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Wesson News

SPOTLIGHT

Area Economy

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Volume 9, Number 2

“Good News You Can Use”

February 9, 2021

Robust economy in pandemic



Reflecting the robust economy in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Encore Group LLC, based in Houma, Louisiana, plans to open an air conditioning ductwork manufacturing plant at Hazlehurst (left) and Des Moines-based Keystone Electrical Manufacturing is producing electrical system controls in Brookhaven's Lindbrook Business Park.

By Bob Arnold

Conventional wisdom says the COVID-19 pandemic has tanked the economy, but don't tell that to Stephenie Sullivan, Workforce Education director at Co-Lin, or the economic developers with whom she works.

Sullivan, who is focused on producing Co-Lin's 2021 Pathways Job, points to the enormous need for employees that organizations in the college's district encompassing Adams, Copiah, Franklin, Jefferson, Lawrence, Lincoln and Simpson have indicated. "There seem to be more jobs than workers," she says.

"Economic activity in the area is very robust," observes Sullivan. "Smaller businesses, such as restaurants, which made the 'pandemic pivot' are capitalizing on opportunities to do things differently, attracting customers who want to shop and buy safely. Employers from outside the area are looking for opportunities to build in our green space. Some in bigger places are seeking alternatives in smaller hubs, while others in quieter areas are looking for busier spots."

In the immediate area, Copiah and Lincoln Counties are welcoming new employers and gearing up marketing efforts to sell their assets to more organizations looking for a quality workforce, good location and an overall business-friendly environment (see stories elsewhere in this issue), and Sullivan is also seeing similar activity throughout the Co-Lin district.

Building partnerships and relationships with businesses and other employers is the ground of Co-Lin economic development activity, and

their growing engagement with the Workforce Education division of the college reflects current economic activity, Sullivan says.

As many as sixty organizations could be coming to the Job Fair, and they are seriously hunting for workers even in the midst of COVID-19, she reports. So Co-Lin is designing this year's event for an economy in which employers are ready to hire workers and job-seekers want to do more than casually meet people and learn about organizations, she adds.

"We're asking both participating employers and job-seekers to utilize Handshake, an online matchmaking service that connects hiring organizations and potential hires," Sullivan says. "Both employers and job-seekers complete profiles and then utilize the service to engage. Prospective employees can discover jobs and internships, receive direct messages from employers about jobs and events, connect with employees at organizations and get an inside look at employers and jobs. It is our hope that before the Job Fair, connections can be made and appointments set for serious conversations."

The event is an important part of Co-Lin's economic development mission geared to preparing a skilled labor force in its district, including traditional classroom work leading to Career Tech degrees for regular students, short-term certificate programs for workers, ongoing activities to connect with employers and meet their workforce needs and partnering with economic developers and local government officials who recruit industrial and commercial employers.

cont. on page 4

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Copiah Airport gets MDOT grant

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The Copiah County Board of Supervisors is receiving \$135,800 for airport improvements from \$3 million in funding for multimodal transportation projects awarded by the Mississippi Transportation Commission (MTC) throughout the Central District.

The commission approved the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) to award grants to regional and municipal airports, ports, railroads and public transit systems throughout central Mississippi.

In all, MTC disbursed 18 grants. The largest grants went to the City of Jackson (\$480,000), Ports of Rosedale (\$450,000) and Greenville (\$400,000) the City of Greenville (\$368,663), Hinds Community College (\$342,285), Meridian Airport Authority (\$250,000) and Jackson Municipal Airport Authority (\$158,466).

"In keeping with the heart of MDOT's mission, I am committed to continuing the support of our strategic multimodal investments in the diverse resources that are essential for the safe, effective and efficient intermodal transportation network in our rural and urban communities," said Commissioner Willie Simmons, Central Transportation District.



Special to Wesson News

Funding for these multimodal grants comes from the Multimodal Transportation Improvement Fund. Money from this fund is allocated specifically to support multimodal grants each year. Grant applications, which include project details and funds requested, are reviewed and approved by a multimodal committee specific to each separate mode of transportation.

For more information on MDOT's multimodal resources and other grants, visit GoMDOT.com.



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2014 Honda Accord EX-L



Low mileage, Leather, Sunroof, Rear Camera, Like New



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COVID vaccine promises area fun

Wesson News

There is a vaccine and there will be fun things to do in the area.

Brookhaven-Lincoln County Chamber of Commerce's (BLCC) Katie Nations says a full calendar of events will bring tourists and area residents to Brookhaven and Lincoln County during the spring, summer, fall and winter, and boost the local economy in the process.

"BLCC is taking all state and local mandates under strict consideration and is thoughtfully planning the events to ensure the safety of the community," Nations says.

Downtown Jazzed Up, Brookhaven's annual Mardi Gras celebration, has been recreated as an art walk with COVID-19 precautions in mind and will kick-start the year of fun on February 20 (see story elsewhere in this issue). The fun calendar also features:

- Goin' to Town Car Show sponsored by Fielder's Pro Shop and presented by BLCC. March 6. Owners showcased some 276 vehicles last year, and the Show is expected to be bigger and better. Participants can pre-register for \$10 or pay \$15 on the day of the event. Contact T-Tommy at 601-833-8620 or BLCC at 601-833-1411.
- Spring Fair at Lincoln County Civic Center. April 1-4.
- Spring Movie Series. Downtown Brookhaven. TBA.
- The tenth annual Girls Night Out provides a shopping experience geared to area women in which participating vendors offer deals, door prizes and promotions. June 24.
- Lincoln County Wildlife and Outdoor Expo at Lincoln County Civic Center. August 20-21.
- Summer Concert Series. Downtown Brookhaven. TBA.
- Fall Fair at Lincoln County Civic Center. September 9-12.
- The forty-eighth Ole Brook Festival -- a big day-long party in with live music; arts, crafts and food vendors; an antique car show and designated kids zone with inflatables and games. October 1-2.
- Brookhaven Christmas Open House. November 6.
- Christmas Parade. December 2.

The Brookstock music festival is also expected to return in July. Over three days with intimate sessions and a big grand finale concert, it brings together established and upcoming local artists and returning musicians who started their careers in the area to perform oldies and today's sound -- their own compositions and the music of others in country and rock genres.

Look for 5K/10K runs throughout the year, farmers markets in the summer and fall, the Brookhaven Exchange Club Fair in the summer and the Overbrook Songwriters Festival in the fall as well.

All events are subject to change due to COVID-10 restraints and/or inclement weather. Find updates and get the latest news at visitbrookhavenms.com or call 601-833-1411 for information.

