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Wesson News

SPOTLIGHT

**2026 State
Legislative Focus**
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Volume 14, Number 1

"Your Community. Your News. Your Paper."

January, 2026

Traveling to do small town government right

By Bob Arnold

When locals visit Town Hall, they often bump into City Clerk Angela Hester embarking on another trip or returning from one.

Hester, who joined Wesson government in 2017 as Court Clerk and Deputy City Clerk and took over as City Clerk not long afterwards, didn't know at the time that she was signing up for all the meetings and associated travel that are part of the job. No one told her to buy a set of durable luggage, but packing and unpacking bags and waiting at airports is a constant for Hester to keep pace with the demands of a working environment that changes every day with new laws and governmental change.

"I need to keep up," Hester affirms. "It's about making sure we do government right in Wesson. These aren't pleasure trips. I am learning and working most of the time at the meetings I attend and participate in."

Hester attends conferences and trainings and plays leadership roles in the Mississippi Municipal Clerks and Tax Collectors Association (MMCTCA), the Mississippi Municipal Court Clerks Association (MMCCA) and the International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC).

MMCTCA, including municipal clerks who serve as tax collectors in their municipalities or towns, provides a forum for discussion of problems common to municipal clerks and tax collectors and solving them through exchange of ideas and experiences, promotes the general welfare of Mississippi municipalities and upgrades the benefits, welfare



Hester

Special to Wesson News

and standards of its individual members. Hester attends its spring, fall and winter conferences and serves as treasurer of the organization. In spring 2026, the organization will conduct IIMC training to certify state city clerks.

Hester has served as vice president of MMCCA and will become its president in 2026. The organization serves the crucial administrative officers, who are the record keepers, financial officers, and facilitators for municipal courts, responsible for managing dockets, processing cases, collecting fines/fees, administering oaths, preparing for court, and maintaining official city records, essentially linking the court, city government, and the public. It provides online problem-solving discussions of issues common to its more than 300 members and hosts an annual summer conference, which Hester attends.

IIMC is the leading professional organization for city/town clerks, secretaries, and recorders worldwide, founded in 1947 to enhance their professionalism through education, networking, and Certified Municipal Clerk (CMC) and Master Municipal Clerk (MMC) programs. It provides resources, training, and conferences to support clerks in managing records, conducting elections, and supporting local government to assure high standards of public service.

IIMC awarded Hester its CMC designation and she will attend its May 17-21, 2026, annual conference in Reno, Nevada, to continue work on her MMC.

"The CMC is more than a pin, a certificate and three letters at the

Cont. on page 4

Codes & ordinances 2026 government focus

Special to Wesson News

Wesson town government during 2026 will focus not so much on big projects, but on the smaller equally important tasks of enforcing codes and ordinances, says City Clerk Angela Hester.

In 2025, the town started planning

and implementing street paving and replaced its old water meters. Weather delayed completion of street paving, but it will resume according to the plans approved by the Board of Aldermen. The water meter replacements were completed.

This year, Wesson Enforcement Officer Terry Channel will continue

identifying properties that need to be cleaned, including debris removal and repair or demolition of dilapidated structures. The process started slowly last year. Channel will visit property owners and explain what actions they need to take, and public hearings will be held as required.

Mayor Alton Shaw has assured af-

fected property owners that the town wants to work with them in determining what they need to do and to comply easily over a reasonable time frame.

Ordinances that need attention will vary, with a new dog leash law the most immediate one, Hester says.

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Copiah County under burn ban

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Dangerously dry and windy conditions that have increased wildfire risk have prompted an immediate burn ban issued on January 3 for Copiah County.

The ban encompasses rural areas and Crystal Springs, Hazlehurst, Georgetown and Wesson. All outdoor burning is prohibited, with penalties for violations, until further notice.

What to do:

- **Extinguish fires:** Immediately put out any existing fires.
- **Avoid open flames:** No outdoor burning is allowed.
- **Take precautions:** Be careful with smoking materials and outdoor equipment.
- **Contact authorities:** For questions, contact the Copiah County Sheriff's Office or local city officials.

Check local news and the Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC) website for updates.

Planning for library program starts

Special to Wesson News

Wesson Friends of the Library (FOL) will begin developing a plan of action for its 2026 programs, but already the thinking has begun.



Special to Wesson News

Charlie and Kennedy Garcia pictured at Wesson Library to pick out some of their favorite books. They love reading and often visit the library with their grandmother, Robin Furr.

Library will also highlight patriotic books in a special display and feature a parchment paper replica of the United States Constitution in décor with a patriotic theme that makes the nation's 250th birthday celebration understandable to children and adults alike.

Also on the FOL planning agenda:

- The second "Babies and Books" outreach to new parents, particularly to moms, in May to start using the library as a resource early for themselves and their child through its development.
- A reading contest for adults to build library traffic during September.
- The annual library book sale at Wesson Founders Day in October.

For National Library Week, which will be celebrated April 19-25, the American Library Association, has already identified the theme as "Find Your Joy" towards encouraging exploration of personal interests at libraries. The week also encompasses Right to Read Day and National Library Workers Day as part of the celebration to recognize the vital role libraries and library workers play in transforming lives, to promote library usage and to support libraries as community hubs.

For the annual Wesson Public Library (WPL) Summer Reading Program in July, WPL Librarian Marilyn Britt is suggesting the 250th birthday of the nation as the focus of the event, which is oriented to children. FOL member Dr. Steven Liverman is already researching patriotic books for readings to children in kindergarten and lower grades. The Li-



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Radio remote spotlights Wesson organizations

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Wesson businesses and organizations were spotlighted throughout the area in a special radio promotion last month.

