

JCJC's MI-BEST program graduate recognized statewide

Written By: Teresa McCreery

Email Address: teresa.mccreery@jcjc.edu

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ELLISVILLE – Mississippi's community colleges were recently given a new tool to help those who want to improve their success in the job market with a three-year grant called MI-BEST or Mississippi Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training. Over the last year, students were able to finish their high school equivalency test while also learning a skill, like welding, health care assistant, commercial truck driving, commercial and residential maintenance, business office systems and health care data technology. Jones County Junior College's MI-BEST graduate and Costa Rican native, Alonso Hernandez shared his success story recently at a statewide reception in Jackson involving Governor Phil Bryant, who expressed interest in Hernandez's future.

Hernandez shared with his Facebook and JCJC family, "What a cool man (referring to Governor Bryant). Part of my speech was about my career path and after I was done talking about hot rods and motorcycles he came up to me to talk about his Harley and his '55 Chevy truck. He was wearing these killer boots with the Mississippi Seal on them and he was just so down to earth. It's been awesome being in school. I've gotten to not only be on TV and meet cool people but also explore what I can do and fall in love with my trade more and more!"

The Ellisville resident moved to the United States when he was 22, to marry his missionary wife which he met in Costa Rica. His Costa Rican GED was not accepted by American colleges so he decided to get his High School Equivalency at JCJC. After talking to an advisor or "Navigator," Hernandez discovered through the MI-BEST program he could not only get his H.S. Equivalency at JCJC, but he could also learn to weld. Within a year, he has completed his GED, the employability skills program, obtained a Silver Level on the Career Readiness Certificate, 15-college credits in welding and he has earned a certificate in welding. He began working on his associate's degree in welding last August while simultaneously beginning the automotive technology program. Hernandez also has plans of getting a business degree at Jones.

"Alonso is very proud of himself because when he dropped out of school at 15-years of age, he never imagined he would have a GED from two different countries and major in two and possibly three programs in college. He has worked very hard and has proven to himself and others, that you can succeed if you put your mind to it," said JCJC's MI-BEST program director, Wendy Evans.

The MI-BEST program is an expanded model for Dropout Recovery funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation through a \$6 million, three-year grant that was awarded to the Mississippi Community College Board in 2015. Program participants are able to get workforce and community college credentials and a career path-way to a middle-skill occupation where there is a labor demand, at no cost to the student. Interested students can have their skills assessed and discover a skill-path with the help of an advisor, at any time of the year. There is not a beginning or ending date to earn the H.S. Equivalency or skills training through the MI-BEST program at JCJC.

To learn more about the MI-BEST program, contact Wendy Evans at 601-477-2228 or email at wendy.evans@jcc.edu or Jennifer Hughes at 601-477-3287 or jennifer.hughes@jcc.edu.