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Wesson News

SPOTLIGHT

Co-Lin Wins Bowl Game

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Volume 11, Number 12

“Good News You Can Use”

December, 2023

Parade stirs Christmas spirit

By Bob Arnold

Bands playing holiday music, Santa Claus and others tossing candy to bystanders, high school and college beauties and organizations and businesses with decorated floats helped town folk prepare to celebrate this special time of year in Wesson’s annual Christmas parade.

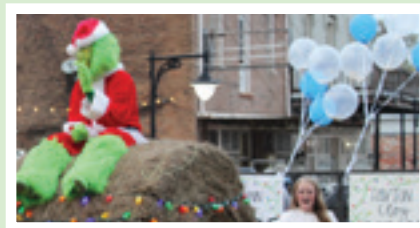
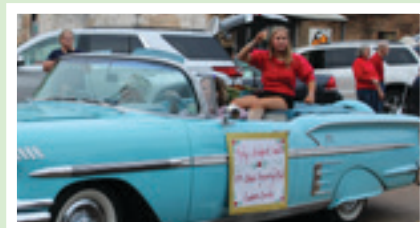
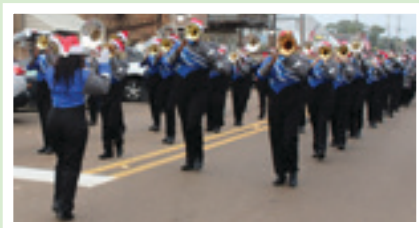
Parade participants proceeded south to the Highway 51 stoplight from the old Sunflower building and Wesson Baptist Church, and reversed direction northward with trucks and vehicles from Copiah and Lincoln County volunteer fire departments and the Wesson Police and Copiah County Sheriff Departments in the lead and Santa Claus in the rear as the climax for whom everybody -- particularly the kids -- were waiting.

In between were the Wesson High School and Co-Lin bands, interspersed with convertibles and other vehicles carrying, among others, Founders Day Queen Kayla Barfield, members of Wesson High School and Co-Lin homecoming courts and beauties and beaux from kindergarten through college freshmen and sophomore classes chosen in pageants at Wesson Attendance Center and Co-Lin; along with floats decorated for the season by varied commercial, faith, civic, service and social organizations carrying their workers, volunteers and members, many with children from the community on board as well -- the little ones who are readily awed by Christmas magic.

The floats were numerous this year, including those built by the American Legion, the Wesson Junior/High School Beta Club, Butterbeans Wesson Garden Club youth organization, Copiah County government, Fastpace Healthcare and Mossy Oak Properties, among others. Then there were the cheerleaders who danced to the music and fired up the Christmas spirit of the spectators who lined the sides of Highway 51: the Co-Lin Wolf mascot, cheer squad and Collette dancers; and students from Nena Smith Studio.

Following the parade, Santa Claus brought a bag of goodies to the Wesson Volunteer Fire Department, where he met with children and punch and cookies were served. Friends of the Library also hosted an open house at Wesson Public Library, where Mrs. Santa Claus read stories to children.

Ken Carraway, as Chief of Wesson Volunteer Fire Department, which organizes the traditional parade, is the primary parade planner.



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Church musician forges secular career

By Bob Arnold

A *Christianity Today* article some years ago observed that “music has always been a point of contention in the church.”

Karl Vaters pointed out that the arguments in large part have been trivial, revolving around such issues as singing in harmony instead of in unison as with Gregorian chants and whether or not to use instruments and which ones are appropriate. But one issue, he says, is worth arguing over, or at least taking seriously: performance music vs. worship music -- music focused on musicians vs music focused on the divine, or specifically Jesus in Christianity.

Over more than three decades, Brookhaven native and resident Blake Scafidel has lived this contention and personified it.

Before 2020, folk knew him as primarily a church musician, who also had to support a family as a secular musician. In recent years, he has focused on building a reputation as a performing artist and secular composer.

Scafidel says his musical experiences have paralleled his life experiences -- “navigating through chaos, facing rejection, overcoming mistakes, and -- most importantly -- believing in myself.”

Born in Brookhaven in 1968, Scafidel really started his career journey at the tender age of six when he told his parents he wanted to study piano, following in the footsteps of his mother, the musician in the family, who was an accomplished pianist and the musical accompanist at Central Baptist Church, the Brookhaven congregation in which he grew up. His childhood and youth revolved around his interest in music.

“I was never into sports like other kids,” he recalls. “I played the piano in church, at school and in local talent shows.”

After his parents separated, he left Southwest Mississippi briefly in the 1980s to live with his father in the Dallas, Texas, area, where he earned his Graduate Equivalency high school diploma. He returned to Mississippi in 1986 to study music at Co-Lin until 1988 and then at Mississippi College in Clinton, Mississippi, until 1991 before starting a 30-year career as a church musician.

