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# Wesson News

## SPOTLIGHT

### Easter Meditation

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Volume 9, Number 3

*"Good News You Can Use"*

March 9, 2021

# Winter storms shut down Wesson

Wesson News

Two winter storms caused a week-long shutdown in Wesson last month, with icy roads that prevented people from leaving their homes, and fallen trees and limbs that downed power lines, knocking out electricity to most of the town's 2,000 residents and businesses and drastically reducing pressure to make water service virtually useless to customers.

"The town was pretty much shut down from Monday, February 15, until Saturday, February 20, when the sun came out and temperatures rose into the 50s from freezing throughout most of the week," Wesson Public Works Director Brad Turner reported.

The first storm came with heavy sleet and snow mixtures on late Sunday night and early Monday



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morning, February 14 and 15, and continued into Tuesday morning, leaving a one-inch pretty, but troublesome, white blanket on the Wesson landscape, impassible primary and secondary roadways

and scattered power outages.

Additional ice, snow and sleet starting Wednesday afternoon, February 17, put additional strain on the already ice-packed roads, and caused more power outages as

ice-covered trees, limbs and power lines collapsed under the weight.

By Thursday morning, most Wesson residents and businesses had lost power, and the town's water system could not meet consumption demands. Co-Lin and Wesson Attendance Center cancelled classes. The U.S. Post Office suspended services. COVID-19 vaccination sites in the area shut down. King's Daughters Medical Center's clinics were closed. Low water pressure impacted restaurant operations. Jackson Airport closed, along with large stretches of interstates and highways.

Perhaps the most dramatic storm-related incident locally occurred on Mt. Zion Road Wednesday evening after an accident closed Interstate 55,

*cont. on page 3*

# Three running for At-large Alderman

Wesson News

The race for Alderman-at-large involving three candidates will bring excitement to the Wesson municipal election on June 8 in which incumbent Mayor Alton Shaw and four Ward Aldermen will run unopposed.

"Everyone needs to get out and vote," affirms Wesson Town Clerk Angela Hester. "Not only will there be a closely contested Alderman-at-large race, but municipal elections are important because local officials make the decisions related to the things closest to our day-to-day lives."

Incumbent Stephen Ashley will face former Alderman Van Graham and Mark Douglas in the contentious Alderman-at-large race. In addition to Shaw, Aldermen Larry Hall (Ward 1), Jarrad Ashley (Ward 2), Billy Ellison (Ward 3) and Michael King (Ward 4) are running in the unopposed races. Because Wesson municipal candidates



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run as independents, they vie only in a general election with no preliminary primary election.

City Hall, rather than the American Legion Hall, will be the polling place for the election, since it will be held for selecting municipal officials only. The poll will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Wesson residents who will be at least 18 years old before June 8 can register to vote at City Hall or with Copiah County Circuit Clerk Edna Stevens through May 10 if they are not already registered or need to change their registrations. Wesson City Hall is open Monday thru Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and will be open Saturday, May 8, from 8 a.m. to 12 noon for

voter registration. Applications for absentee ballots will be available at City Hall on April 8.

At their February meeting, Wesson Aldermen named three commissioners to oversee the election: Alena Hughes, Chad Sills and Sabrina Brown.

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# Jesus: the missing puzzle piece

By Guest Columnist Nelson Santa Ana

When we go searching for something that is lost or valuable, we call it a quest. The word “quest,” itself, makes a search sound important and noble. The Quest for the Holy Grail, the Ark of the Covenant, or Amelia Earhardt’s *Spirit of St. Louis* are the types of adventures about which books and movies are written.

In spite of how fancy it sounds, we have all been on quests. Some are aggravating and not very noteworthy, like the quest for the missing sunglasses I eventually found on top of my head. Some are short and very intense, like the time my one-year-old son slipped out of his stroller in a parking lot while I was tying a Christmas tree to the roof of my car. In this space, however, we are going to encounter a quest that took place 2,000 years ago. In the process, we will realize that we are on a quest, as well. Not a quest for a lost object, but a quest for a lost truth. A quest of faith.

The background to this quest centers around Jesus of Nazareth. Where we pick up the story, Jesus has been accused of crimes He did not commit, condemned as a criminal worthy of death, flogged mercilessly, crucified, murdered, and laid in a tomb for three days.

*When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they could go and anoint him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they went to the tomb at sunrise. They were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb for us?” Looking up, they noticed that the stone—which was very large—had been rolled away. When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side; they were alarmed. “Don’t be alarmed,” he told them. “You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they put him.” (Mark 16:1-6, CSB)*

Here we see three women who followed Jesus went on a quest to see his grave and tend to his body. That’s pretty close to the modern day equivalent of going to place flowers on a loved one’s grave. But, on the way, something dawned on them. The stone that keeps the tomb sealed was very heavy. In the ancient Near East, a tomb would be carved into the side of a hill and a small trench would be dug in front of the entrance of the tomb. At this point, a large stone that covered the entirety of the entrance would be rolled into the trench. So a heavy stone had to be rolled upwards in order to get in the tomb.

The women quickly realized they couldn’t move this stone on their own. Their quest to see Jesus was in danger. How could they possibly move an obstacle that was larger than themselves?

Everyone all over the world, like these women, is on a quest, as well. Our quest is to seek to know the reality of spirituality, and there are all different kinds of beliefs. Between atheists, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians and many other religions, there is a plethora of options for what to believe. But ultimately, no matter which group you would place yourself in, all of us are seeking to do the same thing. Not seeking after God, but seeking to fill a void in our lives.

Blaise Pascal, a Seventeenth Century philosopher, said we are all on this quest because we all have a God-shaped hole in our hearts that we strive to fill. Everyone

seeks to fill this void with different things in an attempt to perform some sort of self-surgery to close our holes. It’s like doing a 750-piece puzzle and not having the last piece. It’s frustrating and incomplete. Thus, we try to fill that hole with different things. We try money, as if we can buy our way to fulfillment. We try power, as if controlling others will fulfill us. We try fame, as if a brief spotlight on our lives will lead to inner satisfaction. We try knowledge, as if understanding the world will help eradicate the pain caused by it. We try addictive behavior, as if temporarily numbing the emptiness will make it go away. Eventually, though, rather than filling the void, these become more obstacles to overcome. And all along, none of these puzzle pieces actually fit.

So, what does this missing puzzle piece look like? In the women’s quest for Jesus, they see an angel, who tells them they are looking for the wrong thing. They were seeking a crucified, dead, and buried Jesus. That’s often where our personal quests get off track. There are so many misconceptions about Jesus. For some, he’s a legend, though history clearly vouches for his existence. For many, he’s just a good prophet or teacher, but that doesn’t really make sense because He called Himself the Son of God. If He willingly deceived people, then that makes him a liar and not good.

If you look at the Biblical account about Jesus, C.S. Lewis, in the book *Mere Christianity*, points out that there are only three viable options for who He is.

He could be a liar, because when he claimed to be the Son of God, he knew it wasn’t true. The problem with this is, if Jesus was a liar, then surely his disciples would have known it. He taught the most radical, God-following messages and claimed to be without sin. His disciples did everything with Him for three years. They would have seen the inconsistencies. Yet they were willing to die for Him! Sometimes people are willing to die for a cause, but how often are people willing to die for a cause they know isn’t true?