A remote from downtown Wesson before the annual Christmas parade aired owners and representatives of local for-profit and not-for-profit organizations from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. December 9 on K106, B92 and WAZA 107.7.

They talked about what they do, their products and services, giving back to the community, particularly during the holiday season, and the importance of shopping local and using Wesson services before going elsewhere.

Participants in the remote paid \$100 for their air time. They included Grace Foam

Solutions, SuperSounds DJ/Karaoke & Super Shots Photo Booth, Destiny's Delights, The Event Room, Copiah Nutrition, Copiah-Lincoln Community College, C&L Treasures, Hispanic Heritage Cleaning, Mossy Oak Properties Agent Stephen Ashley, Hunter L. Posey Insurance, Mill Town Mall Antiques and Flea Market, Taylor's Legacy LLC Heating & Air, Fire House BBQ, 51 Diner, Ace Hardware, Shop 'n Wash, Sherry Davis, Realtor - Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices, Hometown Family Dental, Mill Town Salon & Day Spa, Wesson Friends of the Library, Wesson American Legion Post 79.



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Wesson Alderman-at-Large Stanley Martin represented SuperSounds DJ/Karaoke and Super Shots Photo Booth among some 20 businesses and organizations in remote radio interviews before the annual Christmas parade that spotlighted the variety of products and services available in Wesson.



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Cont. from front page

Traveling to do small town government right

end of a name," IIMC Certification Manager Kellie Siggson told Hester. "It is a declaration that you are proficient in your important position and that you have demonstrated mastery of administrative skills critical to good government."

For the CMC, Hester attended extensive education programs in which she earned 60 points toward the designation and demonstrated pertinent experience in work as Wesson Town Clerk to earn another 50 points. She earned the designation over six years and is now in the four-year MMC program in which she will earn another 60 advanced education points and 40 professional contribution points.

IIMC, which established the CMC program in 1970, says it prepares designees "to meet the challenges of the complex role of Municipal Clerk by providing quality education in partnership with institutions of higher learning, as well as State, Provincial and National associations." The program is designed to enhance the job performance of the Clerk in small and large municipalities alike. In Mississippi, municipal clerks like Hester are central administrative officials, serving as the hub between citizens and government by managing official records (minutes, ordinances), running elections, handling public records requests, issuing licenses/permits, and providing key support for the Mayor and Board of Aldermen, essentially acting as the city's historian, record-keeper, and primary public contact.

For Hester, the smaller state organizations are important, too. That's why when others were beginning to engage in the activities of the busy holiday season, you found her at the Sheraton in Flowood for the 2025 MMCTCA winter conference December 10-12. The three MMCTCA conferences are coordinated by the Mississippi State University Extension Service, the Center for Government and Community Development and Mississippi Institute of Municipal Courts, and the Winter conference covered "Customer Service and Public Relations in Local Government," "Financial Basics: Bank Reconciliations," "From the Auditor's Perspective: Strengthening Accountability in Your City," "Privilege License and Transient Vendor," "Office Organization from Large to Small Municipalities" (a panel discussion), "Mississippi Municipal Service Company," updates from the Mississippi Municipal League and PERS Tier 5 training.

The winter conference came as Hester was catching her breath from the October 8-10, 2025, fall conference that featured sessions on leadership development, "DOR Sales Tax & Modernization Funds," asset management and modernization funds, wage garnishment and child support issues and "Best Practices in Human Resources."

As if the information and training sessions aren't reason enough for Hester's involvement in the organizations for municipal clerks, she values the networking at the meetings she attends. "I meet people from all over the world as well as across the state," she says. "When we need help with something, I can go to a municipal clerk elsewhere and usually find someone who can assist. Research we need. The benefit of experience. Advice on work. Even a machine breaking down."

So the next time you encounter Hester running off to the airport or readjusting to work in her office after a trip, you might want to thank her for the role she plays in making Wesson government work.

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Chess Master from McCall Creek

Special to Wesson News

Co-Lin sophomore Benson Schexnaydre of McCall Creek is making Mississippi chess history.

Already the highest-rated player in the state, he has claimed the Mississippi Chess Championship title for the sixth year in a row. In 2024, he earned his U.S. Chess Master title, becoming the first Mississippian since at least the 1980s to achieve the designation and the only homegrown player in the state to ever reach master status.

This fall, Schexnaydre brought his expertise to the national stage when he served as a guest panelist at MINDSETS, The New York Chess in Education Conference, a sold-out event hosted by the National Scholastic Chess Foundation and the Kasparov Chess Foundation in New York City. The conference examined the role of chess in education, touching on curriculum, policy, and the benefits of learning through failure and play. Featured speakers included World Chess Champion Garry Kasparov, Grandmaster Peter Wells and Dr. Barry Hymer. Schexnaydre joined Will Trepp, co-founder of Rockport, and Jack Kochansky on the "Redefining Success at Chess" panel.

Schexnaydre's chess journey began in 2015 at Franklin County Chess in Meadville, a program that received national attention when it was featured on *60 Minutes* in 2017. Under the direction of Dr. Jeff Bulington and funded by the late Wade Creekmore, the center has made a name for itself in the world of chess. Today, Schexnaydre serves as an assistant coach at the center, working with second through 12th grade students -- an experience he says is rooted in the generosity that shaped him.

"So many of the successes and personal growth I've experienced would not have happened without what he [Creekmore] did for me," he said. "Because of chess, I developed a hunger to learn more. I expanded my knowledge in academics, became healthier, traveled across the United States creating unforgettable memories, and grew

into a better person -- one who now understands the impact we can have on others and hopes to do so in my own way."