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Buy plants & seeds at right place

By Guest Columnist Gary R. Bachman

During the COVID-19 pandemic, huge numbers of people have discovered the joys and benefits of gardening, but they will need to become intentional gardeners to assure continuing enjoyment in their gardens, planning what they will grow and buying the right seeds and plants at the right place.

I'm in my 2021 garden planning mode right now, and along with many other intentional gardeners, I have my mind on seeds. The intentional gardener needs to begin the new year by purchasing seeds, but be aware that the source is important.

When I want to buy seeds and plants for my home landscape, I like to shop the local, independent garden centers. Their seed racks are always a highlight of my gardening year.

If you do any kind of gardening, you know that impulse buying without knowing where the plant is going to be placed is part of the game. But being an intentional gardener means you must control these impulses.

Now the thing about the display racks of seeds is that the selection is generally limited to reliable garden standbys. This is the place to buy those standard seeds. But these garden center displays can't offer the numerous specialty varieties because of the sheer numbers available. That's where the garden catalogs fit in. You can find exactly the variety you want, including the new selections you've read about.

Be sure to order from reputable companies. My recommendation is to choose those that provide great products and even better customer service. I strongly recommend buying seeds directly from reputable businesses with a proven history of selling high-quality products, rather than major online retailers or auction sites. You don't know where the seeds are coming from.

Sure, I could and sometimes do go to the big box or home improvement stores, but there is a

huge difference between plant material bought from these sources and independent garden centers. You can count on working with a knowledgeable staff. Many independents pride themselves for having experience with local and

regional plant selections and growing information. Don't hesitate to ask questions because they'll have answers and suggestions for you to be successful.

These professionals are happy to give you personal assistance with your plant purchases. Many independent garden centers are associated with design and build or landscape maintenance divisions. They can offer a high level of services available besides the basic plant material.

The plant selections at independent garden centers are usually more extensive than those found at other outlets. And if they don't have what you're looking for, many will try to source it for you. Independent garden centers typically work with an assortment of wholesale growers. Having a grower network like this can really be a benefit to the home gardener.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated quarantines threatened the independent garden centers as businesses. In Mississippi, we were extremely fortunate that garden centers were deemed essential and could remain open. Independent garden centers rely on the customer base of the home gardener, as sales of consumer horticulture products account for 100% of their revenue. These sales are less than 5% of revenue for the big box stores. I want to encourage all of us to be intentional and support our local independent garden centers this year.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. Gary Bachman is an Extension and research professor of horticulture at the Mississippi State University Coastal Research and Extension Center in Biloxi.



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Virus no obstacle in Copiah economy

By Bob Arnold

Copiah County Economic Development District (CCEDD) Executive Director Arthur Lee (Pokey) Evans, Jr., says the COVID-19 pandemic may have slowed business, but there's still a lot of business to be had locally, and companies are looking to capitalize on opportunities in the area even as people seek to avoid contact with the virus.

"I see it as a consumer, shopping locally," says Evans. "Local retail stores are teeming with customers who have curtailed travel, but still want and need to do business. If people are learning about where they can shop locally and continue to utilize local sources that create jobs and generate tax revenues to boost the economy of our villages, towns and cities, it's a very good thing coming out of the pandemic circumstances."

Evans is seeing it on the job, too, which he sees as "making sure that the people of Copiah County have jobs and can put food on the table for their families," in the final analysis.

He won't talk about it much, but Evans is currently involved in trying to convince a new employer to establish operations in Copiah County.

"The Mississippi Development Authority introduced us along with several other economic developers to a company, which we are pursuing," Evans relates. "It's competitive, but businesses are looking for opportunities."

Evans is a little more talkative about another company that has purchased the long-deserted facility near the Hazlehurst South Interstate 55 exit where Cherry Bark once produced hardwood flooring. Encore Group LLC, an offshore oilfield food catering service based in Houma, Louisiana, is planning to open Duct Fab, a subsidiary company, to fabricate commercial and residential air conditioning ductwork at the site.

"We're renovating the facility and doing strategic planning around the

expansion beyond our oilfield-focused operations," says Encore's Myron Lopez. "We're looking to open possibly in mid-March."

A wood pellet manufacturer that planned to open operations in Copiah County a few years ago continues to await favorable market conditions, but remains positive about its opportunity, Evans reports.

Overall, Evans says, Copiah County businesses have weathered the pandemic storm well, with no major layoffs or troubles.

"It has pretty much been business as usual," he says. "Premier Transportation had some initial problems, but its trucks are moving again." Steel Outdoors in Wesson is also expanding its product line.

During 2021, CCEDD will be using an updated, more user-friendly web site (www.copiahworks.com) as its major economic development marketing tool.

"The web is the initial point-of-contact with potential new businesses in economic development," notes Evans. "Rarely do site visits occur until you are well into the process." In selling Copiah County to business, the CCEDD web site emphasizes:

- A workforce that is willing and ready to serve employers;
- A location near key markets with rail, interstate, air and nearby water access;
- Government officials who understand business needs, provide incentives, and facilitate location;
- Available land that is well-priced.

CCEDD offices are now located at the Robert Johnson Blues Museum on Marion Avenue at Crystal Springs. Contact Evans at 601-421-1249.



Wesson News

Arthur Lee Evans (Pokey), Jr., executive director of Copiah County Economic Development District and staff assistant Brenda Harper have moved their offices to the Robert Johnson Blues Museum at Crystal Springs.

Pandemic-safe Mardi Gras planned

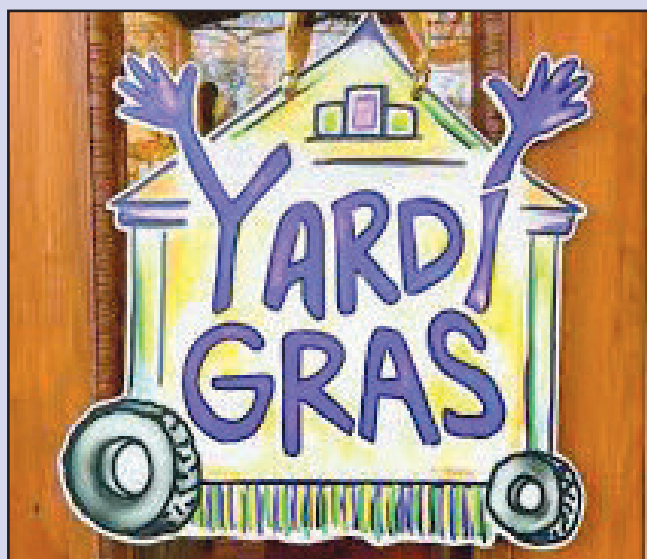
Wesson News

The magic of New Orleans Jackson Square with its painters, musicians and street performers comes to downtown Brookhaven for locals to celebrate a pandemic-safe Mardi Gras.

