



**Wharton County  
Junior College**

# NEWS RELEASE

Office of Marketing and Communications  
911 Bolling Highway  
Wharton, Texas 77488

Toll free: 1.800.561.9252, ext. 6322  
Office: 979.532.6322  
Fax: 979.532.6493

---

## AN INCREASE OF OPPORTUNITY

*WCJC to expand Process Technology and EMS programs at Richmond campus*

WHARTON, TEXAS – Wharton County Junior College's Process Technology and Emergency Medical Services programs will expand to Fort Bend County this fall in the hopes of providing students with better opportunities.

By offering the programs at WCJC's Richmond campus, the college will be able to collaborate with a wide array of industries and healthcare facilities, said Dr. Amy LaPan, WCJC's Dean of Vocational Instruction.

The end result is more intensive training and better employment possibilities for graduates.

"We are expanding the profiles of these programs so we can appeal to additional organizations," LaPan said. "We are increasing the opportunities for our students."

EMS students, for example, will be able to utilize a host of Fort Bend County hospitals and emergency care agencies as "clinical sites" in order to broaden their skills, said EMS Program Director Gary Bonewald.

"We will have a greater presence in these facilities and will be able to provide our students with additional training that will eventually lead to a better quality of care," Bonewald said.

Process Technology students will benefit as well, having "additional exposure to other industries," LaPan said. Process Technology is a two-year program currently housed at WCJC's Bay City campus.

Offering classes in a high-growth area like Fort Bend County further helps WCJC reach a new crop of potential students, said Process Technology Program Director Willie Myles.

"The purpose of expanding the Process Technology program to the Richmond campus is to make it more convenient for prospective students living in the Harris County southwest and Fort Bend communities the opportunity to obtain an education that has a very promising future and pays extremely well while minimizing travel time to do so," Myles said.

Plans are to pattern the Richmond campus' program after the one currently being offered in Bay City. The program will have its own advisory board – comprised of area business and industry representatives – and teaching staff, Myles noted.

Filling the classes is not anticipated to be a problem. In addition to commanding great salaries – for 2014 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics lists the median salary of a chemical plant operator as \$55,900 with the possibility of earning upwards of \$78,000 – Process Technology graduates normally have little issue with finding employment. According to Myles, 80 percent of program graduates find employment within 90 days of graduation. That number is expected to increase as the petrochemical and refinery industries expand and as older employees reach retirement age.

Myles said projections indicate that more than 81,000 jobs will be created by 2020 to support the Texas chemical industry.

“Process Technology is an education that pays,” Myles said. “And currently the demand for Process Technicians is very strong.”

Like Process Technology, the EMS program will fill a need by expanding its program at the Richmond campus. Although a basic-level Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) class is already being offered in Richmond, beginning this fall that will expand to a half dozen basic EMT courses and one advanced EMT class. A dedicated classroom and lab space have been set aside for these courses, and Bonewald said a full-time staff member will be hired to help oversee and instruct the expanded program.

Bonewald said there are currently no colleges offering such training inside Fort Bend County.

“We’re trying to fill a void,” he said.

EMS graduates are well suited for a variety of careers. Bonewald said there are roughly 20 private EMS providers in Fort Bend County alone – and that doesn’t include larger services like Fort Bend County EMS and the Sugar Land Fire Department.

“A lot of our students also get hired for Emergency Room positions and for minor emergency surgery clinics,” Bonewald said.

Bonewald noted that the majority of students have job offers before they graduate or are already employed by an agency and are seeking additional certification. He said WCJC graduates have an impeccable reputation for excellence.

“These emergency providers are impressed with our current students and are very welcoming of our future graduates,” he said.

Starting salaries vary widely depending upon the county and the type of service. For 2014, the Bureau of Labor Statistics placed the average salary of a paramedic at just over \$31,000, although larger departments could pay as much as \$54,000. EMS graduates who choose to seek additional training in order to become nurses, physician’s assistants or doctors do even better.

Bonewald said up to 50 percent of program graduates will continue their education.

“A lot of times they are using EMS as a stepping stone to bigger and better things,” he said.

The same can be said of Process Technology graduates. LaPan said many corporations will pay employees with associate of applied science degrees to go back and obtain a bachelor’s.

“The EMS and Process Technology programs can serve as the basis for higher-level careers,” LaPan said. “Education and career development are these days occurring more in tandem.”

For more information on WCJC’s Process Technology or EMS programs, visit the college’s website at: [www.wcjc.edu](http://www.wcjc.edu)

# # #