“My experience as a church musician encompassed a variety of traditions in diverse settings throughout the South,” Scafidel relates. “I served big and small Southern Baptist, Methodist and non-denominational Pentecostal churches in rural, suburban and urban communities in Mississippi, Alabama and South Carolina. The challenge was providing music with which both the varied congregations and I were mutually comfortable.”

Scafidel cites pianist Dino Kartsonakis, whom he describes as “the religious version of Liberace,” along with Olafur Arnalds, John Williams and Hans Zimmer as major influencers in development of his reflective, contemporary classic music style.

Drawn to large-scale instrumental and orchestral music, he enjoyed producing the Christmas and Easter pageants at the churches he served. He also found satisfaction in developing distinctive music programs. He recalls a unique non-denominational congregation that wanted to build a contemporary music program, and needed to recruit musicians you could not find in churches to provide the required sound.

“Now, besides churches, there are two other places you can find musicians -- schools and bars,” Scafidel says. “We developed and implemented a plan to visit bars to get the musicians for the program.”

Because the jobs are normally part time and the pay is usually low, the life of a church musician is often a financial struggle, and Scafidel worked outside the religious community while serving his varied churches to make ends meet. Over the years, he has composed music for grant monies, operated his own commercial video production company and performed with bands and other artists in varied gigs. In 2008, The Mississippi Arts Commission awarded him \$5,000 to produce several orchestral compositions. Second Story Films, his production company, created promotional videos for the State of Mississippi and corporations and covered weddings. Gigs have taken him to varied venues, including Mor-

gan Freeman’s Ground Zero Blues Club at Clarksdale, Mississippi.

In 2020, after the COVID-19 pandemic made the financial life of church musicians even tougher, Scafidel moved to the secular world full time. Outside the religious community, Scafidel says he has been a “late bloomer” in pop music influenced by Elton John and Bruce Hornstein. He maintains a studio and is creating an events center with a stage where he can perform for private audiences at his home in the Breckenridge section of Brookhaven off Highway 84 west going towards Natchez. He performs regularly at Magnolia Blues in Brookhaven and continues to expand his public appearances as a piano soloist in new venues. A public website (blakescafidel.com) and Facebook page (Blake Scafidel Music) tout his performances and sell his albums.



Wesson News

Karl Vaters

A highlight of Scafidel’s secular musicianship is his Christmas show -- “The Cure for Christmas Chaos” with solo and orchestral arrangements of Christmas favorites and two original compositions.

“I’ve watched people from our area travel for miles to Branson or Nashville to see professionally-produced shows,” he says. “There is no reason Mississippians should have to travel to see a spectacular, high-quality, professional show, when our own state is known as the birthplace of America’s music. Maybe it’s the heat, maybe it’s the culture, or maybe it’s a magical combination of elements unknown, but we consistently produce and promote artists in all genres. ‘The Cure

for Christmas Chaos’ showcases that talent for our own people to see and enjoy and brings the revenue associated with a professional show to our local businesses in a mutually-rewarding partnership. It has the staging, lighting, and artists that are expected for a professional production. All the arrangements are originals exploring both religious and secular themes, and all of the musicians are professionals -- some of the most talented in our state. My goal for ‘The Cure for Christmas Chaos Live’ is to bring our communities together and share the beauty of Christmas music through a Branson-style show that is both entertaining and uplifting.”

Scafidel and his wife Correne, whom he met at Co-Lin, have five children -- two still at home, a 19-year old son and 11-year old daughter; and three grown, two sons, 29 years old and 25 years old, and a 23-year old daughter. His wife teaches piano at Brookhaven Downtown Music Academy and is the music accompanist at Brookhaven’s East Haven Baptist Church.

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

What are your hobbies?

I played golf with my father at one time, but music is both my career and hobby today.

Are you a reader?

When I was a church musician, I read a lot of religious and spiritual books that inspired and nurtured me and changed my life. Today, my interest is in the lives and work of musicians like John Williams and Hans Zimmerman.

You are a musician, of course. But do you have a special interest in any one type of music?

I like instrumental and orchestral music, particularly movie scores.

How about movies or theater?

I like epics. *Star Wars* movies are my favorites. I like the acting of Sean Connery and Morgan Freeman.

What would you do with the winnings if you won the lottery?

I would travel the world to experience different cultures and give it to humanitarian causes.

How would you change the world?

I wish it were so simple. Change is needed for sure. But doing it is the big question.



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Bowl victory caps Co-Lin's season

Special to Wesson News

A 28-20 victory over Navarro Community College in the TIPS-CHAMPS Heart of Texas Bowl capped an historic season for the Co-Lin football Wolves.