Chess has taken him across the country, with tournaments in Cali-

fornia, Niagara Falls, Washington, D.C., Michigan, and Philadelphia, among others.

At Co-Lin, Schexnaydre is a Presidential Scholar and biomedical engineering major who stays deeply involved on campus. He serves as Treasurer of Mu Alpha Theta, Public Affairs Officer for Co-Lin C.A.R.E.S., and works as a student recruiter with the Trailblazers. He is also active in the Co-Lin Chess Club, Alpha Omega Science Club, Future Business Leaders of America, Wolf Pack Strong, Phi Theta Kappa and the Baptist Student Union.

He was recently named to Who's Who at Copiah-Lincoln Community College and selected as a Campus Favorite by his peers. He has earned a place on the President's List every semester, maintaining a perfect 4.0 GPA.

After Co-Lin, Schexnaydre plans to pursue an engineering degree at Mississippi State University and later attend medical school, with an interest in pediatrics. Reflecting on his time at Co-Lin, he keeps his message simple: "If I could do it all over again, I wouldn't change a single thing."

He is the son of Randy and Sonya Schexnaydre of McCall Creek.



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Education & healthcare legislative focus

Special to Wesson News

Mississippi lawmakers started their 2026 state legislative session on January 6 and will continue meeting until April 5.

Even after Democrats capitalized on special legislative elections last year, Republicans still control both the State House of Representative and Senate, although their grip has loosened slightly, with the party's supermajority in the Senate broken after Democrats gained two seats.

Leading the Senate for his seventh session as lieutenant governor is Republican Delbert Hosemann. In the House, Republican Jason White will oversee the chamber for his third session after being elected by his peers in 2024.

Thousands of bills will be filed, with hundreds making it to a floor vote. Major issues are education, healthcare and reinstituting a ballot initiative.

Education. In the House, which made waves last session by immediately dropping a massive tax package that went on to be signed by Republican Gov. Tate Reeves, education reforms seem to be the next big focus for Speaker White and company. White wants school choice -- the ability of parents to select where their child receives an education, rather than being confined by the neighborhood in which they live. Open public-to-public transfers or "portability," expansion of charter school options, creation of an education savings account program that would allow public dollars to be used for private school tuition and related policies are cited as ways to make this happen.

Critics of school choice argue it could be detrimental to the health of some public school districts that already struggle financially if per-student fund allocations followed pupils who transfer to a different school. White, however, counters that more options for students and their families should make individual districts more competitive in providing the best education possible.

It's unclear what the appetite for school choice, or at least some form of it, will be in the Senate. Lt. Gov. Hosemann has said he supports a limited form, such as the portability, but has not publicly been as all-in on school choice as White.

Both White and Hosemann, however, do agree on paying public K-12 teachers more, with Mississippi still lagging behind the national average for teacher pay and experiencing a shortage of teachers, administrators, and school support staff. Hosemann also wants to tighten the state's truancy laws, with nearly 28% of students considered "chronically" absent during the 2024-25 school year, meaning they missed 10% or more of classes. He has floated the idea of having parents testify before a judge as to the reason for their child's noticeable absences.

Healthcare. Medicaid expansion is expected to remain on the back burner due to pending changes on the federal level, but several healthcare-related bills are expected to be introduced. Rep. Sam Creekmore, a Republican

from New Albany who chairs the House Public Health and Human Services Committee, says he has received "a lot of public feedback" on the idea of stipends being issued to mothers during and in the months after pregnancy as Mississippi currently battles the highest infant mortality rate in the U.S. Creekmore is also expected to introduce a bill to make the state's health information exchange uniform statewide and another that would mandate health insurance coverage for biomarker testing in cancer.

The biomarker technology helps ensure patients get the correct treatment for the cancer they're battling.

The legislature also plans to move forward with the first year of allocation of tens of millions of dollars in opioid settlement funds. Creekmore said the Opioid Settlement Fund Advisory Council has recommended a five-tier plan to the speaker and lieutenant governor that would spread the funds across 122 applicants working to fight the state's opioid crisis.

Ballot initiative. It has been more than four years since Mississippi residents have been able to propose new laws or constitutional amendments directly on the ballot for public vote. Sen. Jeremy England, the chair of the Senate Elections Committee, plans to make another run at changing that during the upcoming session.

The ballot initiative process was stripped by the Mississippi Supreme Court in 2021 over a technical flaw in the state constitution that required signatures from five congressional districts, even though the state had since been reduced to four congressional districts. The ruling came after citizens rallied to legalize medical marijuana through a grassroots campaign. In the four sessions since, lawmakers have been unable to restore it due to a lack of widespread interest, disagreements over signature thresholds, and disagreements over potential caveats that would prevent citizens from making changes to certain laws. England did not disclose many specifics about his bill, but did say it will take into account the evolution of digital marketing and social media campaigns.

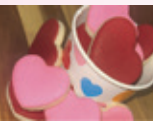
Other potential legislation are legalization of mobile sports betting, something the House passed in 2025 before it died in the Senate; a new retirement benefit structure passed in 2025 that does not force first responders to serve an additional five years before being able to draw retirement benefits; a tax rebate program endorsed by Lt. Gov. Hosemann that would result in taxpayers being handed back 15% of what they paid the state in 2023; helping Jackson revitalize with state help; easing the process of restoring voting rights for individuals who were convicted of certain felonies; shifting control over registered apprenticeship programs to the state instead of the federal government; and distributing BP oil spill money. Lawmakers have also been tasked by a federal judge with redrawing the state's Supreme Court map, which was deemed to be diluting Black voting power.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Excerpted from a Super Talk Radio report.



