

Texas City-La Marque Chamber of Commerce  
Chamber Express Entry – Texas City ISD Industrial Trades Center (ITC)

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When Kirk Broiles, Chamber Board Chairman, asked me to write about my perspective regarding the Texas City ISD Industrial Trades Center (ITC) I was honored, and somehow also felt it was serendipity at work. He was looking for the viewpoint of a local retired engineer involved with the Community Advisory Council (CAC). As coincidence would have it, my high school; Belén Catholic School in Cuba run by the Order of Jesuits, had an on-campus vocational center.

As history goes, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Jesuits decided to relocate to the suburbs of Havana and build a new Catholic School. It was built at a cost of more than one and a half million dollars. Included in the same campus, “la Escuela Electro Mecánica Belén” - the Belén Electro Mechanical School was developed and operated as a vocational/technical school. It was quickly referred to as the “la Universidad Obrera de Belén” or Belén Laborers University with a mission to have the workforce develop needed vocational skills and become licensed/certified technicians.

One of the innovative benefits of having “la Escuela Electro Mecánica Belén” on-campus with our high school, is that in the evening, classes were made available to prepare those who needed help passing the required entrance exam. These preparatory classes covering such topics as math, geometry, mechanical drawing, English and other basic courses, were conducted by many of us high school juniors and seniors as part of a school ministry program.

Graduates of the “la Escuela Electro Mecánica Belén” became technicians in automotive mechanics, radio, refrigeration, electricity, television, and several other trades offered.

While it is clear that the concept of “la Escuela Electro Mecánica Belén” was different to the current model developed for the TCISD ITC, it met the needs of the times. The salient point is that even back then; there was an awareness of the importance and need of vocational education.

That was our vocational school then; the beginning of today’s Industrial Trades Center. Unfortunately, on May 3, 1961, the Colegio de Belen complex in Havana Cuba was confiscated by the Castro regime.

So it is amazing for me that after 58 years, I can see the good fortune of the historical cycle coming through Texas City with the development of the Texas City ISD Industrial Trades Center. It is an investment with untold future potential helping fill much needed educational niches; allowing our students to develop skills and expertise in their God-given talent areas.