Navarro, ranked number 10 in National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) play with a 6-4 overall record, won the game statistically, but Co-Lin prevailed with two passing touchdowns by Devon Tott -- 66 yards to Richard May in the second quarter and 36 yards to Jaylan Smith in the third quarter -- and running touchdowns of 12 yards in the third quarter and 4 yards in the fourth quarter by Tray Miner and Johnnie Daniels. The Bulldogs racked up 240 passing and 175 rushing yards against Co-Lin's 175 passing and 115 rushing yards, but penalties were the equalizer, with Navarro assessed 125 yards on 12 against only 20 yards on four for Co-Lin. At halftime, Navarro took a 13-7 lead into the locker room after Co-Lin turned over the ball on an interception, followed by a 36 yard touchdown pass from Dana Jentsch to Jaxxon Warren. The Bulldogs also scored on 33-yard and 42-yard field goals in the first half and a fourth quarter 24-yard passing touchdown from Jentsch to Braylan Fenney before Co-Lin ran out the clock to end the game.

Both Navarro and Co-Lin missed opportunities to play for the NJCAA crown, losing their conference championship games before receiving invitations to play in the postseason game at Commerce, Texas. Going into the Mississippi Association of Community Colleges Conference (MACCC) championship game against East Mississippi in their second matchup with them, the Wolves were ranked fourth in NJCAA competition, but fell to sixth after their disappointing 27-20 loss in the final minutes of the fourth quarter at Scooba, Mississippi.

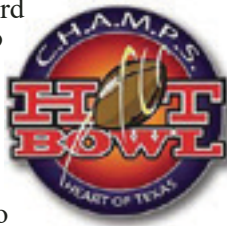
Before the matchup with Navarro, Co-Lin had a 9-2 record -- their fourth under Head Coach Glenn Davis, and the bowl game victory gave the Wolves only the second 10-win season in their history.

The Wolves finished the 2023 season averaging 350 yards per game (166.5 rushing and 183.5 passing) while scoring 29.1 points per game. The Wolves post-

ed a shutout in their regular season finale against Hinds in a game that also saw the defense allow the Eagles just 125 yards of offense. The Wolves offense had over 400 yards four times this season in wins over #8 East Mississippi, Mississippi Delta, East Central, and #10 Northwest, with the highest total against Mississippi Delta at 473 yards. Leading the Wolves into the bowl were:

- Sophomore quarterback DeVon Tott, with 1768 yards, including 10 touchdowns and 190 rushing yards on 67 carries with 4 touchdowns.
- Sophomore running back Johnnie Daniels, with 1,491 all-purpose yards -- 1196 yards on 168 carries and 205 receiving yards on 22 receptions. Daniels led the nation in touchdowns, was second in the nation in rushing yards and yards per game and fourth in yards per carry.
- Sophomore wide receivers Carlos Martin and Jaylen Smith both had 37 receptions.
- Freshman back Jahron Manning led the defense with 68 tackles (6.2 per game).
- Sophomore back Kaden Dukes and freshman linebacker Malachi Williams led the defense with three interceptions.
- Sophomore defensive lineman Billy Pullen leads the team in sacks with 12.5 and tackles for loss. Pullen led the nation in forced fumbles, was second in sacks, and fifth in tackles for loss.
- Sophomore kicker/punter Brandon Gilliam scored 82 points, kicking 16 field goals on 23 attempts, with 44 yards his longest; and 34 extra points on

cont. on page 9



Youth mental health initiative

By Guest Columnist Stephanie Duguid

In Mississippi, a revolutionary initiative is taking shape aimed at transforming the way mental health is approached among youth and young adults.



Open Up Mississippi, a state-wide leadership council composed of persons aged 14 to 26, is leading this charge to engage youth and young adults in breaking down barriers to mental wellness, utilizing their strengths and voices to combat the stigma surrounding mental health.

The pioneering group is focused on three primary goals: eradicating the stigma and stereotypes that deter individuals from seeking mental health services, raising awareness about the prevalence of mental illness among young Mississippians and advocating for enhanced mental wellness services tailored to the needs of individuals aged 18 to 26.

A critical aspect of its initiative is the introduction of a new, easy-to-remember three-digit dial and texting/chat code: 988. This number connects callers directly to the suicide prevention hotline and is a lifeline for those experiencing a mental health crisis, emotional distress, or substance abuse

issues. Moreover, 988 offers support to people seeking help for loved ones facing similar challenges.

The statistics underscoring the need for such an initiative are stark. One in six U.S. youths aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder. Among young adults aged 18-25, the prevalence of mental health conditions soars to 30.6%. Alarming, half of all lifetime mental illnesses commence by age 13, with 75% manifesting by age 24. Additionally, high school students showing significant symptoms of depression are over twice as likely to drop out compared to their peers.