Another option is that Jesus was a lunatic. That when Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, he actually believed it was true. The problem with this theory is that He consistently taught the same things over 3 years, consistently exhibited normal social behavior, and none of his opponents seriously accused him of being insane. You don’t put a lunatic to death for what he says, you disregard him.

The final option and the consistent message of the Bible takes us back to the tomb. “He Has Risen!” Jesus is the Risen Lord. The truth of Jesus is that He was dead, but now He is alive! This is the message of Easter. He took our sins, suffered our death, and was buried in our place. But sin could not control Him, death could not defeat Him, and the grave could not contain Him! He is Alive!

Now you may ask, what does this have to do with me? Remember that God-shaped hole in our hearts? Listen to what Jesus says about Himself. “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10, CSB). Jesus is what fills the void in our lives. He is the missing puzzle piece. Only He brings fulfillment, completeness, and satisfaction. Only Jesus! I wonder, do you know Him today?

*EDITOR’S NOTE: Nelson Santa Ana is pastor a Wesson Baptist Church.*



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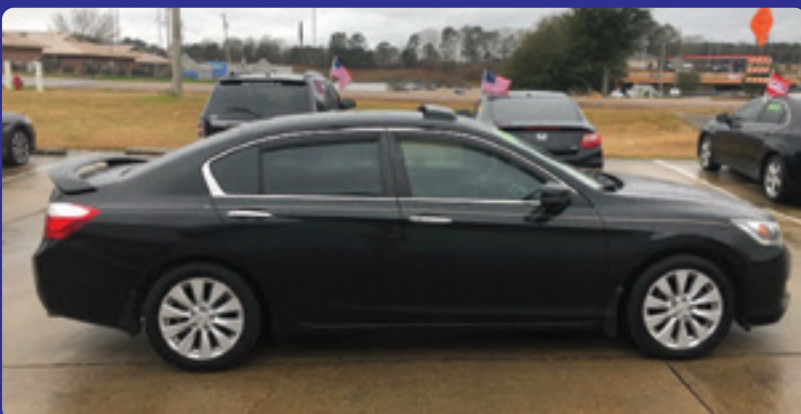
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# Winter storms shut down Wesson



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and truckers and motorists who exited onto the roadway could not climb an ice-covered hill into Wesson and towards Highway 51. An 18-wheel tractor trailer jack-knifed, dozens of cars slid off the road into ditches and motorists abandoned vehicles. Co-Lin provided temporary housing to drivers and their passengers on Wednesday night until they could reclaim their vehicles Thursday following work by recovery crews on the road.

Wesson Public Works Department Director Brad Turner said he and his crew, including Joe Glasper and Jonathon Hutt, handled fallen limbs and trees on roads without outside assistance with the town's backhoe and chain saw. "Our biggest challenges were recurring debris problems on Highway 51," he noted.

The water pressure problems revolved around loss of electricity and multiple leaks at homes and businesses, including running water from faucets to prevent pipes from freezing, Turner said. "We had no water line breaks," he reported.

As February ended, Turner and his crew further helped life return to normal, clearing debris from yards of Wesson residents whose homes needed major cleanup following the storms.

Jackson-based National Weather Service meteorologist Logan Poole attributed the storms to an "unusually dense arctic air" -- the bottom of three layers, which also included a very cold upper layer and a mass of warmer air at the center. Poole said the Arctic air originated in Northwest Canada and was 30 to 50 degrees colder than normal.

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# Black history month celebration goes virtual

By Bob Arnold

The annual Wesson Attendance Center (WAC) Black History Month celebration -- a spectacular show featuring song, dance, inspirational readings and speeches along with a traditional students' post display focused on African American heroes and leaders surrounding the audience on the walls of WAC's old gymnasium -- has gone virtual in deference to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Albert Brown, a WAC English and drama and theater teacher, and his students have created a video production that, while losing some of the impact of live in-person audience interaction, extends the reach of the celebration to audiences that may have missed it in the past and continues to provide enjoyment and inspiration over time.



Albert Brown

Wesson News

View the WAC virtual Black History Month celebration at  
<https://www.copiah.ms/Domain/99#calendar2856/20210227/month>

Mississippi winter storms delayed production of the video when they closed down WAC for a week in late February, but gave students the opportunity to create it and others to observe its making at the time of the usual celebratory show.

"The CD production includes video clips of student speakers, musical selections, a step-team dance performance and, of course, the hard work of my students as the centerpiece of the production," Brown reports

"The Traveler and the Path" thematically frames this year's virtual celebration.

Instead of creating posters documenting their research into African Americans, Brown's students this year produced a project board based on their gained research and submitted a video to share with the connections they made to their topics.

"Our students looked down the line and identified the pathways they would like to pursue regarding careers and life choices," Brown explained. "With their pathways identified, they were challenged to research contributing African American who helped pave the way for others with similar career interests. They make connections to their intended work and the inspiring African Americans that helped strengthen the fields before them."

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# College jobs nurtured local restaurateur

By Bob Arnold

Local folk who enjoy a night out on the town -- a steak dinner in an ambiance with live music -- celebrate the contributions of chef and restaurateur Carl Craig to area dining and entertainment since he opened Magnolia Blues (MB) on the edge of downtown Brookhaven on West Monticello Street.

Craig grew up in Brookhaven and caught the restaurant and food service bug as a worker at varied establishments in Starkville and Hattiesburg when he was in college. He considered different locations for his plunge into the business, but decided to make the investment in his hometown.

In his youth, sports -- particularly baseball -- and music, to a lesser extent, were Craig's passions. "I loved being outside and playing," he recalls. "I didn't have the talent to go far in the music world, but I also learned guitar and piano and was in a couple of small bands."

At Brookhaven Academy (BA), Craig played football, baseball and golf. "I sucked at golf, but was not too bad as a right tackle and linebacker on the football team and a third baseman on the baseball team," he says. "We never won a championship, but we never had a losing season, either."

After graduating from BA in 2001, Craig went off to Mississippi State University (MSU) at Starkville to study business for three years, and completed his business administration degree at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) in Hattiesburg in 2007. His sports career ended, but a job at Ruby Tuesdays in Starkville introduced him to the restaurant business, and he built his experience in the field at small bars and venues such as the Keg & Barrel and Veranda near MSU and USM.

For three years after graduating from college, Craig worked as a sales representative for a copier and document management service, but he recognized



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in short order that it was not his calling. "I missed the restaurant world," he says simply.

Enter Magnolia Blues (MB) in June 2013. "I thought I knew what I was doing, but I didn't know as much as I thought I did," Craig says. "We've have grown steadily, and I have learned a lot." The menu initially was barbeque plates, but Craig experimented with varied dishes, added to its meal choices and made it one of the area's premier steak houses. At the same time, Craig made it a venue for musicians and

winner in a competition among some of the best restaurants in Mississippi. More recently, it has landed in the Top 5 Best of *Mississippi Magazine's* Reader's Poll for barbeque, burgers, steaks and fries.

In June, Craig will move MB to larger space at the old Fred's store on Whitworth Avenue in downtown Brookhaven, which he is buying. Craig is already operating Serio's Pizzeria in the location -- his second restaurant venture. Over the years, he has looked at locations outside the area to expand his restaurant

for Craig, he says.

Craig resides in Brookhaven and has one son -- Jack, 1 ½ years old -- with the former Anne Houston Cupit, who he married in 2015.