This year, the annual Downtown Jazzed Up features loads of socially-distanced family fun in an art walk on Whitworth and Railroad Avenues and in the railroad park and municipal parking lot from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, February 20, in Brookhaven.

Gone is the traditional fall-in parade replaced by a leisurely stroll -- a fully outdoors event highlighted by painters and other visual artists displaying their works, multiple musicians providing entertainment around the walking area, street art performances and fun and games tailored for everyone.

Restaurants will offer specials. There will be sidewalk sales. A sidewalk chalk art contest for kids will run throughout the day and Yoga in the Park will provide a way for



Wesson News

Brookhaven's Mardi Gras celebration will feature a yardi gras in which residents decorate homes as stationary floats.

others to shirk their stresses.

When things end downtown, visitors can join a Yardi Gras Drive Thru Parade in their vehicles on Storm Avenue, where residents will decorate their houses as stationary floats in Brookhaven's version of a phenomenon that started in New Orleans as a social media joke, but became a unique Mardi Gras parade pandemic alternative.

Event organizers are still accepting registrations for tables, easels, spaces and time slots from participating visual and musical artists, the sidewalk chalk art contest and anything else that could enhance the celebration at <https://www.bragarts.com/jazzed.html#>.

The Brookhaven Regional Art Guild is sponsoring Brookhaven Downtown Jazzed Up with the Mississippi School of the Arts, Brookhaven Tourism Council and Brookhaven-Lincoln County Chamber of Commerce.

cont. from page 1

Robust economy in pandemic

In the past year, Co-Lin started training the skilled workers for the new Keystone Electrical Manufacturing plant that just opened in Brookhaven.

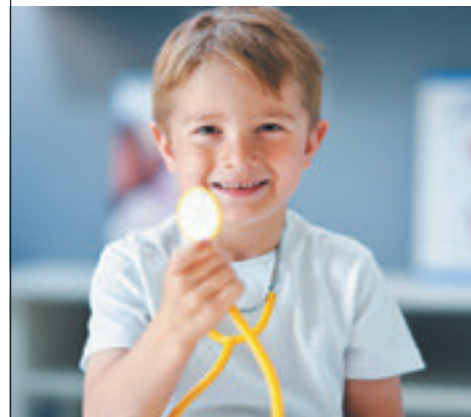
Following a year in which federal dollars geared to pandemic relief and recovery supported free training in a wide variety of areas, including preparation for emergency medical technicians, nurses, medical and legal assistants and welders, Co-Lin will introduce a lineman training course for Southwest, Entergy and Magnolia electrical systems. The 16 week course covers poll climbing and rescue and basic electricity, and awards nine certifications.

This year, Co-Lin will also roll out a class for entrepreneurs throughout the district following its debut last year at Brookhaven Country Club. Designed for persons with a business concept that is in its formative stages or has matured, the class covers business and financial planning and other

preliminary steps before going to a bank for a loan. Co-Lin partners with the federal Small Business Administration's Small Business Development Center in producing the 12-hour course delivered in four sessions. Four to six courses will be scheduled over the next 12 months. Also on the training menu for the coming year are courses on flying drones and commercial driving.

Co-Lin's support of the ACT Work Ready program continues. In all seven Co-Lin district counties, emerging, existing and transitional workforces have been certified as Work Ready as a result of performance by employees and job seekers on the WorkKeys Assessment administered by the college.

"We're now focused on maintaining the Work Ready status of the counties and helping economic developers and employers use data generated by the testing," Sullivan says.



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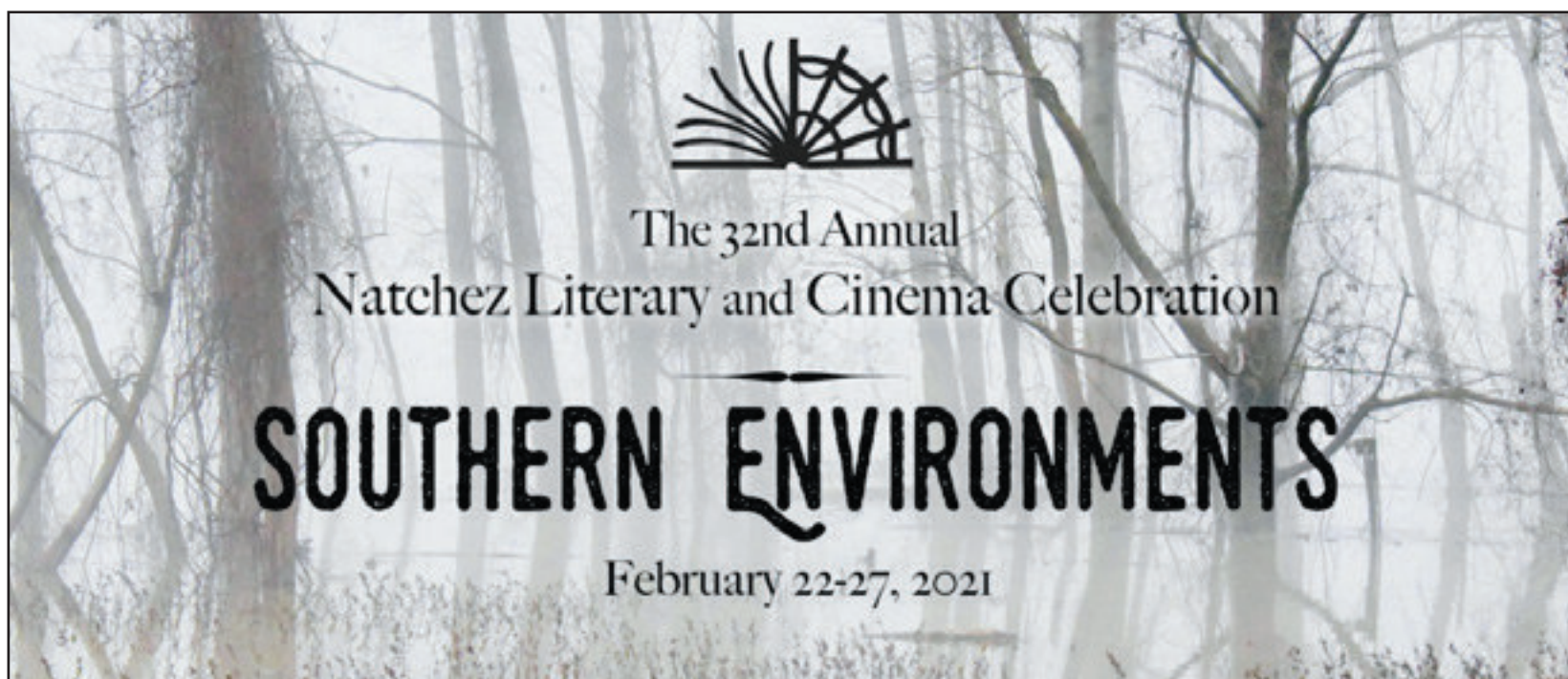
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Virtual literary celebration this year



By Guest Columnist Shaw Furlow

Surprise! Co-Lin's 32nd Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration (NLCC) is virtual this year. Many social events have been canceled, but NLCC producers have decided to go virtual with presentations. On a positive note, it should open the conference to people who cannot always make it to Natchez to attend in person.