Open Up Mississippi is basing its communication activities service delivery on the unique ways youth communicate and seek solace. For many, texting is a preferred mode of communication over talking. Music, too, plays a vital role in their lives, serving as a medium for healing, mood regulation, and expressing feelings.

The group's program is also building a peer-to-peer support system, leveraging relationships to extend the reach among students and adults through community presentations and awareness campaigns to ensure the message of mental wellness and the avail-

ability of support systems permeates throughout schools and social groups.

Visit openupms.org or contact youth@namims.org to support or learn more about this transformative initiative. The website and email provides links to resources, guidance, and avenues for involvement in Open Up Mississippi's crucial mission.

Open Up Mississippi stands as a beacon of hope and action in the face

of mental health challenges confronting youth and young adults. By empowering the very individuals affected by these issues to lead the charge, Mississippi is setting a precedent for how communities can come together to foster understanding, support and lasting change in the realm of mental health.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Stephanie Duguid is owner of Do Good ProHealth (CPR Classes) and Do Good Leadership (motivational speaking, and leadership and success coaching).



Crystal Springs' Dexter Allen wows audiences

Special to Wesson News

Crystal Springs-born Dexter Allen is a Mississippi blues and soul musician who has spent the last three decades touring and performing across the U.S.

At age 12, he was playing bass guitar with The Christian Travelers, his parents' gospel band, which performed regionally and nationally, and, as he has matured as an artist, has earned an international following with soulful vocals and passionate, driving guitar.

"Music is music, and I love music," he says. "Most musicians don't just play one genre, but one thing may be closer to their heart than the other. My thing happens to be blues, soul and gospel. When young people tell me they don't like the blues, it's because visually the mainstream shows blues as an old guy sitting on a bucket. But when they come to my show, they say 'Man, you rock.' So I structure my music in a way, production wise, to catch today's ear and keep the root of where it comes from.

I sing the blues of today, not yesterday. My blues is the 2020 blues."

A 1988 Crystal Springs High School graduate, Allen moved to Jackson in 1990, started playing with secular bands and artists, met legendary blues artist Bobby Rush while playing at a local church and joined his band as a guitarist, traveling with it from 2000 to 2006 before launching his career as an individual performing artist. He

closed out the decade wowing audiences everywhere from Seattle to Eric Clapton's Crossroads Guitar Festival, touring on his album, *Dexter Allen: Live from Ground Zero Blues Club*. He performed to sellout audiences on a European festival tour and at Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise, a Chicago Blues Festival, where he also had standout jam session with other musicians, including top touring guitarist Ana Popovic.

Allen's credits include playing in James Brown's band in the Oscar-winning *Get On Up*, scoring films and a leading role in the western *Indie*. He was honored as the Mississippi Music Awards Entertainment of the Year as a singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and producer in multiple genres. He served on the Blues Foundation Board and won the JUS Blues Award presented by Bobby Rush, who called him "a legend to tomorrow." British musician and radio personality Robin Phillips invited him to record at Muscle Shoals Studio, which asked him to play its annual benefit.

When Allen isn't on tour, he makes his home in Byram, and conducts workshops in schools and for autistic youth.


EDITOR'S NOTE: Throughout the 2023 Copiah County Bicentennial year, Wesson News will feature sketches of past and present visual artists, musicians, authors and photographers who are natives of the county. They will be excerpted from Tricia Nelson's reporting in A Shared History: Copiah County, Mississippi 1823-2023 edited and compiled by Paul C. Cartwright and available through Cartwright for \$25 plus \$5 for shipping at 3 Waverly Circle, Hattiesburg, MS 39402. Nelson is a Crystal Springs writer who contributes to the Copiah County Monitor.

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Curtain rises on theater program

Special to Wesson News

Two theatrical performances in October and November raised the curtain on a new theater program, including classes, at Co-Lin.

On October 27, 28 and 29, Dr. Bobby Helms, Director of Choral Activities at the college, staged three performance of *Steel Magnolias*, a comedy-drama set in the early 1980's based on the life of writer Robert Harling's sister about a group of women who bond in a small Southern town as customers of a hairdresser and deal with the death of one of their own, a Type 1 diabetic who risks everything to give birth to her own child.

On November 10 and 12, he produced and directed *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* -- a musical play based on the 1831 novel by Victor Hugo about an impossible love affair focused on the bellringer at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and a 16-year old street dancer, with songs from the 1996 Walt Disney Animation Studios film adaptation.

There will be three more shows during the spring semester and two junior shows featuring children and youth during the summer, also produced and directed by Helms. The venue is the Stanley Stewart Auditorium in the Ewing Fine Arts Building on the Wesson campus, with tickets priced at \$10 per person.