## What are your hobbies?

Obviously, I am into cooking. While my specialties are steaks and barbeque, I experiment. I like Mexican and Italian cooking and have tried Puerto Rican, Argentine and Greek cuisine. I touch all the bases. Beyond cooking, I haven't given up golf, and try to get out on courses once a week. I also collect bourbon.

## Are you a reader?

I enjoy reading John Grisham novels and anything that is history-related. I like baseball biographies.

## Do you enjoy movies or theater?

I am not against them, but I prefer outdoor activities and prefer to work. Outside of sports coverage, I am not really into television.

## What kind of music do you like?

I am particularly into Red Dirt Country -- the music that comes out of Texas and Oklahoma -- as opposed to modern country. The Turnpike Troubadours -- a Red Dirt Country band -- is my favorite. I also follow rock, and even hip hop.

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

I am into dogs. I have three of them. I would buy 100 acres, adopt all the dogs at local shelters and let them run free on my land.

## How would you change the world?

People need to be nicer and more understanding. I would work on that.

## MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

bands. When Brookhaven voters approved wine and liquor sales in the city, he started a bar business. In 2018, the Natchez Food & Wine Festival put MB on the map, recognizing it as a

business, but says he is now firmly committed to reinvesting in and around his hometown. Once MB is settled in its new location, the future may hold a third restaurant concept



## Community Easter party April 3

Wesson News

All are invited to a community family Easter party.

Wesson Baptist Church and the Town of Wesson's Play It Up family events program are hosting the party on Saturday, April 3, from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Wesson Baptist Church.

"It's our way of demonstrating love of our community," says Rev. Nelson Santa Ana, pastor at Wesson Baptist Church.

The Easter Bunny will be on hand in the midst a variety of fun activities for adults and kids, including an Easter egg hunt in which those who find two golden eggs will receive special prizes.

The event will also feature games geared to players of all ages and inflatables on which the kids can frolic. There will be a dunk tank and, of course, munchies and snacks.

Town Clerk Angela Hester says event planners welcome support of donors and



volunteers, particularly snacks and candy-filled eggs. Contact Hester at City Hall and Wesson Baptist Church.



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# Old music store spawns 2 businesses



Tyler Bridge recording studio.

Wesson News

By Guest Columnist R. Shaw Furlow

Retail is a tough business. There are trends to be followed and merchandise that has to be kept current. Advertising, employees. It all adds up. I know very little about the inner workings, but I do know online sales have hurt mom and pop stores. This is particularly true in the music business.

The two largest guitar makers, Gibson and Fender, made decisions to sell only to big box and very large stores, leaving stores like Brookhaven Music and Sound to find either lesser lines or used equipment. There are great instruments made by the smaller companies, but if you want a Fender, you want a Fender. So in February 2019, Tyler Bridge closed the area's last music store. He fought the good fight and outlasted most, but the end was inevitable.

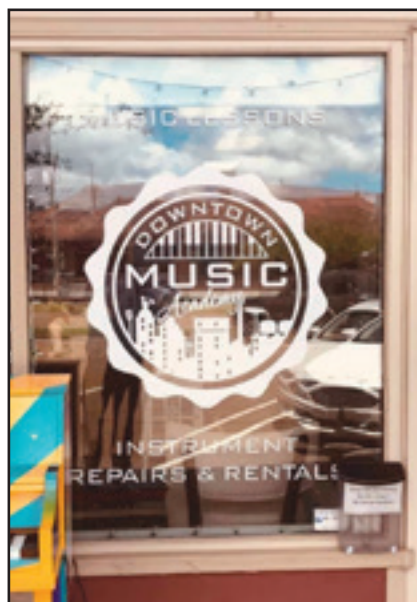
Yet there were profitable parts of the business, and, on Monday after the Saturday Bridge closed his store, Tony Norton and Gregory Smith, who had worked at the Bridge store teaching guitar lessons, repairing guitars and renting band instruments, moved down Railroad Ave and opened a new business -- Downtown Music Academy (DMA). Bridge moved around the corner and opened Brookhaven Sound Studios, where he records everything from radio commercials, cheerleader and dance line cuts to full albums for bands.

On March 2, Norton and Smith celebrated their second year of operation. What began on a wing and a prayer has become a thriving business filling a very specific void. DMA's Norton and Smith looked around town and noticed there were private teachers for every student activity: martial arts, dance and gymnastics. High school athletes could get all the private help they needed to improve their skills. What was missing was a comprehensive program for students interested in music.

DMA now has nine faculty and over one hundred students that range from



Wesson News



Special to Wesson News

pre-teens to older adults, says Smith, who runs the lessons side of the business. It has teachers for piano, violin, guitar, wind instruments, and percussion. "We've had quite a growth spell with students recently," he adds.

One of the real surprises at DMA is the amount of repairs Norton has on his desk. "There are a lot of guitars in this area that need attention," he points out. Not only does he repair guitars but all string instruments, including mandolins, banjos, both electric and acoustic guitars. Norton's reputation has grown quickly, and now he has artists from all over the area who allow him to work on their gear. Norton also handles the band instrument rental program.

Bridge operated what is now Brookhaven Sound Studios in the back of the defunct Brookhaven Music and Sound, has moved it up front in its new location on Cherokee Street, and is staying busier than ever. His facility includes a very

professional setup with a control room, isolation booth and a large room for full bands. That large room also serves as the rehearsal hall for the Bridge Band, which he continues to lead. Among five recent projects, Bridge is working with two new artists on their first recordings and others on follow up albums.

Avery Landrum, 19, originally from St. Francisville, Louisiana, and now living in Brookhaven, is working on her first serious record with Bridge -- an EP with five original songs. Landrum, who has been performing solo since she was 13 years old, is a well seasoned veteran at a young age. "She's really talented, her songs are good, and she knows what she wants," says Bridge. "That's not always the case."

Landrum recorded a few songs when she was 16, but this is her first full project with Bridge. "I met Tyler in Natchez at the songwriters night at Natchez Brewery," she relates. "He asked me to drop by the studio, and we just hit it off. We think a lot alike creatively, and I know he'll be able to produce the sounds I want for my songs. He's super easy to work with."

That's it for now. Be safe. Wear your mask. As the pandemic takes a downward turn, outdoor music festivals will return. Brookstock and Overbrook Song Writers Festival are on the calendar for late summer. Performers are looking forward to getting back in front of you, the audience. Take the shot, and let's get back to some semblance of normalcy.

Support the arts and the artists, my friends.

**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.



## Re-evaluate food choices & plate

By Guest Columnist Dr. Stephanie Duguid

Let's take time to celebrate National Nutrition Month. Take this time to reevaluate your food choices and your plate.

It is very easy to get caught up in the daily hustle, and choose quick tasty foods that are prepared for us, whether it is fast food or pre-packaged food from the grocery store. However, when we choose those quick options, we are also choosing foods higher in sodium (salt), added sugar, and fats, which can lead to high blood pressure, excess weight gain, and even Type 2 Diabetes, to name a few.