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by Megan Lang

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Williams Co-Lin Workforce Ed chief

Special to Wesson News

Tuwanna Williams has become Executive Director of Workforce Education at Co-Lin.

Williams brings more than 20 years of experience in workforce development, economic advancement, and community engagement to the role. She most recently served as Director of Workforce Development for the City of Natchez, where she established and led the city's first Workforce Development Department and secured more than \$2 million in external funding to support training initiatives.

"Tuwanna Williams offers extensive experience and a strong track record in workforce development," said Co-Lin President Dr. Dewayne Middleton. "Her leadership, strong industry partnerships, and firsthand knowledge of workforce needs across our region make her the right person to lead Co-Lin's Workforce Education division as we continue expanding opportunities for students, employers, and our communities."

In her role with the City of Natchez, Williams designed and launched the first Building Trades Program in the Miss-Lou area in more than 25 years, creating train-

ing pathways in construction, electrical, plumbing, carpentry, masonry, and heavy equipment operations. She also convened employer advisory councils, working with more than 170 employers across 22 industries to align workforce training with regional labor market needs.

Williams has a strong connection to Co-Lin, having previously served at the college from 2015- 2021 as a College Navigator and WIOA Workforce Recruiter. During that time, she promoted Co-Lin's career-technical and workforce programs across the college's seven-county district, coordinated WIOA-funded training, and worked closely with employers to ensure programs met industry demand.

"Mrs. Williams brings the experience, perspective, and leadership necessary to guide Co-Lin's Workforce Education division," said Dr. Jackie Martin, Vice President of the Wesson Campus. "Having previously served at Co-Lin, she brings a clear understanding of our college and the critical role Workforce Education plays in supporting local communities and employers across Southwest Mississippi. She also understands how strategic partners



Special to Wesson News

Hester

such as AccelerateMS, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, and the Central Mississippi Planning and Development District work alongside the college to align training with workforce demand. That experience will further strengthen our workforce pipeline, drive economic growth, and expand access to meaningful employment opportunities."

Her career also includes leadership roles with the National Multiple

Sclerosis Society, the National Center on Family Homelessness, Magee General Hospital, and the Mid-Delta Empowerment Zone Alliance, where she focused on workforce readiness, grant development, and community-based training initiatives.

Williams holds a Master of Business Administration with a concentration in Human Resources from Delta State University and a Bachelor of Business Administration in Organizational Management from American Intercontinental University. She also earned an associate's degree from Hinds Community College and holds professional certifications in workforce-related training and coalition building. Additionally, she was named 2025 Woman of the Year by the Natchez-Adams County Chamber of Commerce.

As Executive Director of Workforce Education, Williams will oversee the College's workforce training programs and initiatives, strengthen partnerships with business and industry, expand opportunities that support regional economic growth and workforce readiness, and oversee the WIN Job Centers across the college district.

WESSON AREA DINING GUIDE

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Bakery opens downtown

By Bob Arnold

Nekitha Jackson, a long-time local cottage baker, just opened a permanent retail location to cook and sell her cakes, cookies and other treats in downtown Wesson.

If there was ever a bakery in Wesson, it was so long ago that locals can't remember it.

Destiny Delights, which Jackson calls her business, has moved into the new 6,700 square foot mini shopping and office complex that Salmon Point Development has built on the southwest corner of Church

Street and Highway 51. Jackson is renting the smaller 1,000 square foot structure on the property, which will have a total of three commercial spaces.

Jackson says she bakes with love as her secret ingredient. Since 2014, she has done the bulk of her baking at her Wesson home on Lott Smith Road and sold her products and baked some of them on site at farmers and other outdoor markets throughout southwest Mississippi.

Now she'll go to work in her own bakery, where three or four workers will also help her serve customers. It's a status that has been a dream since her childhood -- being known as a baker in her community beyond her home base. The pink and brown colors that she has made a trademark of her business as a tribute to her sister, who died in a car crash, will also be part the new status.

As she prepared for her move to the retail location, Jackson reflected on the strength she has received from God, family and friends:

"I'm thankful for God's blessing and guidance. My husband, Clifford Jackson, Sr., has been an unrelenting force, pouring his heart and soul into making this dream a reality. His unwavering commitment, alongside Walter Jackson's loyal support and Vernie Washington's valuable insights, has been nothing short of remarkable. To everyone who's contributed to this process, I express my deepest gratitude -- your impact won't be forgotten."

Here's to the bright future of Destiny's Delights Coffee Shop and Bakery."

Ron Bath, a former Reno, Nevada, commercial and residential developer who retired to Wesson and transplanted Salmon Point Development here, continues to seek tenants for the 2,100 square foot and 3,600 square foot units in the new Highway 51 complex. Bath found Jackson, who has long been active in community service, on the Wesson Chamber of Commerce board. For many years, Jackson also served as president of the Wesson Attendance Center Parent Teachers Organization.



Jackson

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MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR



Special to Wesson News

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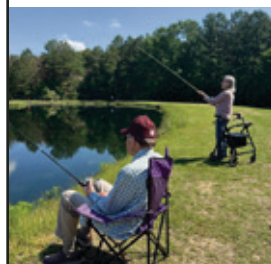
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Fantasy Football changes pro fandom

By Guest Columnist Shaw Furlow

Recently, I got involved in an “exciting” race to the finish of the season with a couple of friends who snatched victory from the certain jaws of defeat with their Fantasy Football team. Their league charged a low entry fee, so not a lot of money was in play. But my friends sweated it out during the final game, as if it were life or death. Amusing to a non playing, casual observer like myself.

So I decided to find out what it was all about.

