochee Valley
- Nursing Support Technician - Wallace State - Hanceville
- Motor Grader Operator - Dothan
- Water Treatment Operator Grade 2

**Courses in Progress**

- CDL A Revamp
- CDL B Revamp
- Biotechnician
- Propane Technician
- Asphalt Lab Tech
- Paver Operator
- Operator Tech Automotive
- Drone Operator



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# Happy Holidays



**from our team to yours!**



Visit our YouTube page for inspiring success stories from Skills for Success participants.



## INNOVATION UNPLUGGED

Stay connected with the latest in innovation through our 'Innovation Unplugged' podcast.



December 2024

# NOVEMBER INNOVATION UNPLUGGED RECAP



## Episode 42

Crafting Content: Behind the Scenes Collaboration with Seed Creative



## Episode 43

Bridging The Gap: Empowering Local Leaders and Strengthening Communities with Mary Jackson

Partnership Highlight: Alabama League of Municipalities



## Episode 44

Healthcare Education: Exploring Career Pathways in Alabama with Kenneth Kirkland

College: Calhoun Community College



**A PODCAST WAS NOT RELEASED ON MONDAY, DECEMBER 23RD**



## Episode 45

Machinery and Mentorship: Shaping Student Success with Shelton State Heavy Equipment Instructors

College: Shelton State Community College



**LINKS WILL BE LIVE DECEMBER 30TH**