"In order to combat the growing virtual burnout felt by so many, we are spreading the presentations out over the entire last week of February," reports Emily Williams, Co-Lin Natchez Learning Resource Coordinator and NLCC co-chair with Lance Harris from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. "I am very excited about the schedule and the caliber of talent that will be showcased."

"Most presentations will be live at either 10:30 a.m. or 1:00 p.m. each day. They will be streamed on Facebook Live. Speakers plan to participate in Q&A's, and we will monitor the comment sections on computer, collecting questions for the speakers there. We will also take questions sent in advance to nlcc@colin.edu from those who will not be able to participate live."

"Of course, we hope most people can watch live, but all sessions will be available for viewing on Facebook, YouTube, and our website for a couple of weeks following."

The theme this year is "Southern Environments," which will encompass sessions in "Ecocriticisms in Southern Studies," "Southern Social Environments" and "Nature as a Character" categories.

The Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration has won numerous awards for its outstanding programming. They include a Cultural Olympiad Award, Best Event of the Year Award at the Governor's Conference on Tourism, the Mississippi Tourism Award, the Mississippi Historical Society's Award of Merit, the Mississippi Humanities Council Humanities Achievement Award, the College Public Relations Association of Mississippi Award, and the 2011 Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts.

NLCC has been called "Mississippi's most significant annual conference devoted to literature, history, film, and culture."

Begun in 1990 by Co-Lin, Mississippi Department of Archives and History is now a co-sponsor and Natchez National Historical Park supports the event. Each year, a theme is selected around which the presentations revolve.

Because it is virtual, classrooms around the state can incorporate this year's event into instruction, and those who have never before attended NLCC can get a taste of what the celebration is all about.

Following is the schedule. Until next time, support the arts and this event is



Wesson News

definitely worth supporting.

Monday, February 22

9:30 a.m. Film tribute to the late Governor William Winter

10:30 a.m. Ralph Didlake. "The Mississippi State Asylum: A Realm of its Own"

1 p.m. Jay Watson. "Energy & Modernity in the U.S. South"

Tuesday, February 23

10:30 a.m. W. Ralph Eubanks. "How to Use Place as an Archive: Studying Mississippi Literature Through Its Landscape"

1 p.m. G Mark LaFrancis, Melanie Addington, Keith Beauchamp & James Williams. "Crafting a Documentary: Experts Share Their Knowledge"

Wednesday, February 24

10:30 a.m. Carter Burns. "Thomas Affleck: Steward of the Land"

1 p.m. Tammy Greer. "Yakni Achukma, Okla Achukma (Healthy Land, Healthy People)"

2:30 p.m. Clifton L. Taulbert. "Tulsa's Black Wall Street: Triumph, Tragedy & Tenacity 100 Years Ago"

Thursday, February 25

10:30 a.m. Natasha Trethewey. "A Morning with Natasha Trethewey"

1 p.m. Aimee Nezhukumatathil. "World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whales and Other Astonishments"

Friday, February 26

10:30 a.m. Zaire Love. "Space in the South"

12 noon. Award Ceremonies. Presentation of Richard Wright Literary Excellence Award to Dr. Alferdteen Harrison. Presentation of the Thad Cochran Humanities Achievement Award to Dr. Billy Thames.

1 p.m. J. Drew Lanham. "Writing Beauty through Plagues -- Creating When Everything is Falling Down Around Us"

5:30 p.m. Spirits & Prose. A Cocktail and Book Pairing Hour with Mark Brockway

Saturday, February 27

10:30 a.m. R.J. Lee. "Bringing More of Natchez into Rosaline"

1 p.m. Richard Grant. "Writing about Place"

EDITOR'S NOTE: Shaw Furlow is a local composer, musician and arts promoter. He produces an internet-based video show -- From the Shadyside -- that spotlights area musical talent and is a consultant to school bands in the region.



Co-Lin board member passes away

Wesson News

Co-Lin Board member and former Board chairman Eugene "Gene" Bates of Church Hill died last month in Hattiesburg.

"We are deeply saddened by the passing of Mr. Gene Bates," Co-Lin President Dr. Jane Hulon Sims said. "He served as a Board Member for 37 years, 17 years as chairman. We are thankful for his outstanding leadership, friendship, guidance and wisdom. He will be greatly missed by the Co-Lin family and his community. Mr. Bates continuously upheld the value of trust, accountability, caring, commitment and excellence. We are especially thankful for the passion he carried in his heart for Co-Lin."

The Board of Trustees honored Bates in 2012 with the dedication of the P. Eugene Bates Men's Residence Hall on the Wesson Campus.

A cattleman and conservationist, Bates is a graduate of the Jefferson County public school system and attended Co-Lin. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees in agriculture



Special to Wesson News

from Mississippi State University.

Bates was an active member of First Baptist Church in Natchez, where he served as a deacon and Sunday school teacher.

Survivors include his wife, Susie Mae Bullen Bates; daughters, Evie Peavey and husband Woodie of Lucedale, Mississippi, Paula Green and husband Ron of Stewartsville, Missouri; grandchildren, Paul Green of Kansas City, Missouri, Shawn Sadler of Wiggins, Mississippi, Elizabeth Bortell and husband Curtis of Centerville, Iowa, Matthew Green and wife Cara of Gower, Missouri, Daniel Sadler and wife Taylor of St. Joseph, Mississippi, Lauren Green of St. Joseph, Missouri, Morgan Lundy and husband Spencer of Stewartsville, Missouri, Madison Green of Kansas City, Missouri, and Michael Green of Stewartsville, Missouri; great-grandchildren, Adrian and Elyse Green, Lily, Madalynn, Phoenix, and Linkin Bortell, Sabina, Anna, Ambrose, Monica, Gabriel and Zelig Green, and Logan Lundy; brother George Bates and wife Linda of Church Hill, Mississippi, and numerous nieces and nephews.