There are many good reasons for not playing Fantasy Football – and that’s why I have remained a casual observer. First of all, following players each week, keeping up with their stats, who’s hurt, who’s not, takes time. Roughly thirty minutes to an hour each a day. Well hold on there sparky! I’m retired and finding thirty minutes a day means something has to go. Like what? One of my naps? Hardly. Cut the time I spend throwing the ball with Flint? Not happening.

The second reason I have no interest in playing Fantasy Football: I watch NFL, MLB, NCAA football, baseball, softball and volleyball. And seasonally, I watch sailing, tennis and curling. I need no further sporting events to take my time.

Yet a quick internet search shows many people disagree with my perspective. Some 95 million Americans play Fantasy Football, some in multiple leagues. I can’t sit with a group of gentlemen, or ladies in some cases, without listening to the incessant chatter about who got picked up by whose Fantasy team. Broken record. There’s a lot of chest thumping, high fiving and bragging about a team of professional players you assembled but had nothing to do with coaching. I just don’t get it. But the quick facts are these: four to eight million Fantasy Football leagues with 40 to 80 million teams generating some \$30-\$37 billion in revenues. To get 95 million Americans to agree on anything is difficult. But these stats came from a quick search on the web, and I believe everything I read online.

Fantasy Football is one of many changes that has affected sports fandom in the modern sports world. Way back in my teaching days at Jackson

Preparatory School, I ate lunch every day with the senior high coaches and the principal. They were graduates of three major universities, some out of state or lesser known universities and a scholar from Delta State. For twenty minutes there was chest thumping, high fiving and bragging about their college teams or the New Orleans Saints. We knew the players and coaches. We actually hurt when they lost. In Fantasy Football, you don’t care if the Saints win as long as Olave catches passes and scores touchdowns for your fantasy team. It makes games you don’t care about important. If I don’t care about Jacksonville vs the Jets, I’m not watching. I don’t care who the wide out is. Not so with the 95 million Americans involved in Fantasy Football.

Fantasy Football has changed the nature of professional football fandom as the impacts of the NCAA Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) and transfer portal policies and procedures have influenced the nature of college sports fandom. The Olympics opened the door for NIL, which allows kids who bust their asses playing sports to use their stardom commercially and share in some of the money their schools and coaches are making – the kind of money a school can use to pay the coach du jour \$9 million a year. Through the portal, players can transfer to other schools where they can find better opportunities elsewhere with different coaches and to be utilized by other teams.

Basically, I support both, but I think NIL compensation should be limited to \$2 million to eliminate the portal stamper to monied schools; and I think portal transfers should be contingent on a freshman staying two years at a school and not playing for just one year before going elsewhere as now required.

College football conference expansion is another change you don’t want me to get started on – i.e., the 16-team "Southeastern" Conference! Change happens. So you Fantasy Football team owners, GMs and coaches, while some of us don’t get it, continue your joust with the windmills. It’s a noble quest.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Shaw Furlow is a retired Co-Lin band director, former Wesson News arts columnist and Brookhaven-based promoter of music programs.



26 Co-Lin Wolves at next level



Off the heels of an impressive 8-2 season that culminated in a South Division Championship, the Wolves have recently had several members of the team sign with four-year institutions. In the early signing period, the Wolves had 26 players sign to play at the next level including:

- Jarmaine Mitchell - Arizona State University
- Matt Mayfield - Mississippi State University
- Martavious Boswell - West Virginia University
- Tre Webb - South Alabama University
- Doug Nelson - Troy University
- Lonnie Smith - Troy University
- Rakeem Davis - Troy University
- Jermarj Bell - University of Louisiana at Monroe
- Mike Williams - University of Louisiana at Monroe
- Jonathan Crain - University of Louisiana at Monroe
- Edarius Green - University of Louisiana at Monroe
- Archie Chambers - University of Texas at San Antonio
- Trenton Rocker - University of New Mexico
- Kamron Pittman - Alabama State University
- Sentario Willis - McNeese State University
- Lee Holmes - McNeese State University
- Jabraxon Boone - Prairie View A&M University
- Ca’Ron Williams - Prairie View A&M University
- Jaylen Pettway - Prairie View A&M University
- Darnell O’Quinn - Utah Tech University
- Londen Butler - Delta State University
- Kannon Cato - Delta State University
- Dezmond Ray - Mississippi Valley State University
- Devan Drennan - University of West Alabama
- Tenerrean Jackson - Southern Illinois University
- Joseph Warren - Sam Houston State University
- Dyson Bell – Eastern Kentucky University

Co-Lin graduated 167 in fall



Special to Wesson News

2025 Co-Lin graduate Heidi Zimmerman of Magee shows off her diploma during fall commencement exercises.

Special to Wesson News

Co-Lin graduated 167 students, who received degrees or certificates, in its Fall 2025 commencement exercises. Graduates from the area included:

Bogue Chitto: Kayslyn Case, Loreli Haas, Arryona Lyons, Madelyn McKorkle, Shacareon Smith, Jon Warren, Lakendricks Williams

Brookhaven: Jamiah Adams, Lydia Bass, Afalon Dillon, Jaylynn Goss, Carriwana Hargro, Britt Hughey, Salacia Hunt, Jayda Johnson, Keanna McCall, Makayla Robinson, Preslee Rushing, Lasandra Smith, Nu Ton, Aliyah Watkins, Dameshia White, Tyreka Wilson

Crystal Springs: Chloe Holloway, Paris Sutton, Zyon Weathersby, Sentario Willis

Gallman: Isreal Newman

Hazlehurst: Morgan Ainsworth, Savannah Blank, David Fair, Ashby Hefner, Jayla Hilliard, Diamond Holloway, Elian Ixcajoc-Sales, Jaleel Jackson, Mehakpreet Kaur, Deaija Montgomery, Kamiya Murray, Rhonda Richmond, Christy Washington