Choose food that will make a big difference in your waistline, your overall health, and your energy levels. Here are some tips from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics:

- 1. Get to Know Food Labels.** Reading the Nutritional Facts panel can help you choose foods and drinks to meet your needs.
- 2. Reduce Added Sugars.** Foods and drinks with added sugars contribute empty calories and do little or nothing to meet your nutritional needs. Review the new and improved Nutrition Fact Label or ingredients list to identify sources of added sugars.
- 3. Slow Down at Mealtime.** Instead of eating on the run, try sitting down and focusing on the food you're about to eat. Dedicating time to enjoy the taste and textures of foods can have a positive effect on your food intake.
- 4. Order Out Without Ditching Goals.** You can eat out and stick to your healthy eating plan! The key is to plan ahead, ask questions and choose foods carefully. Compare nutrition information, if available, and look for healthier options that are grilled, baked, broiled, or steamed.
- 5. Drink More Water.** Cut calories by drinking water instead of drinks with added sugar. Stay hydrated and drink plenty of water, especially if you are active, an older adult, or live or work in hot conditions. Most individuals forget to count the calories in the sugary drinks

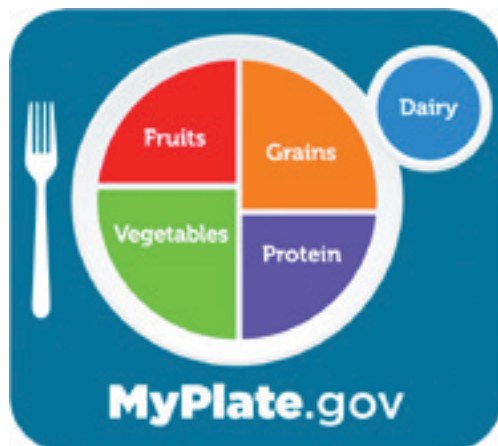
consumed. (Soda can contain over 200 calories per serving!)

Many times, we simply eat the entire serving of food provided (thinking it is one serving), even when the choices are healthy. This is called **Portion Distortion**. The problem is that the standard size of foods has continually increased over the years, while our activity levels have decreased.

When thinking about meals, focus on the new My Plate -- a great visual that shows what food items you should consume and in what amounts on a standard dinner plate:

1. Make half your plate fruits and vegetables
2. Make ¼ of your plate grains

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- (whole grains are preferred).
3. Make ¼ of your plate a protein (lean proteins are preferred)
4. Add a small amount of dairy to your meal.

Visit [www.myplate.gov](http://www.myplate.gov).

A final thought as you concentrate on your nutrition: When you go to the grocery store, concentrate on the perimeter of the store (outside area). You will find the fresh fruits, fresh breads, fresh meats, and dairy in these areas. When you begin to walk up and down the aisles, you will find the processed foods. The longer a food lasts, the more preservatives (typically sodium/salt) it contains.

Make a conscious choice to make the healthy foods your basic foods. Here's to healthy eating!

**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.

## Greer gets Garden Club award



Hubert Greer (center) receives Wesson Garden Club's Magnolia Award from Marilyn Britt (left) and Sonya Cowen.



Nancy Sullivan (left) and Debbie Smith demonstrate Valentine's creations.



Debbie Smith (left) and Dixie Thornton discuss basic flower arrangements.

Special to Wesson News

Hubert Greer has received Wesson Garden Club's Magnolia Award.

Greer accepted the prestigious award, which is presented annually, at the club's first meeting of 2021 held at American Legion Post 75. The meeting also featured a special Valentine's Day program presented by Nancy Sullivan, Debbie Smith and Dixie Thornton, who demonstrated simple, but adorable Valentine's creations and basic flower arranging.

The club's Magnolia Award each year recognizes and honors home gardeners with the most outstanding landscaped yard and their love of gardening.

A certificate presented to Greer said he "is receiving this prestigious award because of his diligent efforts and for consistently maintaining a well-groomed yard, curb appeal, originality in landscape design, use of native and seasonal plant material and creativity through-

out his entire landscape."

The club's Yard of the Month Committee -- Sonja Cowen, Joy Phillips and Marilyn Britt -- chooses award recipients. They stressed the importance of "consistency" as a basis for the award and noted Greer's "dedication and love of gardening brings credit upon himself, the Town of Wesson and the Wesson Garden Club." The award recipient must have been recognized for a Yard of the Month during the year.

Attendees at the meeting were Marilyn Britt, Sonya Cowen, Robin Furr, Debbie Hoaglin, Denise Jackson, Beverly King, Mandy King, June Owens, Pam Owens, Jennifer Peets, Jean Ricks, Joy Phillips, Debbie Smith, Lisa Smith, Nikki Smith, Nancy Sullivan and Dixie Thornton. Hostesses were Beverly King, Mandy King and Pam Owens.

The Wesson Garden Club is a member of The Garden Clubs of Mississippi, Inc. and The National Garden Clubs, Inc.



# Good container gardening methods

By Guest Columnist Gary R. Bachman

I am passionate growing plants in containers. Everything in my coastal Mississippi landscape and garden grows in some form of container. Growing in containers gives me the sense of control I want in the garden.

I use a variety of containers: black nursery pots in sizes up to 25 gallons; various sizes of terra cotta (I love the way these will patina through years of use); salad tables (yes, these are containers); and, of course, my beloved commercially available self-watering container garden systems.

Container gardening is easy. But gardeners need to know that it is different than growing plants in the ground.

First and foremost, growing in containers requires using the correct "soil," which isn't soil at all. In fact, there's no soil in the correct container mix, which are composed of organic components -- peat moss, coir fiber or bark -- and inorganic components like vermiculite and perlite.

I like to use commercial bagged container mixes that have been engineered for optimum physical characteristics and great plant performance. They are found under a variety of trade names, but each of these is similar in its basic recipe.

One bit of mis-advice that runs rampant on the Internet is to add gravel or other materials to the bottoms of your containers to increase drainage. It just doesn't work. You'll have to trust me on this, because the science behind why it doesn't work is lengthy and involves polar attraction between molecules and overcoming the force of gravity.

Proper watering is important. Since a container is effectively self-contained, you must consistently water based on the particular requirements of the plants you are growing. Never just apply a splash of water on the con-

tainer. Keep watering until you see water flow from the holes in the bottom of the container. Depending on location, such as a porch or patio, you may need a saucer under the container to catch the drainage.

Fertilization is another important consideration. Many of the commercial container mixes have some added fertilizer, which is beneficial in getting plants off to a good start, but it is not nearly enough to sustain satisfactory growth through the entire season. I always feed my container plants with controlled-release fertilizer at planting, and I supplementally feed with water-soluble fertilizer through the growing season.

One of the fun aspects of growing in containers is picking out the container itself. The selection of containers becomes limitless.

You can go old school like I do and use classic terra cotta. There's also a large selection of glazed ceramics that would fit into any design scheme. These containers can be very heavy, so you may decide to look for containers made out of foam-like materials that look every bit like their heavier cousins. I also like to grow in the basic, black plastic pots, which is probably a carry-over from my nursery and greenhouse background. While very functional, the black plastic container is very dull. Painting is an easy way to jazz up and accessorize these basic containers. I like to use the textured spray paints that result in a stone-like appearance.

Container gardening is a fun way to enjoy your garden and landscape.



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*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. He is also the host of the popular Southern Gardening television and radio programs.*

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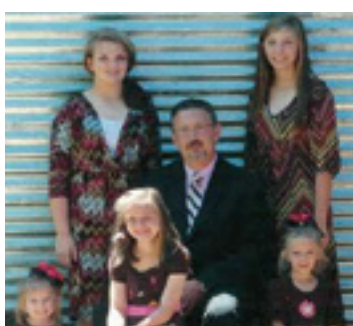
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# WAC announces Honor Roll

## Special to Wesson News

Wesson Attendance Center has announced its Honor Roll for the second nine weeks of its 2020-2021 school term.

