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Bridging the gap, Guam ACTE summit aims to connect education with industry needs

WALTER ULLOA | THE GUAM DAILY POST

FEB 26, 2025

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HERMOSA: Charlie Hermosa, a Task Force Committee chair, speaks at the 2024 Year of the Veteran Kick-Off Event at Tur Thursday, Feb. 29, 2024. *Frank San Nicolas/The Guam Daily Post*

FRANK SAN NICOLAS

As Guam's economy evolves, educators and industry leaders are seeking ways to prepare students for the workforce of tomorrow. The Guam Association for Career

and Technical Education (GuACTE) is stepping up to bridge this gap with its annual Career and Technical Education (CTE) Summit, scheduled for this week.

Under the theme "Education and the Working Economy," the three-day event begins on Thursday with a mixer at Cars Plus, followed by panel discussions on Friday at the University of Guam lecture hall and concluding with workshops on Saturday at John F. Kennedy High School, according to a press release from the association.

The Guam Daily Post spoke to Charlie Hermosa, the newly appointed president of GuACTE, who emphasized the summit's primary goal: connecting teachers with industry representatives to better understand workforce needs.

"One of the things that we want to do is equip our teachers, counselors and professionals with a knowledge base of what the industry looks like, what their needs are and what their issues are," Hermosa said. "That includes the soft skills our students should be learning."

Those soft skills, according to Hermosa, include fundamentals like punctuality. "The number one thing when it comes to work is showing up on time," he said.

The summit comes at a pivotal moment for Guam's economy, with evolving industry sectors requiring new skill sets from graduates entering the workforce.

"CTE literally represents that bridge because it creates the skill sets the next generation needs so they can enter the workforce and work in the data centers, the drone industry, the hospitality industry and the new cybersecurity industry," Hermosa said.

The event follows a Feb. 7 proclamation signing by Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero, designating February as Career and Technical Education Month. This official endorsement underscores the administration's recognition of CTE's importance to Guam's economic future, Hermosa said.

Ecosystem

Hermosa envisions creating an "ecosystem" where schools develop specific skills that align with industry needs, pointing to Tiyan High School's academy model, which focuses on different pillars, as an example of this approach.

"That allows them to focus on certain skill sets students will need when they graduate," he said. "It's not just about having them graduate; it's about making sure they are ready to enter the workforce."

Deputy Superintendent Joe Sanchez has indicated strong support from the Guam Department of Education, according to Hermosa.

"GDOE has made it a priority. They are one of the main sponsors of this event, and Deputy Superintendent Joe Sanchez has been very clear that the message he's getting from teachers and principals is that they're looking for something like this," Hermosa said.

One practical outcome Hermosa hopes for is that teachers gain concrete examples of why their subjects matter in the real world.

"When you have a discussion between a teacher and an industry leader, for example, the teacher might hear that a company is looking for someone with a strong background in English, like grant writers. The teacher can then go back to the students and say, 'This is why you need to learn English and be proficient at writing,'" Hermosa said.

Networking

The summit kicks off with Thursday's mixer at Cars Plus in Mongmong-Toto-Maite from 5:30 to 8 p.m., offering a rare opportunity for direct educator-industry interaction.

"A lot of times, at industry expos or forums, teachers can't attend," Hermosa said. "We want to give them an opportunity to meet these professionals."

Friday's panel discussion at UOG's lecture hall from 5 to 8 p.m. will feature Roseanne Jones, economist and UOG dean of the School of Business and Public Administration, as keynote speaker, along with nine panelists representing Guam's diverse economic sectors.

"The discussions will touch on topics that are very relevant to teachers right now," Hermosa said, including "the evolution of teaching, what that looks like and how it aligns with the needs of different industries."

Saturday's workshops at JFK High School from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. will cover career pathways, college preparation and educational trends, including innovation's impact on learning.

"We want teachers to go home thinking, 'I cannot wait to go to class on Monday,'" Hermosa said. "But the motivation doesn't end there - this is just the beginning. We have a firm commitment from GDOE that they will work closely with us."

Measurements

GuACTE plans to survey participants after each session to gather feedback and measure outcomes.

"We want teachers to walk away with something substantial, something tangible they can use within their current curriculum," Hermosa said.

Ultimately, he hopes teachers will leave with three key takeaways: learning about industries they didn't know existed on Guam, making connections with industry representatives they can invite to their classrooms and discovering new teaching techniques they can implement immediately.

According to Sam Mabini Young, CTE summit chair and founding president of GuACTE, more than 130 educators are expected to attend throughout the three-day event.

As Hermosa made clear, the summit's impact will be ensuring that students are prepared for life after school. "It's not just about putting a diploma in their hands," Hermosa said. "It's about making sure they're ready to enter the workforce. That is the key."

For those interested in participating, registration information for all events can be found on the Guam ACTE website at www.guamacte.org.

Walter Ulloa