Jayess: Jelisa Robinson

Magee: Deanna Craft, Devan Drennan, Courtney Estrada, Dylan Harper, Cherry Harris, Chativia James, Kedrianna McDonald, Candice Williams, Heidi Zimmerman

Magnolia: Mikiayla Smith

McComb: Mya Fortenberry, Tylan Garner

Mendenhall: Fredrick Dampeer, Easter Gordon, Davicious Green, Annica Griffin, Jacob Lemoine, James Lemoine, Devionne McCann, Jakyra Skiffer, Bobby Thornton, Manavmeet Walia, Yvonne Williams

Monticello: Kolby Foote, Jerry Hyde, Kiona Longino, Madison Mason, Aniah Smith, Alissa Stonewall

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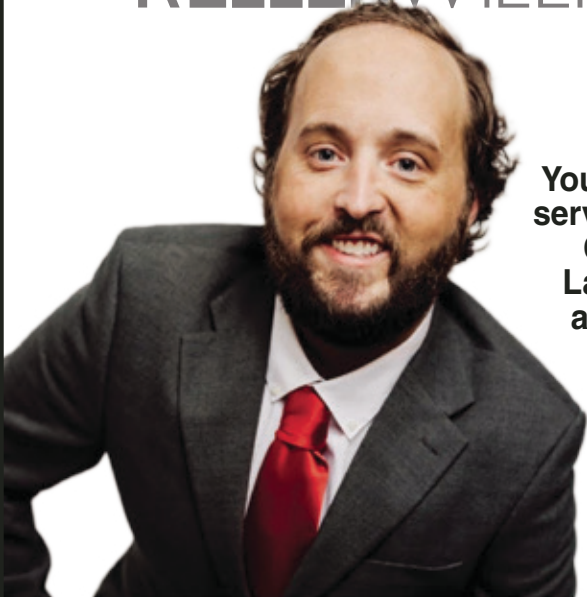
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Skepticism & vigilance beats scammers

Wesson News

Skepticism and vigilance of consumers is the most effective way to beat financial scams of criminals looking for quick money, a banking security executive told Wesson Lions Club (WLC) at its December meeting.

Dayle Alsbury, a WLC member and Chief Information Security Officer at BankPlus, said financial scams garner \$9 billion a year from fraudsters who particularly like to target older adults, and they are hard to stop with operations in China, North Korea, Russia, India, Pakistan and other venues outside the United States.

Alsbury cited four common scams and ways to avoid being a victim of them:

- **Fake phone calls** from the IRS, Social Security, technical support representatives of an organization or a caller who claims to be a family member in trouble. Hang up on unexpected calls. Call back using a known real number. Use call-blocking tools.
- **Online scams**, including emails and texts, asking you to click a line, update an account or open an attachment. Don't click unexpected links. Turn on multi-factor authentication. Use strong, unique passwords.
- **Too good to be true investments** – guaranteed or unusual investment returns, exclusive opportunities or pressure to invest quickly. Verify adviser licensing. Get a second opinion. Avoid pressure-based decisions.
- **Misuse of trust by family or caregivers** – unexplained withdrawals, pressure to sign documents, someone asking access to accounts. Review statements regularly. Set account alerts. Limit access to banking tools.

“If you think you’re being targeted, contact your bank immediately, report the scam to state law enforcement and the Federal Trade Commission at Report-Fraud.FTC.gov or IC3.gov and notify your credit agency – Experian, Equifax or TransUnion,” Alsbury said.





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Float, elections, teachers, oil & healthcare

Special to Wesson News

Mississippi Rose Parade Float. Mississippi's "Where Creativity Blooms" float in the 2026 Rose Parade celebrated the state's artistic legacy and served as a mobile advertisement showcasing Mississippi's cultural attractions from Faulkner's Rowan Oak in Oxford to the Arts and Entertainment Experience Museum in Meridian. The clever blend of nostalgia, star power and cultural pride featured a larger-than-life Kermit the Frog honoring the Muppets empire birthed in Mississippi, Charlie Worsham performing musical hits on a stage wrapped in artwork inspired by Ocean Springs native Walter Anderson, ballerinas representing Jackson's prestigious U.S. International Ballet Competition and a book stack featuring Mississippi authors William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Jesmyn Ward and Tennessee Williams.

Special Election for State Supreme Court. A judge has ordered special elections for the Mississippi Supreme Court after a finding that the electoral map used to select justices violates Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. U.S. District Judge Sharion Aycock in August ordered Mississippi to redraw the map, which was enacted in 1987, concluding the current configuration dilutes the power of Black voters. Section 2, which is the primary way plaintiffs can push back against racially discriminatory election practices, is currently being challenged at the U.S. Supreme Court. Once the legislature approves a new map, Aycock wrote that she will move quickly to meet any deadlines necessary to hold the special elections in November 2026. Aycock will defer deciding which seats will be subject to a special election until after the

new map has been adopted. The order follows a 2022 lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union, which argued the current map cuts Mississippi's Delta region — a historically Black area — in half, diminishing the Black vote in the Central District.