"This is the first time in recent memory that Co-Lin has had a theater program, and a season of plays has been staged in Wesson," says Helms, who was involved in a Georgia community theater and college theater before joining Co-Lin in 2019 to head its Choral department. "We started the program to both attract students to Co-Lin and offer new opportunities to current students."

Helms launched the new theater program with a summer camp at Co-Lin for children and youth this year. Participants in the summer camps introduced the new program with performances of *Sister Act (Junior)*, a 1992 musical crime comedy written by Paul Rudnick, and *Legally Blonde (Junior)*, a 2001 American comedy scripted by Karen McCullah Lutz and Kirsten Smith about a sorority girl who attempts to win back her ex-boyfriend by getting a Juris Doctor degree at Harvard Law School, and in the process, overcomes stereotypes against blondes and triumphs as a successful lawyer.

Classes started in the fall semester are part of the program, too, with the shows in which students can practice their learning along side members of the wider community with a theater background who want to audition for them as well. Helms also teaches the classes, which include one theater major who will graduate and

move to a four-year school, and students who take them to complement other studies. During the current semester, he is teaching stagecraft (building props and sets), acting, movement and drama production. Next semester, his courses will include stagecraft, theater appreciation and drama production.

This month, auditions begin for the three spring semester shows:

- *Tick Tick. . . Boom*, a semi-biographical musical by Jonathan Larson about the writer's experience creating a musical to enter the theater industry.
- *Clue*, a comedy written by Jonathan Lynn, Hunter Foster, Sandy Rustin and Eric Price based on the classic board game, *Clue*, in which six guests are invited to a dinner party thrown by an anonymous host who gives them aliases -- Colonel Mustard, Mrs. White, Mr. Green, Mrs. Peacock, Professor Plum, and Miss Scarlet, discover they are the victims of the same blackmailer, their host, are presented with a weapon and must choose to pay their extortionist double or kill the innocent butler.
- *Little Shop of Horrors*, a horror comedy rock musical with music by Alan Menken and lyrics and a book by Howard Ashman that follows a hapless florist shop worker who raises a plant that feeds on human blood and flesh. The musical is loosely based on the low-budget 1960 black comedy film *The Little Shop of Horrors*. The music, composed by Menken in the style of early 1960s rock and roll, doo-wop and early Motown, includes several well-known tunes, including the title song, "Skid Row (Downtown)," "Somewhere That's Green," and "Suddenly, Seymour."

Helms pronounced the initial productions of *Steel Magnolias* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* successful ventures "received very well" by nearly full-house audiences. The audiences at *Steel Magnolia* participated in the play as attendees at a "wedding reception" during the intermission, which was made part of the play. Minus the audience, however, the play had only seven cast members, making it relatively easy for Helms to produce and direct to start the 2023 theater season at the college. As the season progresses, Helms is creating bigger challenges for himself. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, in contrast, had 35 cast members. Spring semester productions, Helms adds, will feature live instruments in musicals instead of recording tracks to provide sound.

For more information, contact Bobby G. Helms at bobby.helms@colin.edu.



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Special to Wesson News

Chris McSweyn, the long-time chef at Wesson's once world-renown Porches Restaurant before taking over as executive chef for Co-Lin's Aladdin Campus Dining, serves one of the five signature food specialties he taught some 30 participants to make in an Institute for Learning in Retirement (ILR) workshop at the college's Thames Center.

At the workshop, McSweyn shared start-from-scratch recipes for buttermilk biscuits, turkey cranberry sliders, brie, asparagus and prosciutto wraps; cherry (or blueberry) cream cheese tarts and shrimp creole; showed class participants how to prepare them from fresh ingredients, cooked and served the food to them in the tradition of his grandmother and shared thoughts on how to make the dishes extra special.

McSweyn, who grew up in a cooking family and still recalls his grandmother's tutoring, engaged in conversation with his ILR students throughout the workshop, revealing his own secrets as they tested their knowledge and understanding with him. He said he likes to brine fish, poultry and other meats and blanch fruits and vegetables.

Brining before starting to cook meats moisturizes and tenderizes them, enhances their flavor and reduces their cooking times, he explained. A simple brine is a mixture of water and salt, but brines may include sugar, spices and other seasoning mixed with broths, buttermilk and juices as well as water. Usually, meats are refrigerated in a brine overnight.

Blanching -- immersing a vegetable in boiling water for one to two minutes to cook it rapidly and then abruptly stopping the cooking with an ice bath -- preserves the flavor, color, texture and nutritional value of vegetables and fruits like cauliflower, green beans and tomatoes.