Helping people meet in a pandemic

By Bob Arnold

For Tricia Russell, the events coordinator at Co-Lin, the past year has been a challenge, trying to do her job in midst of a pandemic in which people have been reluctant to come together and interact.

"Normally, I seek to maximize space for people and groups, providing room for them to do what they want to do most efficiently in the least space," she explains. Now, it's providing room for people to do what they want to do safely. Events or meetings that required one room in the past now may need two or even three rooms. You seek to spread out people."

Technology, always an important part of her work, has, increasingly, become the critical component. In some cases, meetings are wholly virtual and often partially virtual with participants attending via Zoom and other meeting apps on their computers rather than on site. Speakers now commonly come to events through telecommunication technology whether or not participants are there in person, Russell points out. In the post-pandemic future, virtual technologies will continue to play a major role in events, she predicts.

Russell joined Co-Lin 1997 as secretary for community services, working in events coordination for the Institute for Learning in Retirement (ILR), Workforce Education, the band, senior aid and adult education. When the Thames Center opened in 1999, her work became more focused on events held there and ILR and less on the campus as a whole. From 2006 until 2018, she worked with Marilyn Brown as ILR events coordinator and



Wesson News

with Julie Wright since then.

Born at Anniston, Alabama, Russell traveled a lot in her childhood and youth in an army family with her parents, who were Brookhaven natives, and two sisters. She was too young to remember the three to four years they spent in Hawaii, but recalls the field trips in Germany when she was in junior high school and life in South Carolina and Georgia before settling in Brookhaven as a junior in high school when her father retired from

the one-year secretarial program at Co-Lin in 1983. She married Scott Russell, also a Co-Lin graduate, and moved with him to Vicksburg, where she worked for a law firm and he worked for IBM. She returned with her husband to Brookhaven, where she also worked briefly as a legal secretary before starting her career at Co-Lin.

Russell and her husband, now wheelchair-bound due to childhood muscular dystrophy, live in Brookha-

pist. Russell's sister Ramona Thomas teaches in the Co-Lin Medical Radiologic Technology program.

What are your hobbies?

I am into crafts -- sewing among other things. I like to travel. My husband, two daughters and I have made two road trips to California and back. Branson, Missouri, is another favorite destination. My husband and I are active in the Brookhaven Church of Christ. I assist with secretarial needs and teach a Bible Class. My husband is one of the church leaders.

Are you a reader?

I am an avid reader, particularly of Christian fiction, Christian inspirational literature and mysteries. My favorite author is Dee Henderson. Her O'Malley series is the best. The inspirational romantic suspense novels are focused on the stories of seven abandoned or orphaned teens who became a loyal, committed family which they call O'Malley. They restore strength and hope to your spirit.

Do you enjoy movies or theater?

Any mystery!

What kind of music do you like?

Country and Christian.

What would you do with lottery winnings if you were so lucky?

I would hit the road with my husband in a mobile home and travel.

How would you change the world?

I would try to shape a healthier world in which people are more grateful to God and loving, kind and respectful to each other.

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

the military. Collecting things from places where she travelled -- stamps, coins, spoons -- occupied her as she was growing up.

Russell graduated from Brookhaven High School in 1982 and then

ven. They have two daughters -- Abbey Fleming, 28, a Co-Lin graduate who is a cosmetologist, and Mandy, 23, who will be graduating from the Co-Lin Respiratory Care Technology program as a Respiratory Thera-

Lincoln County goes electric

By Bob Arnold

Add another basic industry to the economic mix in Lincoln County: electrical power generation.

Over the past twelve months, the Brookhaven-Lincoln County Chamber of Commerce (BLCCC) and the Brookhaven-Lincoln County Economic Development Alliance (BLCEDA) have worked with partners to bring a manufacturer of electrical system power output controls and a power generation cooperative's district office to the Linbrook Business Park in Brookhaven.

Last month, BLCA announced it had accepted an option from Southwest Electric (SE) based at Lorman, Mississippi, in Jefferson County to purchase approximately 65 acres in Linbrook Business Park where it will build a district office, which it said in 2018 it planned to locate in the Brookhaven area.

Since it incorporated in 1937, SE has had its headquarters facility at Lorman, and the utility opened a work center at Natchez in 2006.

"Having a district office on the Brookhaven side of our service area will help us in our mission to provide reliable electric service to our members," SE CEO Kevin Bonds says. The office, including a dispatch office, IT services, a full warehouse, mechanic shop, truck staging area and laydown yard to house emergency storm crews, will allow staff, material and equipment to be distributed across the SE service area to better serve its 25,000 members in Lincoln, Copiah, Franklin, Amite, Adams, Hinds, Jefferson and Wilkinson Counties and increase overall system reliability. In the coming weeks, prior to its final purchase of the Linbrook site, SE will conduct site studies to assure that construction and utilization of its new facility cause no environmental or civil engineering impacts.

"In the seven and one half years I have been in Brookhaven and Lincoln County, SE will be making the largest investment of funds and jobs by any company," says Garrick Combs, executive director of BLCC and BLCEDA.

SE detailed its plans almost a full year after Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves came to Brookhaven to participate in announcing the location of a Keystone Electrical Manufacturing Company (KEMC) production facility in Linbrook Business Park. The Des Moines-based company is investing \$4 million and initially creating 30 jobs in Lincoln County to produce what its owner Fred Buie, a Brookhaven native who is coming back to his hometown, calls "the brains of the electrical power grid."

Its products monitor demands on the grid and protect it from overloading and control output of wind farms, based on determination of power demand on wind turbines.

The community effort that brought KEMC to the area has become an economic development model for which BLCC and BLCEDA were recognized by the Mississippi Economic Development Council (MEDC), Combs says. The key component of the model is construction of a speculative industrial building in Linbrook Business Park to lure an employer that wants to deploy workers and machinery to get its product to market as quickly as possible without a long wait for construction of manufacturing facilities. KEMC's decision to locate in Brookhaven



Lincoln County-Brookhaven Chamber of Commerce's Garrick Combs and Katie Nations oversee economic development and events.

culminated a three-year marketing effort in which a special web site wooed interested businesses followed by numerous meetings and telephone calls to sell the spec building to various prospects. In July at its annual meeting, MEDC spotlighted the model with an Economic Development Award for municipalities in the Brookhaven size range.