### Superintendent's List All A's

**First Grade:** Paris Beasley, Madalyn Benton, Derren Brister, Jr., Bently Burns, Tinley Douglas, Asher Formby, Leighton Hall, Abigail Holloway, Makinley Johnson, Reagan Johnson, Griffin Newell, Jamiah Robinson, Whitman Rogers, Ty Rushing, Israel Scopel, Ella Shelton, Braxton Shoemake, and Brantley Smith.

**Second Grade:** Joshua Armistad, Ambernae Armstrong, Katie Garcia, Laney Hamilton, Amy Hill-Ramirez, Bree Howell, Kypton Lofton, Sadie Nguyen, Molli Shannon, Mary Smith, Keagan Stevens, Alexander Touchstone, Molly Waltman and Aubree Williams.

**Third Grade:** Jaiyana Barlow, Haley Bates, Avalyna Becerra, Ja'thai Burrows, Riles Douglas, James Harvey, II, Levi Highfill, Addison Lee, Bailey Lee, Harper Martin, Rylan Morgan, Jon Morris, Haydn Rushing, Laikin Tarver and Rushten Williams.

**Fourth Grade:** Braleigh Barnett Emory, Britt Andrew Brooks, Aubrey Carraway, Kaden Conner, Charlee Grace Hart, Isaac Heggins, Weston Hughes, Jaxton Hunley, Grant Hynum, Evan Lambright, Tucker Martin, Kate McKenzie, Brooks Shoemake, Caroline Smith and Mackenzie Smith.

**Fifth Grade:** Ashley Chamblee, Kayla Clingan, Sean Cooper, Elijah Dollar, Adyson Rose Dowd, Eden Hall, Laine Hewitt, Tristan Holloway, Slade Oberschmidt, Phypher Roberts, Addison Rorie, Madelyn Sanders and Allyson Selman.

**Sixth Grade:** Micqueal Berry, Lucas Bowlin, Presley Bridges, Riley Beth Bush, Ciara Byther, Anna Crabtree, Jaycee Heard, Zechariah Holloway, Wesley Loy, Alice Luong, Mackenzie Mire, Elizabeth Moulder, Taylor Murray, Bryant Parker Robbins, Bently Roberson, Judah Scopel, Jacey Shannon, Jaide Shoop, Kevin Smith, Anye Tanner, Madyson Westrope, Molly Westrope, Blayten Windom and Ava Woodson.

**Seventh Grade:** Brayden Allen, William Bizot, Trinity Breland, Brandon

Parker Brooks, Abigail Cameron, John Cooper, Brendon Duguid, McKenzie Hall, Noah Howell, Alana Hux, Willow Love, Macy Loy, Tripp Martin, Dayne Newman, Sullivan Roberts, Brynden Rogers, Kylie Rorie, Dakota Rushing, Baylor Smith, Maddisen Staats, Ty Turner, Sydnee Westrope and Mary Margaret Woods.

**Eighth Grade:** Mason Ashley, Joycelyn Barner, Lilly Kate Channell, Allison Hamilton, Gracyn Martin, Hunter Meredith, Eric Merrill, Maggie Runnels, Lucas Shelton, Aubree Smith, Avery Watts, Cotton Westbrook and Emileigh Woodson.

**Ninth Grade:** Rachel Anderson, Ja'niyah Byther, Hannah Cameron, Brandon Ebarb, Alan Luong Mallory Sanders, Julianna Wilson and Karen Zarate Lopez.

**Tenth Grade:** Akiria Brown, Marley Channell, Jaylynn Cloy, Grayson Coates, Lena Coleman, Alexis Freeman, Kiara Haynes, Ethan Laird, William Lo, Alexander Luong, Madalynn McManus, Hannah Meredith, Taylor Papizan, Sadie Sandifer, Cole Short, Jayonce Stewart and Caleb Sutton.

**Eleventh Grade:** Kimberly Ayers, Kamryn Bridges, Alayna Everett, Logan Hux, Zoe Johnson, Samuel McInnis, Vivian McRee, Kyla Smith, Mary Grace Sullivan and Amber Westbrook.

**Twelfth Grade:** Kayla Barfield, Marisa Becerra, Victoria Benton, Cooper Brinson, Dakota Brown, Mallory Chavez, Carsyn Earls, Tess Holley, Heaven Howard, Avery Kyle, Larson Lewis, Shelby Martin, Chloe McManus and Breanna Westbrook.

### Principal's List – All A's & B's

**First Grade:** Addisyn Coleman, Jayce Coleman, Madelynn Coleman, Bryant Collins, Braylee Davis, Kolton Ferguson, Caleb Granger, Laken Hogan, Georgia Jackson, Makayla LeBouef, Rayne McManus, Kori Peets, Madison Smith, Antonio Walker, Jr. and Natalee Westmoreland.

**Second Grade:** Kace Allen Whisper, Breland Ada Brewer, Breeze Brewer, Jude Carr, Malorie Durr, Luis Flores-De La Cruz, Aiden Gemelli, Harper Johnson, Leah Norman, Karaily Russell, Matthew Shannon, Lily Sykes, Kendall Turner, Grayson Westmorland, Evelyn

Westrope, Jeremy Williams, Addilee Windom and Sydney Yaskovic.

**Third Grade:** Mahmoud Anter, Alexander Bello-Silvan, Mason Brister, Case Cliburn, Lucian Darce', Parker Elliott, Lyla Formby, Brennan Holder, Lillian Jackson, Jackson James, Colson Lee, Hunter McCullough, Adria Merchant, Makenzee Miller, Ellison Powell, Lexie Ryan, Canaan Scopel, Kaylee Sills, Santana Silvan-Martinez, Vivian Smith, Cooper Tarver, Karleigh Wallace, Braylen Watson and Jayden Williams.

**Fourth Grade:** Carson Barrington Walker Breazeale Brenton Brewer Jade Brewer Ella Cotten Kaia Denson Angel Derouen Mikelyn Douglas Bennett Ebarb Ryker Gladden Jacob Hogan-Makya Jackson Ryleigh Jeffreys Skylar Martin Kayti McDaniel Jayden Miller Tyler Morris Preston Morse Anna Linley Newell Anne Peets Brody Ponder Adalyn Prestridge Joseph Purviance Wyatt Runnels Nathaniel Shoemaker Isabella Shoop Halle Short Hayden Tucker Collin Watts Chastin Wilson.

**Fifth Grade:** Matthew Branch, Kristis Brewer, Kenslie Carter, Payton Cloy, Adalynn Coleman, McKenzie Conner, Isaiah Cook, Hunter Granger, Brandon Gremillion, Braydon McNair, Michaela Noble, Ripken Powell, Tiffany Rials, Allie Ryan, Brenlee Shelton, Isabella Sills, Kimberly Silvan, m Martinez, Brandon Thomas, Laiken Thomas, Taylor Traxler, Blake Warren, Maddox Weeks and Nancy Zarate Lopez.

**Sixth Grade:** Flint Ahlberg, Nicole Berch, Caylie Britt, Madelynn Brooks, Yozelin Cruz, Flores Kali Denson, Layton Earls, Austin Hamilton, Lillian Love, Ethan Martin, Lane McManus, Dawson Selman, Charley Shelton, Peyton Sims, Carley Clayton Smith, Laci Sykes, Brooke Thaxton and Ridge Yeager.