WAC honors veterans



Special to Wesson News

Wesson Attendance Center (WAC) honored area present and former members of the armed forces with its annual Veterans Day breakfast and community celebration program attended by students, veterans and the wider public on November 10. Bobby Thornton, Commander of Wesson American Legion Post 79, spoke at the program, presenting a POW/MIA ceremony -- "America's White Table" -- with the help of WAC students who had participated in the Mississippi American Legion Boys and Girls State this year. During the program, WAC's Mighty Cobra Band also played as veterans of each branch of the armed forces were recognized. Students from grades seven through twelve were part of the program audience. Students in grades kindergarten through six decorated the school walls (above) with handmade tokens of appreciation that they gave to the veterans. A large, enthusiastic audience was present for the program as the annual event continues to grow and reach increasing numbers of veterans. Contact barbara.roberson@copiah.ms for more information about the WAC's interaction with veterans.

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18 griders honored by MACCC



Special to Wesson News

Eighteen members of Co-Lin's football Wolves have been selected by the Mississippi Association of Community Colleges Conference (MACCC) to its All-South Team.

Five Wolves earned First Team honors -- running back Johnnie Daniels (Crystal Springs), defensive lineman Billy Pullen (Kaufman, Texas), wide receiver Jaylen Smith (Jacksonville, Florida), defensive back Navarion Benson (Crystal Springs), and offensive lineman Zane Hooper (Denham Springs, Louisiana). It was the second time Smith made an all-conference team.

Eight members of the team earned Second Team honors -- quarterback De'Von Tott (Mandeville, Louisiana), wide receiver Carlos Martin (Laurel), tight end Tyler Fortenberry (Brookhaven), kicker Brandon Gilliam (Vicksburg), returner Zyrian Jackson (Hazlehurst), linebacker Dedric Hicks (Laurel), and defensive lineman Kevontay Wells (Jackson) and Montra Edwards (Lexington).

The Wolves also had six Honorable Mention honorees -- defensive backs Kaden Dukes (Petal), Jahron Manning (New Orleans, Louisiana), Christopher Burnett (Yazoo City) and linebacker Collin McGowan (Wesson).

The 2023 season saw the Wolves finish as MACCC South Division Champions and make a run all the way to the MACCC Championship game, ultimately falling to the East Mississippi Lions, 27-20.

Sanders signing



Wesson Attendance Center Fastpitch Softball senior standout Mallory Sanders has inked a scholarship with the Longwood University Lancers at Farmville, Virginia. She will begin Longwood in fall 2024. Sanders was a driving force for WAC's fastpitch team both offensively and defensively. Last year, she was chosen Fastpitch Softball Best Offensive Player and Best Defensive Player of the Year at the school. She was also named All-Region in 7-3A. Sanders was also chosen to play in the Mississippi Athletic Conference (MAC) All-Star South Softball Game and as MAC's Most Valuable Player. At the signing (front, left to right) were her mother Misty Sanders, signee Sanders, her father Mark Sanders, (back, left to right) Karla White, WAC Assistant Fastpitch Softball Coach; Jeremy Loy, WAC Athletic Director; and Michelle Nunnery, WAC Head Fastpitch Softball Coach.



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cont. from page 3

Bowl victory caps Co-Lin's season

35 tries. He also averaged 33 yards on 42 punts, with his longest 60 yards. Gilliam led the nation in points and field goal attempts.

Before the bowl game, the Bulldogs averaged 381.6 yards per game (161.5 rushing and 220.1 passing), while scoring 30.8 points per game. They allowed 361.3 yards per game (142.2 rushing and 219.1 passing) and 27.4 points per game.

Quarterback Dane Jentsch led the Bulldogs with 2,082 yards on 164 completions with 13 touchdowns and 13 interceptions. Jentsch was also the leading rusher for the Bulldogs with 620 yards on 128 carries with ten touchdowns. Wide receiver D'Tyrain McCoy had the second most rushing yards on the team with 455 yards on 74 carries with five touchdowns. Bryan Spottwood led the Bulldogs receiving corps with 44 receptions for 635 yards with three touchdowns while Braylon Finney had 467 yards on 36 receptions with five touchdowns.

The Bulldogs defense had 68 tackles for loss with 28 sacks, while averaging 67.7 tackles per game. They forced eight fumbles this season and had seven fumble recoveries along with seven interceptions and five blocks. Sophomore linebacker Jordan Smith led the defense in tackles per game and total tackles, while sophomore linebacker Eddy Toussom led the team in sacks and tackles for loss. Sophomore defensive back Jakelyn Morgan led the team in interceptions.



tions.

The TIPS-CHAMPS Heart of Texas Bowl (known as the HOT Bowl for short), founded by Copperas Cove (Texas) High School football coach Jack Welch, has been played since 2001, at Copperas Cove (until 2017), Waco, Texas, ISD Stadium (2018) and now at Memorial Stadium at Commerce, Texas (beginning 2021 following a two-year hiatus during the COVID 19 pandemic).