State Teacher Shortage. Nearly 4,000 teaching positions remain unfilled in Mississippi, hundreds more than last year, the latest iteration of the Mississippi Department of Education annual teacher shortage and educator recruitment surveys reveals. The surveys validate what teachers have been ringing the alarm bell about for years — low pay is driving the state's teacher shortage. There were 6,907 vacancies among teachers, administrators and school support staff across the state, 1,747 more than last year. The increase is the biggest jump in recent years. Teachers received pay raises during the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years and, subsequently, there were fewer vacancies during that period. And during the COVID-19 pandemic, licensure testing suspensions that made it easier for college students to become teachers likely contributed to fewer vacancies. Teacher vacancies are concentrated in special education and elementary education. Another area of concern is teacher assistant vacancies. That pool is often where the agency looks for prospective teachers. In recent months, education researchers, teachers and administrators have called on state lawmakers to raise the teacher pay floor once again during the 2026 legis-

lative session. Vacancies increased the most in U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson's Second Congressional District, which encompasses the Delta, the region with the largest population of Black people and low-income households in the state. While some districts offer financial stipends to bolster teacher pay, many Delta districts can't afford to do the same.

Oil Drilling in Gulf. Oil companies have offered \$300 million for drilling rights in the Gulf of Mexico in the first offshore lease sale for the region since 2023. The sale came after President Donald Trump's administration recently announced plans to allow new drilling off Florida and California for the first time in decades. That's drawn pushback, including from Republicans worried about impacts to tourism. Thirty companies — including industry giants BP, Chevron and Shell — submitted bids on parcels covering 1,600 square miles. Total high bids were down from \$382 million offered in the most recent lease sale in the Gulf of Mexico under former Democratic President Joe Biden in December 2023. The administration's promotion of fossil fuels contrasts sharply with its hostility to renewable energy, particularly offshore wind. A judge on Monday struck down an executive order from Trump blocking wind energy projects, saying it violated U.S. law. Environmentalists said the fossil fuel sales would put wildlife in the Gulf at higher risk of dying in oil spills. Spills occur regularly in the region and have included the 2010 Deepwater Horizon tragedy

that killed 11 workers in an oil rig explosion and unleashed a massive spill. Most parcels that received bids were in water depths greater than 800 meters (2,625 feet).

Healthcare advice. Advocates and state agency directors have pitched recommendations to lawmakers on how to prioritize legislative funds for the health and well-being of Mississippi women, children and families during the upcoming legislative session. The nine-member Senate Study Group on Women, Children and Families, chaired by Sen. Nicole Boyd, a Republican from Oxford, was formed in 2022 after the overturning of Roe v. Wade. The group's mission was designed to make the state safer for moms and babies. They suggested ways to improve the interrelated structures surrounding the Mississippi mothers who risk their lives giving birth and the children who grow up supported — or not — in a state with some of the nation's highest rates of infant mortality, poverty and hunger. One example is the Child Care Tax Credit, passed in 2023, which offers a 50% income tax credit to employers who either provide their employees with child care during work hours or provide at least \$6,000 in a stipend to a licensed child care provider for their employees. The program has had next to no uptake, said Biz Harris, director of the Mississippi Early Learning Alliance. Harris attributes that to mid-size employers not having the bandwidth to take on the administrative burden the program currently has, and the \$6,000 minimum being too high. In his presentation to lawmakers, State Health Officer Dr. Daniel Edney drilled down on obesity as a leading cause of preterm birth.

NEWS NUGGETS

Crystal Springs writer pushed conservation

Special to Wesson News

The Mother of Mississippi's conservation tradition, writer Francis (Fannye) Adine Cook, acquired her lifelong passion as a farmer's daughter who collected wild plants, birds, mammals and amphibians as a child growing up in a Crystal Springs Victorian home on Georgetown Street in the early 1900s.

Born July 19, 1889, she was the seventh child of Gilbert and Martha Ellen Cook and would follow a career as a teacher, auditor, researcher and genealogist as well as a writer and conservationist after graduating from the Industrial Institute and College (now Mississippi University for Women) in 1911 and completing graduate studies at George Washington University in Washington, DC.

After teaching history and English literature at West Point and Louisville in Mississippi and in Wyoming and Panama, Cook worked as an auditor with the Internal Revenue Service, while researching and preparing specimens for the Smithsonian Institute and becoming concerned about public indifference in Mississippi to protection of natural resources and the state's inadequate laws and failure to enforce existing ones. In the 1920s, she returned to travel her home state at her own expense and campaign for a comprehensive state conservation program, speaking at local fairs and to schools, clubs and county supervisors and exhibiting a poster which illustrated the usefulness of birds in combatting harmful insects. Her efforts led to organization of the Mississippi Association for the Conservation of Wildlife, which became the Game and Fish Commission, and she supervised a state plant and animal survey funded by the federal Works Progress Administration.

Cook collected and cataloged Mississippi wildlife, led the effort to restore the state's natural environment, pushed for public hunting grounds, conservation laws and education, fish and streams, hawks and owls to control rats and mice, song birds, holly, wild crabapples, dogwood and azalea to beautify roadsides and woodlands, and rallied people to appreciate the outdoors.

Cook also started writing, perhaps influenced, inspired and encouraged by Eurora Welty whom she got to know when boarding at the Welty home in Jackson, where she kept a stash of deceased birds in her desk for scientific study. Her numerous articles and several books included *Freshwater Fishes of Mississippi* and *Snakes of Mississippi*. She became the first director of the Mississippi Wildlife Museum, now the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, where her personal collection of papers is the basis of a 10,000-volume library; and helped organize the Mississippi Ornithological Society.

When Cook wasn't focused on conservation issues, she and her sister, Lena Mae Brignac, documented cemeteries, producing invaluable records, particularly for markers and cemeteries no longer extant.

Cook died April 30, 1964, and she is buried at Crystal Springs City Cemetery. A life-sized bronze statue commemorates her at Railroad Park in downtown Crystal Springs and a 2600-acre urban nature area is named in her honor in Rankin County.

