When a local motocross training facility mentioned a need for additional mechanics, Southwest Georgia Technical College created a certificate program to teach just that skillset. Such community collaborations between local business and industry and educational institutions have been advanced by the work of the Grady County Archway Partnership. To assist in further addressing workforce development needs, Grady County has secured a Conversion Charter for Cairo High School, which led to securing a College and Career Academy.

In the summer of 2011, key leaders from 13 community institutions and business and industry, who form the Grady County Archway Partnership Executive Committee, came together to kick-off the Archway Partnership process. Their first project was a well-attended, community-wide listening session to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing Grady County. Through this process, citizens identified “Education for a Quality Work Force” as one of four priority issues impacting community and economic development.

The next step was to create a collaborative working group of education and workforce stakeholders and invite them to the table for dialogue, networking, assessment, partnership and ultimately an action plan. To that end, stakeholders from the public school system, higher education, business and industry, media, local government, state agencies, public library, and the hospital/health care providers have come together to form a regional partnership to address local education and workforce development issues.

For the past two years, the Archway Partnership’s Education for a Quality Work Force Issue Work Group and Executive Committee have achieved two major goals.

1. The first goal was to assist the school system in establishing charter school status and a College and Career Academy at Cairo High School. Charter status allows for increased dual enrollment, academic and career training flexibility, enhanced collaborations with local higher education institutions, and expanded partnerships with local business and industry.

2. The second goal was to establish a local business and industry advisory board to identify workplace trends, promote opportunities for student learning in the workplace, assist college and career pathway implementation, and seek private funding (or other funding resources) to support educational efforts.

“The Archway Partnership process brought us together on the same field with regional post-secondary partners and the business community to leverage our collective resources to achieve our goals for the Charter and College and Career Academy for Cairo High School. We received a $3.2 million dollar grant for the construction and renovation of our career training center...that is significant boost for a small rural county.” Lee Bailey, Superintendent, Grady County Schools.

**Advancing Community Priorities:** The achievement of the Cairo High School Conversion Charter and the College and Career Academy helped to address the community-identified need for improved student educational opportunities, regional partnerships and workforce development in Grady County.