Following its successes over the past twelve months in bringing two new employers to the area, BLCEDA will again build its 2021 economic development activities around this model. A new 50,000 spec building is being completed with a few minor changes to make it more attractive to buyers: permanent flooring will not be installed; only one center row of columns will be required for structural support; the ceiling height will be 30-foot instead of 28-feet. "We're planning a ribbon-cutting for late spring or early summer, will launch a web site to promote the building and a marketing campaign," Combs says.

The Lincoln County Board of Supervisors and Brookhaven Board of Aldermen have approved the BLCEDA plan. Agracel, Inc., an Illinois-based industrial development company with offices in Madison, Mississippi, is constructing the building and will own it, sparing BLCEDA and taxpayers a \$2 million bill.

With electrical power generation now part of the Brookhaven-Lincoln County economic mix, Combs says BLCEDA will be looking upstream and downstream for employers that complement SE and Keystone.

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COVID-19, liquor, lottery, debt & schools

Special to Wesson News

Blood filter treats COVID-19. A new device that filters blood is showing promise at Forrest General Hospital in Hattiesburg in treating COVID-19 patients who have not responded to other therapies. The Seraph 100 Microbind Affinity Blood Filter has helped most of the 17 patients treated in four to six hour sessions. The filter has coated beads which bind to infectious agents, including viruses, in the blood. The hospital is using the treatment under an emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration.

COVID-19 spread slows. The spread of COVID-19 in Mississippi showed significant signs of slowing last month, although it is still relatively high compared to case and death numbers in 2020. The seven-day average is now at 1,623, a 20 per cent decrease since the start of 2021. Both new cases and hospitalizations are now back to the levels they

were in early December. The rolling average for deaths has dropped to early December levels, about 32 per day, after peaking at 44 per day on Jan. 9.

Move to privatize liquor business. Mississippi lawmakers are considering withdrawing the state from the liquor and wine business, letting private industry take over warehousing and distributing liquor. The Legislature is also considering allowing home delivery of liquor, wine and beer. Both measures appear to have traction in the Legislature this session, even in a Bible Belt state that has been slow to relax or change its strict liquor laws. Mississippi is one of 17 states that tightly control the sale of liquor, and one of 10 that sell spirits to all private package stores.

Copiah \$1 million winner. A Copiah County Mega Millions

lottery player has won \$1 million. A ticket sold at RBs One Stop on Highway 28 in Hazlehurst matched all five white ball winning numbers worth \$1 million. The player did not choose the Megaplier option and chose to remain anonymous. "The winner is the second millionaire to win playing Mega Millions in Mississippi," said Mississippi Lottery Corporation President Tom Shaheen. "A Gautier woman won \$2 million in the June 9, 2020, Mega Millions drawing."

Justice system drives debt. In 2019, people who had touched the criminal justice system in Mississippi held \$507 million in debt as a result — more than double the \$243 million they owed in 2009, new research finds. While court-ordered financial burdens grow, the minimum wage hasn't budged and overall inflation-adjusted wages in Mississippi actually dropped in that same

timeframe. Even many who finish their sentences — often coined their "debt to society" — are saddled with very literal debts that prevent them from the opportunities they need to thrive outside of prison.

Schools get more funds. Schools in Mississippi are about to see a large influx of federal dollars from the second federal coronavirus relief bill passed in December. The second wave of funding allocated for Mississippi is nearly three times the amount the state received last year from the education portion of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Around \$720 million is slated for Mississippi K-12 schools, compared to around \$170 million the state received from CARES in 2020. Up to 10% of the second round of funding, or about \$72 million, can go to the Mississippi Department of Education, and the remainder must go directly to schools.

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Co-Lin mourns Winter's death

Wesson News

On the eve of its Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration (NLCC) later this month, Co-Lin mourned the death of former Mississippi Governor William Forest Winter in a special resolution that highlighted his contributions to NLCC.

Winter died at age 97 in December.

"The Copiah-Lincoln Community College Board of Trustees, faculty, students, alumni and leaders of the NLCC express their deepest sympathy to the William Winter family on the loss of a great Mississippi statesman and devoted friend to education," the resolution concluded after citing his several contributions to NLCC:

- Serving as Director of Proceedings at its inaugural event in June 1990

- Suggesting program topics, speakers, award winners and films over three decades

- Participating in programs as a speaker and in sharing his research and first-hand knowledge of Mississippi history and culture



- Personal financial support and endorsements that helped secure grants and other funding

- Serving for 27 years on an advisory committee

- Lending his name to the NLCC William Winter Scholars program that recognizes outstanding college-level students and faculty members in Mississippi

The resolution noted Winter was recognized as the "Education Governor of Mississippi" and was a "longtime advocate and promoter of all levels of education in the State of Mississippi, including two-year colleges, and in particular, Copiah-Lincoln Community College."



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Learn your heart health numbers

By Guest Columnist Dr. Stephanie Duguid

There are many conditions that affect the heart. You may know that heart attacks, arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythm), cardiomyopathy (issues with the heart muscle) and congenital defects (heart conditions with which you are born) are directly related to heart health. But did you also know that many other conditions including, but not limited to, cholesterol, diabetes, and high blood pressure, can lead to heart disease, heart attack, or stroke?

February -- National Heart Month -- is a time to consider heart health.

The are factors you can control such as diet, exercise, smoking, and alcohol consumption that are related to our heart health. Age, heritage, and gender are things we cannot control that are also related to our cardiovascular status. The controllable factors of which you should be particularly aware are cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure:

- Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance made in the liver and other cells. It is found in certain foods such as dairy products, eggs, and meats. You need some cholesterol to function properly, as it helps to support cell walls and produces hormones and bile that assists in digesting fat. There is good cholesterol and bad cholesterol. Lean fats in avocados and nuts tend to be good cholesterol, while other fats in red meat and fried foods tend to be bad cholesterol. However, you only need a limited amount of either type. When you have too much, plaque -- a thick, hard substance -- forms in your arteries and can impede blood flow, causing atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and heart disease, including high blood pressure, angina (chest pain), and even heart attacks.

- Type 2 diabetes is a condition related to glucose (sugar) and insulin levels. Adults with Type 2 diabetes are at least 65 per cent more likely to die from some form of heart disease or stroke than those without the condition.

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- High blood pressure is a condition that refers to pressure your blood exerts against the walls of your arteries when your heart is pumping compared to the pressure against the walls of your arteries when your heart is relaxed. When the numbers are too high, it can lead to heart related issues, and stroke. High blood pressure results from plaque build-up, salt intake, smoking, stress, and more.

Controlling these factors starts with knowing your numbers:

- Total cholesterol should be less than 200 mg/dL. LDL. Bad cholesterol should be less than 100 mg/dL, while HDL good cholesterol should be more than 50 mg/dL. If you don't know your numbers, consult your doctor.