AREA ARTS



Special to Wesson News



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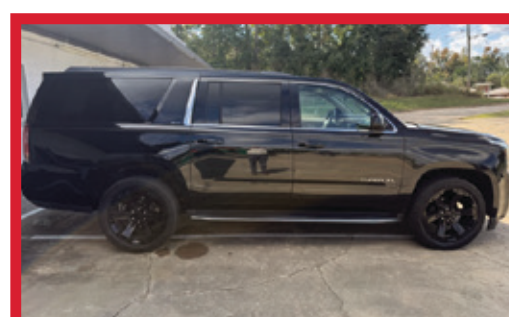
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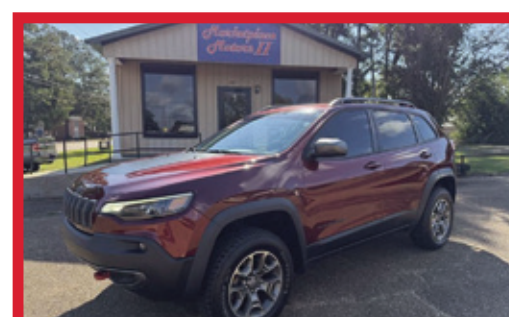
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Waters named ASA executive director

Special to The Clinton Courier

The American Subcontractors Association of Mississippi (ASA of MS) recently announced that Joel Waters has been hired as their new Executive Director.

Waters is the former Executive Director of the Mississippi Concrete Association, serving from 2016 to 2025, and has been instrumental in their growth and success. Prior to 2016, Waters was Executive Director of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of MS.

Waters has also previously been an active board member of Build MS and instrumental in the growth of that organization, along with several ASA members on that Board.

Waters brings vast experience in the Mississippi Association community and has strong ties to the Subcontractor sector and knows how to operate in the Association space.

Cody Curry, 2025-2026 ASA of MS Chairman states, "ASA of MS is proud to welcome someone of Joel Waters' work history, character and work ethic as our new Executive Director, to continue the successful growth of ASA of MS well into the future."

Waters is a 1984 graduate of University of Southern Mississippi, where he was a member of the USM baseball team.

Waters and his wife Susan have been married for 43 years and reside in Madison. They have three married children and five grandchildren.



One Big Beautiful Bill No Tax on Overtime

Pollyanna Smith EA CPA

By now, you might have heard about the "no tax on overtime" for tax years 2025 through 2028. If you receive qualified overtime compensation for tax years 2025 through 2028, you may deduct the pay that exceeds your regular rate of pay. To qualify for this, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requires that most employees are paid at least minimum wage for all hours worked, with overtime pay being time-and-a-half for all hours worked over 40 in a workweek. To calculate the "no tax" part, it would simply be the pay that exceeds your regular rate of pay (the "half" portion of "time-and-a-half"). The "tax" would be federal income tax only. For example, if someone was paid \$10 an hour, your overtime rate would be \$15; the portion that is not taxed would be the additional \$5 you are paid, or one-third of the overtime rate. The maximum annual deduction for 2025 is \$12,500 (\$25,000 for joint filers). The deduction phases out for taxpayers with modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) over \$150,000 (\$300,000 for joint filers). If you are married, you are required to file jointly in order to claim this deduction, and it is available for both itemizing and non-itemizing taxpayers. Please consult a tax professional to ensure you are accurately claiming this new deduction.

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GENERAC

Taking one step at a time

By Guest Columnist Dr. Stephanie Duguid



January has a way of making us reflective. A new calendar hangs on the wall. Fresh pages wait to be filled. And with that comes a familiar phrase many of us have already said, or at least thought: “New year, new me.” While the idea of a brand-new version of ourselves sounds exciting, it can also feel overwhelming. Too often, January goals are set high, fast, and all at once. By February, motivation fades, not because we lack discipline, but because real change does not happen overnight. This year, let’s approach the new year differently. Instead of striving for a new you, what if the goal was a healthier, more intentional you? Health and wellness are not about perfection. They are about progress, small, consistent choices that add up over time. That might look like:

- Drinking one more glass of water each day.
- Taking a 10-minute walk after dinner.
- Going to bed 30 minutes earlier.
- Choosing foods that fuel your body more often than not.
- Taking a moment to breathe before responding to stress.



These steps may not feel dramatic, but they are powerful. Sustainable wellness is built through habits you can maintain, not goals that exhaust you. One of the most common mistakes people make in January is setting goals that do not fit their real lives. True wellness should support your responsibilities, your family, your work, and your season of life, not compete with them. Ask yourself:

- What does my body need right now?
- What would make my days feel more balanced?
- What is one habit I could improve, not overhaul?

Wellness is personal. Your goals do not have to match anyone else’s. Health is not just physical. It is mental and emotional, too. The way we speak to ourselves matters. The way we handle stress matters. The way we allow rest matters. As you move into this new year, give yourself permission to:

- Start where you are.
- Celebrate small wins.
- Learn from setbacks instead of quitting.
- Be kind to yourself along the way.

Growth does not demand perfection. It requires patience and consistency. The new year does not require a total reinvention. It invites reflection, intention, and action, one step at a time. If January is about anything, let it be this. Choose to take care of yourself in ways that last. Here’s to a year of realistic goals, renewed energy, and a healthier you, built one intentional choice at a time.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Dr. Stephanie Duguid is owner of Do Good Pro-Health (CPR Classes) and Do Good Leadership (motivational speaking, and leadership and success coaching). She is also a Mississippi Health Ambassador.



BY
Jessica Breazeale

Where we consider other viewpoints with an effort to all get along and see the bigger picture that there’s beauty in unity and unity in community.



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