CHAMPS is the acronym for bowl sponsor Communities Helping Americans Mature, Progress and Succeed, which is a nonprofit group focusing on improving drug and alcohol abuse, bullying, mental health, and preventing teen suicide. TIPS (The Interlocal Purchasing System) started sponsoring the bowl game with CHAMPS in 2018.

The bowl game matches Texas teams from Southwest Junior College Football Conference with community and junior colleges from other states. Opponents have come from Arizona, Georgia, Kansas, Minnesota, Mississippi, and New Mexico, with the Texas teams winning most of the contests. Trinity Valley Community College and Kilgore College have had the most appearances among the Texas teams, with five apiece. Trinity Valley has been the most successful participant by far, going 5-0 in its games. Among the non-Texas teams, Coffeyville Community College of Kansas has the most appearances, with three. No non-Texas team has won the bowl more than once.

Hoopsters start seasons with wins

Special to Wesson News

Co-Lin men's and women's basketball teams have started their seasons on a winning note in line with expectations following successful play during 2022-23.

The men finished last year with an 18-6 overall record, 12-2 in conference play, and won their first Mississippi Association of Community Colleges Conference (MACCC) championship since the 1999-2000 season, while the women had a 16-10 overall record, 6-8 in MACCC play. Both teams went to the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Region 23 Tournament, but lost in early rounds.

Men's second-year Coach David Sanders has a new group of players, but says his expectations coming into the new season are still high. "We want to be National Champions," he says. "That is the goal and that is what it is always going to be, and from that goal we create others. Winning the conference again is the first step, then we want to win regionals. The main thing for that to happen is getting our players to buy in and get ready for the challenge ahead."

New Lady Wolves Coach Dr. Britta Stephens says she is excited about her first season. "I think we have a good group of core sophomores who all bring experience to the table along with freshmen that have shown promise leading up to the season," she says. "I think that we are going to be a high energy team and that will look a little different than what Co-Lin has had in the past because of our player makeup and ability. Pressing and guarding will be the way we work best this season. We are going to guard well and generate offense through our solid defense."

The men's roster features 13 players, including 11 freshmen.

"I think that everything starts with Devin Carter (Edwards), who is a transfer guard from Alcorn State," Sanders says. "He can handle the ball, shoot it well, and is a very dynamic player who has a chance to be an All-Conference player for us. We also have Avaughn Johnson (Jackson), who is a Jackson State transfer. He plays inside out and we like what we have seen from him in practice and scrimmages so far. Emmanuel James (Nigeria) is the first international player for us at Co-Lin and he has a chance to be one of the best athletes in the conference. Ismail Rashid (Brandon) is a do-it-all guy for us who comes in with a lot of maturity after spending a year at a prep school. He is a guy that we are going to be able to use all over the court to make plays for us. Dakota Hillard (Hazlehurst) is a big guy and can shoot it with a nice post game and we are just trying to find

ways to get him touches"

The roster also includes Jamarion Smith (Magnolia), Kaison Saunders (Olive Branch), Trevon Taylor and Courterius Scott (both from Jackson), Corey Brown (Roxie), Jayden Jackson (Camden), Antonio Oatis (Hattiesburg), and Fred Gray, Jr. (Belzoni).

The roster for the Lady Wolves features 12 players including six sophomores (four returners, two transfers) and six freshmen. Returning sophomores for the Lady Wolves include Kayla Howard (Shaw), Lashaunte Payne (Magee), A'shante Fleming (Canton), and Ceara Myers (Baton Rouge, LA) while Sequoia Bolden (Hattiesburg) and Jamea Smith (Jackson) both come to Co-Lin after playing their freshmen years at Coahoma.



"I look for us to play pretty fast every game and for all of our players to play every game because of the style of basketball we are going to have to play this season," stated Stephens. "I think the depth of our roster will be one of our strengths."

Returning sophomores for the Lady Wolves include Kayla Howard (Shaw), Lashaunte Payne (Magee), A'shante Fleming (Canton), and Ceara Myers (Baton Rouge, LA) while Sequoia Bolden (Hattiesburg) and Jamea Smith (Jackson) both come to Co-Lin after playing their freshmen years at Coahoma. "I really think that Jamea, Ceara, and A'shante have the ability of being all-conference type players for us," says Stephens. "Jamea and Ceara can average double-doubles in rebounds and points. If we can keep those three playing really well for us and two or three more that can complement them then we will be really successful this season."