**Seventh Grade:** Jamera Black, Deanna Bonsall, Blair Boyd, Tate Brister, Kayleigh Cook, Jace Curtis, Lexi Ferguson, O'mari Johnson, Starlynn Leonard, Marshunti Martin, Timothy McDaniel, Karter McLemore, David Newman, Katherine Norwood, Mila Paul, Lexi Prestridge, Gustavo Ruiz-Garcia, Samuel Scopel, Karley Shannon, Aiden Wallace, Paige Westrope, Caeden Williams and Jack Henry Wilson.

**Eighth Grade:** Abbey Berch, Sa'niya Brice, Larsen Carpenter, Cailley Duplantis, Laney Earls, Wyatt Hughes, Mary Gwyn Hynum, Austin Johnson, Benjamin McKenzie, Trevor McRee, Kalana Nhem, Nicole Schillings and Tiara Tronstad.

**Ninth Grade:** Ethan Bonsall, Aidan Brice, Samantha Casanova, Alexius Holder, Taylor June Cameron, Elizabeth Miller, Kaylee Prine, Hailey Walker, Melody Waltman and Christopher Watson.

**Tenth Grade:** Kalyn Benton, Harlan Brewer, Noah Brister, Caleb Carty, Jessie Cole, Sarajo Dear, Abbie Edwards, Olivia Grantham, Justin Hailey, Lucas McRee, Jordan Morse, Slayd Oswalt, Luis Ruiz-Garcia, Gabriel Selman, Allyson Sullivan and Emma Thaxton.

**Eleventh Grade:** Alexis Ashley, Brett Boutwell, Ja'Kyle Brown, Tyler Coghlan, Kelly Grace Raiford, Gage Smith Suzanna Smith Malliyah Walker Clay Cenana Westmoreland Alayna Westrope Lane Westrope and Zackary Woods.

**Twelfth Grade:** O'Koya Barlow, Maicie Bell Chandler, Byrd Katlyn Caponis, Emily Covington, Laynee Crapps, Kaitlyn Davidson, Conner Diamond, Nicholas Edwards, Anessa Harris, Preston Lee, Stacy Martin, Madaliene McReynolds, Derek Mora, Brayden Nicholson, Katie Papizan, Emily Ponder, Connor Renfroe, Ella Silvan, Antrelle Sims, Aubree Smith and Kenzie Sullivan.

### Honor Roll – All B's

**First Grade:** Emmett Case, Franco Gonzalez-Sanchez and Emma Lewis

**Second Grade:** Fenix Costilow, Konner Minton and Jaxon Newman.

**Third Grade:** Colton Barlow, Elijah Hunter and Acelynn Nuckles.

**Fourth Grade:** Kaden Allen and Addisyn McDaniel.

**Fifth Grade:** Traden Barlow Dalton Duguid Preston Oberschmidt Britt Roberts Grady Smith Micah Thomas and Mallory Wilkinson.

**Sixth Grade:** Brayden Arbaugh, Tyler Berch, Brooke Cline, Layton Cloy, Jordyn Coleman, Michael Smith, Summer Starkey, Gavin Upton and Lane Wilson.

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## Chamber announces new officers



### Wesson News

Wesson Trustmark manager Marilyn Britt, also a bank vice president, will serve as president of the Wesson Chamber of Commerce during 2021, her second round as leader of the organization.

The Chamber's other officers for the year are local real estate executive Stephen Ashley, vice president; Co-Lin administrator Deemie Letchworth, secretary; and Copiah County citizen leader and activist Nora Berch, treasurer.

The Chamber 2021 board members are Dr. Stephanie Duguid, Dr. Brent Duguid, Phillip Knight, Kayla Williams, Ken Sullivan and Dr. Steven Liverman.

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## Lions Midwinter meet at Brookhaven

Wesson News

Demonstration of a new sight screening tool that Lions clubs can use in their traditional community service will highlight their District Mid Winter Convention scheduled March 19 and 20 at the Holiday Inn Express in Brookhaven.

The event will bring together Lions from clubs as far north as Canton and Yazoo City and south to the Gulf Coast to conduct business and hear reports, says Lions District 30-S Governor Randy Davis, a member of the Wesson Lions Club. The status of the COVID-19 pandemic could change to a virtual gathering in which participants meet through ZOOM on the internet. Wesson Lions Club will join the two Brookhaven Lions Clubs and other area groups in hosting the event, Davis reports.

Whenever the event occurs or whether or not it is a face-to-face meeting, the new sight screening equipment will be featured. The plus-Optics machine makes it possible to test a subject's vision without physical touching, according to Davis.

"The plus-Optics machine takes a photo that shows if a subject needs to be referred to an optometrist or if they pass the screening," Davis explains.

"Lions of District 30-S have purchased two +Optics devices for use by any club, and several clubs have purchased their own sight screeners. Also on the meeting's agenda are:

- A catered dinner at Mitchell's in Brookhaven
- Presentation by Lions International Director Steve Thornton from Wooster, Ohio
- Discussion of the Lions North American Membership Initiative and strategizing around the goal of organizing four new Lions clubs in the district
- Entertainment provided by students from Mississippi School of the Arts and tours of the MSA campus
- A silent auction for the Lions Sight Foundation coordinated by Hazlehurst Lion Rita Roberts
- Appointment of new members to Lions committees and election of new officers
- Booths for vendors and organizations

## WAC Hall of Fame



Wesson News

The faculty and staff at Wesson Attendance Center (WAC) have selected three outstanding seniors as 2021 inductees for the school's Hall of Fame. The honorees represent five percent of the senior class and are chosen based on academics, school involvement, leadership, service, and character. The three inductees (left to right) are Antrelle Sims, Kayla Barfield and Larson Lewis.



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# Taxes, infrastructure, teen driving

Special to Wesson News

**Conflicting views on tax phase-out.** Economists have conflicting views about the effects of phasing out Mississippi's individual income tax over a decade, as Governor Tate Reeves wants. A new report from economists with the state's university system says Mississippi's economy, personal income and population would decline, while an analysis commissioned by Empower Mississippi, a conservative policy group, says either Reeves' straight income tax phase out or a swap from income to consumption taxes would yield positive benefits for the state economy and people's income.

**Infrastructure review.** Mississippi's public service commissioners are launching a comprehensive review of the state's public utility infrastructure as a result of damages caused by the winter storm in February. The commission, which regulates the state's public utilities that offer electricity, water and gas, noted that the state's electric and natural gas utilities performed well during the winter storm, but that regulators still need to guarantee systems are in place to avoid costly and damaging large-area outages like what happened last week in Texas.

**Teen driving fatalities targeted.** Mississippi Highway Patrol is implementing a campaign -- Driving Requires Initiative Values and Education (DRIVE) to address increasing teen driving fatalities, which rank in the top five nationally among states. The DRIVE campaign incorporates computer presentations, guest speakers and, when possible, seatbelt rollover simulators. It covers driving dis-



This truck is similar to a new auction find that will replace an old town dump truck that has outlived its usefulness with transmission and other mechanical issues. A Kansas dealer accepted Wesson's \$12,500 bid for a 1991 Chevrolet C-70 grain truck the public works department will use to collect debris and limbs and dumping. Wesson Public Works Department Director Brad Turner travelled to Kansas to pick up the truck and drive it back to Wesson.

tractions, impaired driving, seatbelt usage and driving with teen passengers.

