



# NEWS Release

Aransas County Courthouse • 2840 Hwy. 35 N. • Rockport, TX 78372

**CONTACT:** Deanna Spruce, Aransas County Public Information Officer, [pio@aransascounty.org](mailto:pio@aransascounty.org), (361) 790-9496

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**MEDIA, PLEASE CONTACT:**

Deanna Spruce, Public Information Officer, Aransas County (210) 639-2340

Lorette Williams, Executive Director of Communication and Marketing, Del Mar College (361) 698-1351

Barbara Gurtner, Marketing Coordinator, Aransas County Partnership EDC (361) 790-7952

Vicki Pitluk, Community Relations Director, City of Rockport (361) 463-8591

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION AWARDS \$1.7M FOR ARANSAS COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP CENTER**

(ROCKPORT, TX) · The United States Congressional Delegation for Aransas County announced that Aransas County, in cooperation with Del Mar College and the Aransas County Partnership Economic Development Corporation, is the recipient of a United States Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration grant in the amount of \$1.7 million dollars.

The award will assist Aransas County in acquiring and renovating an existing building that will house a workforce development and entrepreneurship center. The establishment of this center is a critical element of the community's economic development program to diversify the economy, create resilience, and promote sustainable business through regional workforce training. It is anticipated that a workforce development program will create, sustain and retain a viable workforce while aligning local business needs with skills in the workforce. The program will also facilitate learning marketable skills, create career pathways and advancement while enhancing career awareness through education. It is expected to connect skilled workers with employers as well as creating local entrepreneurs and targeting specific business types.

The total cost of the project is estimated at \$2,138,731. Since Hurricane Harvey, Aransas County and its community partners have been working diligently on infrastructure grants and other approaches to facilitate recovery and strengthen the economy. Aransas County Judge, C.H. "Burt" Mills Jr. commented, "The establishment of a workforce development center is a major step in the recovery from the devastating effects of Hurricane Harvey. This project would not have been possible if not for strong commitments from our Economic

Development Corporation and Del Mar College.”

The announcement was made in Rockport, Texas on January 19, 2021. “Aransas County has come a long way since Hurricane Harvey and continued recovery depends on economic development and rebuilding. I was pleased to write a letter of support for this grant last year, as it will bring important workforce training to our district while stimulating private investment. I look forward to the resulting economic growth in the region.” – U.S. Congressman Michael Cloud.

“With the help of community, resilience and sheer hard work, Texans have come a long way since Hurricane Harvey hit. Scars of its devastation still show throughout our state. I’m thankful for this federal grant to Aransas County to enhance local workforce training and create local jobs.”- U.S. Senator John Cornyn.

The grant opportunity was identified in the spring of last year by Russell Franques with Texas A&M Coastal Bend Business Innovation Center. The Center, in conjunction with IC<sup>2</sup> of The University of Texas at Austin, has been working with the community on economic recovery and facilitated a series of community meetings and focus groups called “Communities as a Start-Up” initiative. Workforce development is also included in the community’s adopted Economic Development Action Plan as well as the Long-Term Recovery Plan. At the request of the Aransas County Alliance Local Government Corporation, the Aransas County Partnership EDC formed a grant exploratory team, chaired by John Jackson, to give advice and work with Long Term Recovery and Del Mar College on project viability, space planning, scope of work and educational programming. The Aransas County Long Team Recovery Team wrote and filed the application.

“I was honored to chair the EDC Exploratory Committee for this workforce development dream. Early in the process last June, our hand-picked committee of 12 local stakeholders visited the Del Mar College West Campus and were literally “blown away” with the quality of the programming and facilities right here in our back yard. On that day, the seeds were sown for a solid partnership with Del Mar College to bring that training and expertise to Aransas County. This will be recognized for generations as a pivotal accomplishment for the EDC and Aransas County,” Jackson noted.

Aransas County has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Del Mar College for operation of the workforce development center. Aransas County will retain ownership of the building and associated land. Del Mar College has well established, proven programs and expertise for operations as well as established business relationships in the Coastal Bend area. Lenora Keas, Executive Vice President and Chief Operation Officer for Del Mar College, stated, “Del Mar College welcomes the opportunity to work with Aransas County, the EDC, and the community leadership to provide local workforce development programs. These programs are unique to the region, in demand by employers and focus on what is needed to be successful in today’s economy. As a graduate of Rockport-Fulton High School, I personally appreciate this opportunity and see the challenges facing the young people coming out of high school. The courses being offered in Rockport will give people of all ages the skills for a high paying job, personal enrichment or entry level courses to continue with college degrees.”

Expected participation in the programs include the following: high schoolers, young adults, those who are currently employed who wish to improve their skillset, those who are employed but do not have the skillsets they need in the changing economy, and even those wishing to get back into the workforce. Del Mar plans to offer college credit/dual credit courses, certifications, continuing education, apprenticeships and internships.

Initial course offerings are anticipated to be in health science and allied health, geospatial technology, industrial technology, maritime programs, public safety and arts. Aransas County ISD has an existing relationship with Del Mar College at Rockport-Fulton High School and is looking forward to this expanded educational and training opportunity. Dr. Joshua Garcia, Superintendent of Aransas County Independent School District notes, "This is an incredible opportunity for the students of ACISD to earn industry-based certifications aligned with our community needs."

"In many strategic planning sessions over the years, the topic of workforce development surfaces every time. It is truly exciting to hear that the EDA is providing the necessary funding to make this project happen." - Diane Probst, President/CEO of the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Jackson and Jatin Bhakta, local Rockport business owner also conducted an aggressive private fundraising campaign to meet the 20% match required for the grant. The goal was met within two weeks, thanks to the phenomenal response and support by individual, foundation and corporate contributions.

Aransas County plans to acquire the property and start renovations this year. The project should take approximately 18 months. The facility will be located on Highway 35 Business North, near the high school. It will consist of approximately 16,000 square feet of classrooms, labs and additional space.

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