- Fasting blood sugar levels in the morning can indicate if you have diabetes. Your reading should be less than 100 mg/dL. If you are consistently higher than 100mg/dL, check with your doctor.

- Blood pressure is read as the systolic pressure (heart contracting) over the diastolic pressure (heart at rest). Your numbers should be less than 120 over some number less than 80. Anything over 120/80 needs to be discussed with your physician.

It is important to be educated about your health. Be sure to ask questions, understand how conditions are related, and see your doctor on at least an annual basis. For more information, visit the American Heart Association web site -- www.heart.org.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Stephanie Duguid is Dean of Academic Instruction at Co-Lin. She is also an athletic trainer and nutrition specialist and has been teaching courses related to those two areas as well as practicing what she preaches for more than twenty years.



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Mississippi Lawmakers file 2,000+ bills

By Bob Arnold

Mississippi lawmakers have filed some 2,000 bills so far in their 2021 session, which started January 5 and is scheduled to adjourn March 26.

Republicans are in the majority -- 36-16 in the Senate and 75-46 in the House -- and have a veto-proof supermajority in both chambers, although they control the governorship.

The Legislature is responsible for redistricting following the U.S. census, which it is expected to address as part of the session.

With the COVID-19 pandemic -- and at least three cases have been reported among lawmakers, the legislative leadership has urged members to limit the number of bills they file this year so the session can be wrapped up quickly and the 174-member Legislature can leave the Capitol. Committee chairmen said leaders also urged them to drastically limit the number of bills they take up and move forward out of committees this session.

Taxing, spending and other bills that face later deadlines for drafting and filing are still to come. Last year, more than 2,800 total bills were filed. In a typical session, about 600 or so general bills will be passed into law.

Here are some key bills to watch by category:

1. Education.

SB 2001: Teacher pay raise. All teachers and assistants would get a \$1,000 annual pay raise. For starting teachers through three years with a bachelor's degree, it would be \$1,110, raising the starting salary to \$37,000. Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hosemann is pushing for a raise, a major campaign promise.

SB 2267: Teacher license reciprocity. Aimed at helping to combat teacher shortages, this would allow teachers licensed in other states to more easily obtain a standard five-year license to teach in Mississippi.

SB 2314/HB 316: Compulsory kindergarten attendance. One of several such measures proposed again this year, it would apply the state's compulsory school attendance law to 5-year-olds.

HB 314: Allows the Mississippi State Board of Education to receive donations and gifts.

SB 2536: Mississippi Fairness Act. Would require K-12 and higher education schools to designate teams based on biological sex and prevent students from playing on teams that align with their gender identity. Students who don't make a team could sue schools that violate this section; they could also sue if they encounter a student of the opposite sex in bathrooms or locker rooms.

SB 2313/ HB 1030: Would allow student athletes to be paid for their name, image, likeness, and endorsements.

2. Health Care.

HB 207: Would expand Medicaid as is allowed under federal law to provide coverage to primarily the working poor. Numerous bills have been filed this year to expand Medicaid. Various efforts have been under way for multiple years to expand Medicaid, with the federal government paying most of the costs.

HB 1013: Would establish a commission of seven members to govern the Division of Medicaid, which is currently operated by an executive director appointed by the governor. Four would be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor and three by the Governor.

HB 338: Would make all abortions illegal in Mississippi. Prior to this bill, the most restrictive ban passed by the legislature banned abortions after six weeks, though it was later struck down in court. The U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly delayed a decision on whether to take up Mississippi's 15-week abortion ban, which was also struck down in a lower court. The state's sole clinic which provides abortions will not perform them after 16 weeks.

SB 2171: The Transgender 21 Act would prohibit medical professionals from performing certain gender confirming procedures on minors under 21-years-old.

3. Criminal Justice.

HB 525: The "omnibus" criminal justice reform bill. As with a mirror bill in the Senate, this measure includes numerous state codes, and is a vehicle for major criminal justice reform many lawmakers are hoping to enact to address the state's prison crisis. The measure will include increased parole and probation eligibility for some inmates.

HB 84: Allows local sheriffs to use radar. Several bills have been filed and are routinely filed each session without any success.

HB 1041: Would prohibit federal law from stopping a manufacturer within the state from making certain types of firearms and ammunition, such as limiting the size of a magazine in a gun.

HB 465: Compassionate Parole Eligibility Act. Would allow inmates who were not convicted of a sex offense, capital murder or sentenced to death to be eligible for parole if they have been diagnosed with a terminal illness and have a life expectancy of a year or less or are completely disabled.

4. COVID-19.

HB 719: Would prohibit an employer from requiring an employee to take a COVID-19 vaccination as condition of employment.

5. Anti-Poverty Programs.

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Mississippi Lawmakers file 2,000+ bills

HB 976/SB 2759: Would increase the monthly amount of cash assistance under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, known as “welfare.” The benefit is currently capped at \$170-a-month for a family of three.

HB 49: Would terminate the state’s contract with a private company to run child support enforcement, bringing the program back in-house.

SB 2079: Would increase minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2024. The Legislature traditionally refuses to address bills raising the state minimum wage.

HB 17: Establishes a Working Families Study Committee to develop recommendations to assure working families have access to affordable child care so they can participate in the workforce.

HB 987: Would allow unspent TANF, or welfare, funds to pay the expenses of people enrolled in nursing school.

HB 890: Would allow teenage recipients of either TANF, or welfare, funds or Medicaid to participate in birth control, abstinence and parenting programs.

6. Elections.
SC 508: Would amend the state Constitution to allow felons to vote after serving their sentence and meeting certain conditions. Several similar proposals have been filed.

SB 2368: Would allow no excuse early voting up to 10 days before the election.

SB 2102: Would create an agreement among states to elect the President by popular vote rather than the Electoral College. In theory, the bill would

render the Electoral College useless if enough states agree to designate their electors to the candidate who won the popular vote.

7. Taxes.
SB 2182: Would apply the 15% excise tax on tobacco products other than cigarettes to electronic smoking or vaping devices.

SB 2822: This measure seeks to reform and streamline Mississippi’s hodgepodge of economic development incentives, including tax breaks offered to businesses looking to relocate or expand in Mississippi. It would eliminate or consolidate some measures, and require more “transparency” on whether a company is living up to its promises of jobs and salaries when it receives state incentives.

Note: Several tax bills, including proposals to eliminate the state’s income tax, will be filed later in the legislative this session.

8. Miscellaneous.
SB 2196: The governor or lieutenant governor would be required to make appointments to fill vacant offices within 90 days. If the governor fails to make an appointment within 90 days, the appointment authority would shift to the lieutenant governor, and vice versa. The bill would not apply to constitutionally chartered positions, such as the state Board of Education or IHL.