**BLT artistic director leaves.** Emily Waterloo has left Brookhaven Little Theater, which she has served as its first managing artistic director since 2016. During her leadership, BLT partnered with big name actors and directors, such as Kevin Chamberlin and Nick Roetz, to deliver productions that included *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Seussical the Musical*, *Newsies: A Broadway Musical*, *Les Miserables: Student*

*Edition*, *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Little Mermaid*. BLT is the longest continuously running community theater in Mississippi. COVID-19 interrupted its 53rd season during 2019-2020, but it received a \$7,400 emergency grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission funded by federal CARES funds for operating expenses.

**Police to grade lawmakers.** The Mississippi Association of Chiefs of Police will start posting report cards for state lawmakers on how supportive they are of law enforcement issues backed

by the group that represents 330 departments statewide. The "10-8" report, named for the police radio code meaning an officer is in-service, on duty, will give lawmakers a letter grade of A-F after legislative sessions. The move is a political muscle-flex likely to have a major impact on criminal justice reform and other legislation at the Capitol, including current measures, such as state money to help small departments provide bullet proof vests, \$1,220 a year in supplemental pay for officers at accredited departments and revamping the state Board of Standards and Training to give city chiefs a voice equal to county sheriffs and state troopers.

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# Bills allow compensation for college athletes

Special to Wesson News

Mississippi is the latest to join a movement of states across America to grant college athletes the right to be compensated from endorsements and commercial endeavors.

A bipartisan coalition of lawmakers in both the Senate and House passed separate bills that would allow college athletes to contract with an agent for their names, images or likenesses to be used, for instance, to endorse a product and receive compensation for that endorsement.

College athletes are currently strictly prohibited by the NCAA, college athletics' governing body, from receiving any compensation.

At least four other states have passed similar laws, and 31 states are considering similar proposals, according to *Sports Illustrated*. Many lawmakers around the nation have been critical of the NCAA for dragging its feet on the issue. The NCAA says it awaits the federal Congress to pass legislation to provide guidance on the issue and a decision from the U.S. Supreme Court, which will hear arguments in

a relevant lawsuit in March and is expected to rule on the issue later this summer.

Bills in differing versions have passed both chambers of the Mississippi Legislature this year. Proponents have warned the state's universities could suffer in recruiting — both athletically and academically — if lawmakers don't act this year.

"As the old saying goes, we need to hold our nose and support it," said Rep. Scott Bounds, R-Philadelphia, who rang a Mississippi State University cowbell from the well before he presented the bill to the House. "Every day this is not addressed, we are losing ground to institutions around us. We do not need to get behind the eight ball further."

The bill — called the Mississippi Intercollegiate Athletic Compensation Act — passed the House 93-19. A similar bill passed the Senate with no dissenting votes. At some point in the process, the bills must be reconciled for one to become law.

# Mississippi woman officiates Super Bowl



Wesson News

Sarah Thomas

Special to Wesson News

Mississippian Sarah Thomas became the first woman to officiate the Super Bowl.

Thomas served as the down judge, a position she has held in the NFL since 2015, when she became pro football's first female official.

Serving as an official in football's grandest game represented a reward for a job well done. "They are the best of the best," said Troy Vincent Sr., NFL executive vice president

for operations.

Thomas at age 47 has been a trailblazer throughout her career. In 2007, she was officiating a Southern Mississippi football game at Hattiesburg, where the late Jack Vaughn, a former NFL official who called three Super Bowls, was serving as the replay official in the press box. He pointed her out: "She's good, really good. I believe she'll be officiating in the NFL one day. She's that good."

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# Two Copiah-Lincoln Community College student-athletes honored



Special to Wesson News

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Co-Lin student-athletes Kylar Fielder of Bogue Chitto and Katelyn Hayman of Clinton were recognized as the recipients of the David M. Halbrook Certificate for Academic Achievement Among Athletes. The award recognizes the efforts of individual student-athletes who excel in academics, leadership, and service. Each Mississippi college or university selects a male and female student-athlete to receive this recognition.

Fielder was a member of the Wolf Pack baseball team, while Hayman was a member of the Lady Wolves softball team.

The Halbrook Award for Academic Achievement Among Athletes was established in 1984 as a result of the passage of Mississippi House Concurrent Resolution No. 88. The awards program is made possible through endowments from former Representative David M. Halbrook of Belzoni and his brothers, John C. and James G. Halbrook of Belzoni and J. A. Halbrook of Beaumont, Texas, in honor of their parents, John C. and Ernestine McCall Halbrook.

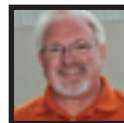
Student-athletes from Mississippi's public, private, two-year, and four-year postsecondary institutions honored recently for their achievements in the classroom with the annual Halbrook Awards, presented at the Mississippi Association of Colleges and Universities (MAC) business meeting, held virtually online. The program recognizes colleges and universities that achieve and maintain high academic standards for student-athletes, thus encouraging high graduation rates.

The awards are usually presented during the annual MAC Conference, which brings together attendees from across the state who serve in postsecondary institutions as presidents and chancellors, chief academic officers, chief student affairs officers, chief financial officers, admissions officers, institutional effectiveness officers, faculty and administrators. Due to COVID-19, the MAC Conference was not held this year.

University of Mississippi Chancellor Dr. Glenn Boyce, who served as the 2019-2020 president of the MAC Board of Directors, presented the awards.

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- 2014 Ford Expedition **SOLD!** loaded, Leather Buckets, Chrome Wheels, Sunroof, Sharp!
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- 2018 Honda Accord EX-L 4D, Local, One Owner, Leather, Sunroof, Navigation, Super Nice!
- 2014 Ford Explorer Limited, Pearl White w/ Tan Leather, 3rd row, Rear Camera!
- 2018 Audi S6, Rare Find, 34k miles, Has Every Option and New Tires, Awesome Car!
- 2010 Toyota Venza Crosstour, Low mileage, Roomy, Nice!
- 2014 Jeep Unlimited Sahara, Low miles, Leather, Navi, Loaded!
- 2013 Honda Accord Coupe EX-L, Leather, Sunroof, 6Speed, Super sharp!
- 2015 Honda Accord EX-L Sedan, Low Miles, Sunroof, Leather, Super Nice!
- 2016 Mazda 6i Touring, Low mileage, Leather, rear camera, Xtra Clean!

### 2014 Honda Accord EX-L



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



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## COVID aid and vaccine scams

*Special to Wesson News*

Federal COVID-19 stimulus money is for people to spend as they choose to help boost the economy and not for long-term care facilities or related to Medicaid benefits.

“Stimulus money belongs to the recipient and should not go to the nursing home or other facility where they are staying,” said Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney. “While my office has not received complaints about this, there have been complaints in other states. Mississippians should know stimulus checks do not count as income and should not be given to facilities to pay for services.”

