

## RONALD HAUGEN

---

**From:** Morales, Andrew, GOV [Andrew.Morales@state.nm.us]  
**Sent:** Monday, February 05, 2007 1:07 PM  
**To:** RONALD HAUGEN  
**Subject:** FYI Bridge Program

### WIA funds aid training program

By Teri Hope

Article Launched: 01/29/2007 08:54:55 PM MST

Marking more than two years of successful operation, Doña Ana Community College's Technical Bridge Manufacturing Program presented highlights of its program, now teaching its third class of students, during the Youth Council Meeting earlier this month. With an initial \$140,000 provided through the Workforce Investment Act and Carl Perkins, and another \$25,000 allocated by the Southwestern Area Workforce Development Board (SAWDB) last spring, the high-tech program has already changed the lives of many young people living in one of the poorest regions in the country.

**The Gadsden Bridge Program was also featured by the Department of Education in Washington, D.C., as a model for future programs nationwide.** "This program gives young people hope, lets them know they can succeed, that it is possible," said Vince Thomas, program coordinator through the Doña Ana Community College and New Mexico State University. He noted that many youth from the Gadsden region, in particular, feel that they don't have many options for their future after high school, with many reluctant even to consider attending a secondary educational institute. This is an attitude among students not uncommon in the SAWDB's seven-county region — which

---

#### Advertisement

---

includes Catron, Doña Ana, Grant, Hidalgo, Luna, Sierra, and Socorro - because of the region's unique economic and rural conditions.

The program was launched in Gadsden on Jan. 15, 2005 in response to New Mexican manufacturers who expressed concern about their hiring needs and the lack of skilled laborers in the region, U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman asked his local staff to help link education with employment opportunities. **Gov. Bill Richardson also offered his support, directing his local staff to help create and launch this program. He identified Gadsden Independent School District as the focal point for the pilot program because of its unique rural and border concerns and growing employment opportunities.**

The first class of 16 graduated from the program on Aug. 9 with every student expressing a desire to continue their education and attend secondary school; which is a complete turnaround from their initial reaction to the question concerning their plans for the future. This change is also one of the best indicators of the program's success.

Five students from the first class were also able to find jobs with ADC Telecommunications, a manufacturing company in the Santa Teresa Industrial Park. Thomas noted that he ran into one of these students who was "simply thrilled to death" with his ongoing employment. "He said to me that if it had not been for the program he wouldn't be where he is now."

The recognition of this high-tech training program, "which is built on a triple helix," is based on the success of bringing together education and government to meet the hiring needs of local industries, according to Jerry Welch, program administrator and member of the SAWDB's Youth Council. "All indications are that it will be a premiere model for the nation," he added.

**With 17 students from Gadsden High School and 11 from the Santa Teresa High School participating in the third class, which began in August and will continue through the end of the current school year, the program is already garnering added interest from both students and local businesses. Organizers developed a curriculum that supports many different types of manufacturing activities and ensures that all students have a chance to succeed while earning both high school and college credit, even if they decide ultimately not to go into manufacturing. There is also a direct link between the students and employers, with programs providing work experience opportunities at each level and employers providing preferential hiring to the program's graduates.**

The industry-driven program's success is also accurately credited to the efforts made by the students themselves, who jumped at the chance to participate and are now planning to carry it into other aspects of their lives.

Teri Hope is the SAWDB's Outreach Technical Specialist. She can be reached at 505-744-4857 or by visiting [www.swjobconnect.org](http://www.swjobconnect.org), where you will also find an archive of all previously published articles. Visit your local office of the Department of Labor for access to computers and the Internet, and ask about Workforce Investment opportunities.

**Andrew Morales**  
Office of the Governor  
505 South Main, STE 145

2/5/2007