HB 16 : Would increase salaries of Highway Patrol troopers and other Department of Public Safety officers. A new pay scale would start officers at \$49,140, with the highest ranking colonels with decades of experience capped at \$125,360.

HB 89: Would allow the issuance of bonds to incur long-term debt for improvements to be made at state parks.

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Lottery scams are common



Wesson News

The Mississippi Lottery Corporation (MLC) warns players of lottery games that "fraud accounts and scammers never take a break."

"Fake lottery scams are fairly common," says MLC President Tom Shaheen. "You can receive a phone call, email or social media message that is seemingly real. Do not be fooled. Stay aware and play responsibly."

"In one scam, Mississippians have received telephone calls regarding a second chance at winning the Mega Millions jackpot. If you receive such a call, hang up immediately. If you receive the message by email, text, social media or any other form of communication, do not respond. It is a scam."

MLC reminds Mississippians:

- The Mississippi Lottery does not contact the winner. It doesn't even know winners until they claim their prizes.

- In online games such as Powerball, the Lottery knows only the winning numbers drawn and where the ticket was sold. Winners must keep their tickets and confirm to lottery officials the numbers

on their tickets. If a winner does not step forward with winning numbers, no one wins the prize.

- A legitimate lottery never asks winners to pay taxes up front. All federal and state taxes are paid before the lottery releases money to a winner.

- Lotteries of foreign countries are illegal in the United States. No legitimate foreign lottery sells tickets in the United States. If you have been contacted by a lottery claiming to be affiliated with the government of another country, it is a scam.

- If you did not buy a ticket, you cannot win a lottery prize. If you have been contacted by a lottery claiming you won a prize, but you have never purchased a ticket, it is a scam.

If you think you're a victim of fraud or attempted fraud by someone posing as a representative of the Mississippi Lottery Corporation, report it to the Mississippi Attorney General's Office Consumer Protection Division at 601-359-4230 or toll-free at 800-281-4418.

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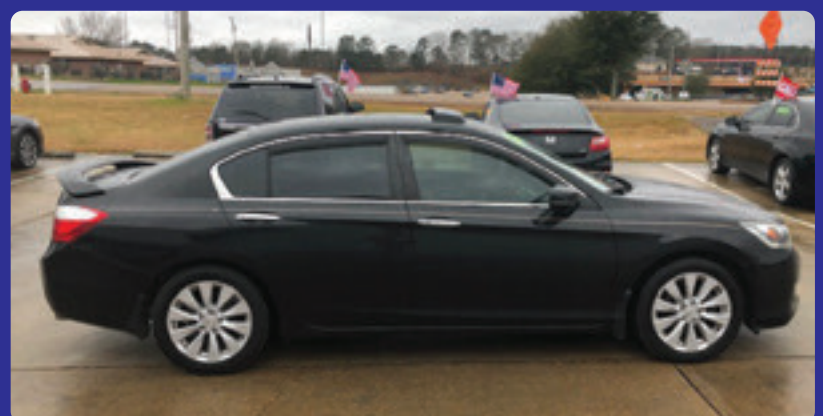
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2014 Honda Accord EX-L



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Opera goes virtual, postpones events

Wesson News

As Opera Mississippi celebrates its 75th anniversary, the company is presenting virtual events.

On January 15, the company started the virtual presentation with a video interview with Rhonda Richmond and Malcolm White, another most notable Mississippi arts figure, at operams.org and through social media channels.

Opera Mississippi had planned a series of live cabarets and performances that would continue its tradition of providing high quality musical offerings in Mississippi. However, as with most all performing arts organizations, the COVID-19 virus became an obstacle. Singing has been identified as one of the most significant ways of spreading aerosols. So in order to keep performers and patrons safe, the company cancelled professional vocal performances until such time it is safe to do so.

Lady Sings the Blues featuring Rhonda Richmond scheduled for January 18 at Duling Hall was postponed until September and *Letters from Puccini* scheduled for February was postponed until February 2022. At this point, all other performances are still planned to be live, but pending the virus situation, may be postponed. There will also be three more virtual offerings in the near future featuring a variety of vocal performers.

For more information please contact Opera Mississippi at 601-960-2300 or info@operams.org.



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Assessment, accountability programs suspended

Special to Wesson News

The Mississippi State Board of Education (MDE) has suspended three statewide assessment and accountability programs to manage the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the 2020-21 school year.

All required state and federal assessments will be administered this school year as usual. However, schools and districts will not be assigned A-F letter grades for their performance during the 2020-21 school year, 3rd graders do not have to pass a reading test to qualify for promotion, and high school students do not have to pass end-of-course assessments to meet graduation requirements:

- Current third graders will take the Third Grade Reading/Language Arts assessment, but students are not required to have a passing score on the assessment to be promoted to fourth grade for the 2021-22 school year. Students still must meet all other district requirements for promotion.

- All high school students who take required end-of-course high school assessments, including Algebra I, English II, Biology and U.S. History, in the 2020-21 school year are not required to have a passing score to meet high school graduation requirements. Students must meet all other state and district requirements to graduate.

- Schools and districts will not be assigned A-F letter grades for their performance in the 2020-21 school year because the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) will not have sufficient data to calculate grades based on state and federal requirements. Schools and districts will retain their most recent letter grades earned in the 2018-19 school year.

The MDE will calculate and report the results of all statewide assessments administered during the 2020-21 school year and will submit information and a waiver request to the U.S. Department of Education to meet federal requirements for assessment and accountability.

“This year’s statewide assessments will provide valuable information about the impact of COVID-19 on learning and will help identify where accelerated learning opportunities for students are most needed,” said Dr. Carey Wright, state superintendent of education. “The policy suspensions are intended to support schools through this intensely challenging year for educators and students.”

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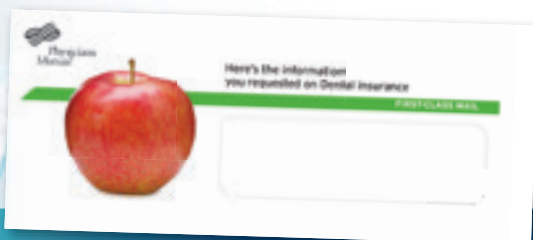
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6255

Medicare has changed. Find out how it can affect you.

Important changes to the federal Medicare program became effective at the beginning of the year. As a result, retirees in your state may be eligible for coverage with new options.

Find out if you qualify for Medicare Supplement insurance that can help limit your out-of-pocket expenses.

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