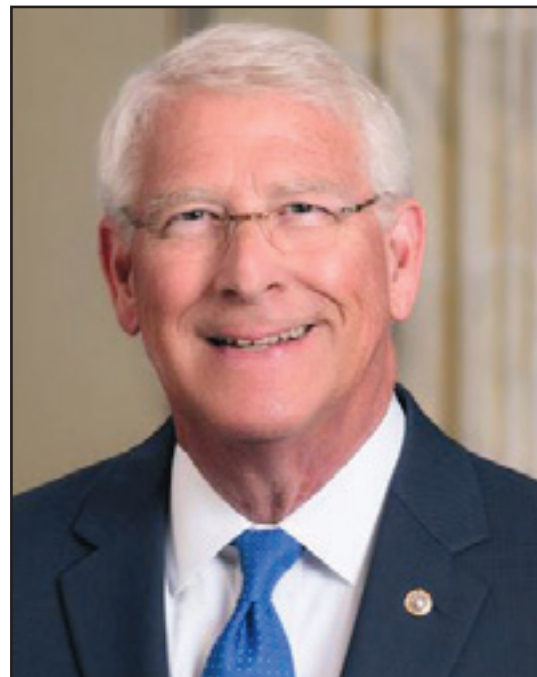
Long-term care residents should decide for themselves, or with a trusted family member, how to spend their stimulus money. The money also does not change what Medical Assistance a person may receive based on income.

The Mississippi Insurance Department (MID) also warns that scammers are trying to cash in on COVID-19 vaccines, citing these signs of fraud:

- You are asked to pay out of pocket to get the vaccine.
- You are asked to pay to put your name on a list to receive the vaccine or asked to pay to get early access to the vaccine.
- You receive unsolicited emails, phone calls and text messages. Scammers may pretend to be vaccine centers or insurance companies to steal your information.
- You are asked to visit a fake vaccine website. Scammers use phony sites to steal your information and money.

When in doubt about anything vaccine-related, call your state or local health department. If you have a COVID-19 or insurance-related question or complaint, call the Mississippi Insurance Department Consumer Services division at 601-359-2453 or email [consumer@mid.ms.gov](mailto:consumer@mid.ms.gov).

## Bill targets rural hospital aid



*Wesson News*

*Senator Roger Wicker*

*Special to Wesson News*

U.S. Senators Roger Wicker, R-Miss., and Tina Smith, D-Minn., have introduced the “PPP Access for Rural Hospitals Act,” (S.310) to waive the Small Business Administration (SBA) affiliation rules for non-profit critical access hospitals and hospitals that serve rural areas so they may qualify for Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans.

“Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, our nation’s critical access hospitals and rural hospitals have continued to provide care to some of our nation’s most vulnerable populations despite facing substantial increases in operating costs,” Wicker said. “Ensuring these vital facilities are able to apply for financial relief through the PPP will mean they can continue to serve their communities as we work to defeat this virus.”

“Rural hospitals are vital to public health -- economic engines for communities in across the country,” said Smith. “As hospitals continue to face the pandemic, they need financial support. We are again introducing our bipartisan bill to make non-profit, rural, critical access

hospitals eligible for the Paycheck Protection Program. We have to keep fighting for rural areas and advocating for the support they need.”

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) established the PPP to provide immediate relief to small business owners with fewer than 500 employees in the form of forgivable loans. Many small hospitals operate as part of a larger health system that exceeds the 500-employee limit under SBA’s affiliation rules, making these smaller hospitals ineligible for PPP.

In addition to dealing with increased costs for staff, personal protective equipment, and other safety measures as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, hospitals and medical facilities have lost significant revenue because of restrictions on elective procedures. Many hospitals already operate on thin margins and the pandemic placed them under even greater financial stress.

Granting rural hospitals access to the PPP program would allow facilities to retain critical staff and focus their resources on providing quality care to patients for the duration of the pandemic.



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## New Mississippi Agriculture Youth Council accepting applications

*Special to Wesson News*

Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson recently announced the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) is launching the new Mississippi Agriculture Youth Council.

The goal of the Council, comprised of youth leaders from around the state, is to provide students interested in the agriculture industry an experience that cultivates leadership and career development while developing the potential workforce for Mississippi. Any public, private or homeschool students can apply to become a member of the Agriculture Youth Council, and final applicants will be chosen by representatives at MDAC.

"I am so excited to launch the first-ever Mississippi Agriculture Youth Council," said Commissioner Gipson. "As the future of agriculture in our state, we are proud to give these students the opportunity to develop leadership, advocacy and employability skills through professional development, industry exposure and experiential learning in a variety of agriculture careers. So, I

want to invite any youth leaders and students interested in the agriculture industry to apply for this incredible opportunity to serve during your senior year of high school. We will choose twelve to fifteen students as members to serve on the Council for one year."

Applicants must be a twelfth-grade student during the 2021-2022 school year. Current eleventh graders in the 2020-2021 school year may apply to serve during the upcoming school year. Any public, private or homeschool students may apply. Students must exhibit an interest, passion and/or experiences in agriculture.

Applications can be found online at [agnetuat.mdac.ms.gov/youth-council/](http://agnetuat.mdac.ms.gov/youth-council/). All applications are due by Thursday, April 1. Semifinalists will be notified by April 15, and final interviews will be held virtually. Twelve to fifteen youth leaders will be announced by Friday, May 14.

For more information about the Mississippi Agriculture Youth Council, visit [www.mdac.ms.gov](http://www.mdac.ms.gov) or contact Gayle Fortenberry at [gayle@mdac.ms.gov](mailto:gayle@mdac.ms.gov) or Emily Stovall at [emilys@mdac.ms.gov](mailto:emilys@mdac.ms.gov).

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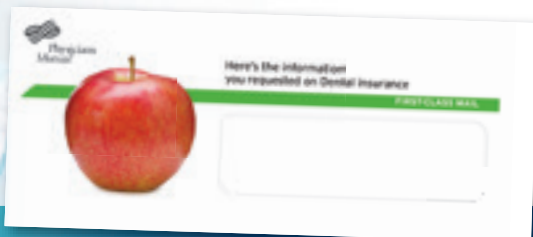
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# Atmos Energy addresses customer bills following historic winter storms

Special to Wesson News

Atmos Energy understands customer concerns that the recent extreme weather may affect their natural gas bills. Atmos assures customers that bills in the near-term will not include any of the unusually high gas prices from the historic winter storms.

Atmos Energy does not set the market pricing for natural gas. There is no profit added to the gas cost. Atmos has been and will continue working with regulators to find solutions that will minimize the impact on monthly bills. Until those solutions are identified, the gas cost portion of a customer's bill will reflect normal, seasonal gas prices.

February and March bills may still be higher than recent months based on the amount of gas used during the cold weather.

Atmos Energy offers installment plans that spread out payments of the total balance over time with no added charges or fees. To set up an installment plan, visit [atmosenergy.com](http://atmosenergy.com), log in to the Atmos Energy Account Center and select the Payment Assistance tab, or call the Atmos En-

ergy customer service team at 888-286-6700 Monday through Friday between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. central time.

Federal assistance funds are also available through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), in addition to Atmos Energy's Sharing the Warmth funds. Sharing the Warmth is a program that leverages the generosity of customer donations with additional contributions by Atmos Energy to amplify the amount of assistance offered. Atmos Energy then partners with local agencies to offer program funds to eligible customers.

Financial assistance is available on a first-come, first-served basis to eligible residential customers through a local energy assistance agency. To locate an agency, visit [atmosenergy.com/assistance](http://atmosenergy.com/assistance) or call 211. Customers needing solutions to keep up with their monthly natural gas expenses are encouraged to contact Atmos Energy's customer service team at 888-286-6700 or visit the account center at [atmosenergy.com/accountcenter/login/login.html](http://atmosenergy.com/accountcenter/login/login.html).

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