Incoming freshmen for the Lady Wolves include Ki-ersten Haynes (Clinton), Myla Harbor (Ferriday, LA), Ke'Asia McChriston (Jackson), Zamiya Brown (Flowood), Alexanjria Washington (Canton), and Tia Richardson (Jackson).

Early in the new season, the men have posted a 4-2 record, and the women are 5-2. The men have defeated Baton Rouge Community College (89-72), Baton Rouge Post Graduate (122-57) and Delgado (83-75 and 87-81) with losses to Chipola (95-73) and Pensacola (66-63). The Lady Wolves have wins over Shorter (76-52), South Arkansas Community College (93-88 and 61-57), Southern University Shreveport (56-39) and Baton Rouge Community College (73-60), with losses to Kilgore (73-57) and LSU Eunice (79-58).

Roasted pork loin for Christmas



By Guest Columnist Charles Fortson, Jr.

Try something different for your Christmas dinner this year. Oven roasted pork loin can make your holiday meal special.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Charles Fortson, Jr., is proprietor-chef at Uncle Ray's across from Lake Lincoln State Park. He makes lunches and dinners to take out or for table service, while also operating a convenience store and bait shop at his Sunset Road location. Follow his cooking tips on Uncle Ray's Facebook page or call 601-643-0174 to check on his daily specials.



Ingredients:

- 3-5 pound pork loin
- ½ bunch of green onions with bottom cut off
- Your favorite Cajun seasoning (mine is Louisiana)
- 2 tablespoons of minced garlic
- 1 ½ pound of thin sliced bacon
- ½ stick of butter
- Paprika

Directions:

1. Two ways to prepare the pork loin:
 - Cut ¼-inch into meat down its length.
 - Cut ½-inch into meat down its length and unroll it until it looks like a sheet of paper.
 2. Apply the Cajun seasoning and paprika all over the meat.
 3. On the inside cut, spread the 2 tablespoons of minced garlic.
 4. Place 4 bacon strips on the inside cut.
 5. Cut butter into slices and place them on inside cut.
 6. Close up the pork loin, tying it on both ends and the center with the cooking string. Set aside.
 7. Lay out remaining slices of bacon side by side.
 8. Place pork loin on the bacon slices. Wrap them around it, with ends meeting at top, and secure at top with tooth picks.
 9. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
 10. Place the prepared pork loin in cooking pan and put in oven.
 11. Cook for 15 minutes with top of pork loin up. Turn over and cook another 15 minutes.
 12. Cover pork loin and cook for one hour at 350 degrees. Larger pork loins will need to cook longer.
- Remove from oven and serve sliced into ½-inch cuts with favorite sides, cut thinner for great sandwiches. White pepper gravy serves well over it on those cold winter days.

39 competed for Most Beautiful



Special to Wesson News

Among top honorees competing for Most Beautiful title at Co-Lin were (left to right) fourth alternate Kelly Grace Raiford of Wesson, second alternate Caroline Griffith of Brandon, 2023 Most Beautiful Mary Taylor Francis of Sontag, first alternate Madelyn Barrentine of Crystal Springs and third alternate Marley Channell of Wesson.

Special to Wesson News

Co-Lin's annual Trillium Beauty Pageant saw 39 young women competing for the title of the college's Most Beautiful and conferred the 2023 honor on Mary Taylor Francis of Sontag.

Runners up were first alternate Madelynn Barrentine of Crystal Springs, second alternate Caroline Griffith of Brandon, third alternate Marley Channell of Wesson and fourth alternate Kelly Grace Raiford of Wesson:

- Francis is the daughter of Jimmy and Holly Francis of Sontag. She is currently a Co-Lin sophomore majoring in chemical engineering, and is a member of Phi Theta Kappa international honor society, Mu Alpha Theta, the Alpha Omega Science Club and the Co-Lin cheerleading squad. Francis graduated with highest honors from Brookhaven High School.
- Barrentine is a Co-Lin sophomore majoring in Elementary Education. She is a member of the Trailblazers, Phi Theta Kappa, Treasurer for Sigma Kappa Delta and serves as captain of the Colettes dance team. She was selected as freshman homecoming maid and as a Campus Favorite. Barrentine graduated with honors from Copiah Academy. She is the daughter of Chris and Rebecca Barrentine of Crystal Springs.
- Griffith is the daughter of Michael and Camille Griffith of Brandon. She is a sophomore business major and is a member of the Lady Wolves Soccer Team. She is a member of Phi Theta Kappa and was NJCAA All-Academic last season. She graduated with high honors from Brandon High School.
- Channell is the daughter of Layne and Laranda Channell of Wesson. She is a freshman majoring in pre-nursing and is a member of Phi Theta Kappa, Sigma Kappa Delta, Mu Alpha Theta, the Baptist Student Union, and is a Trailblazer. She is a graduate of Wesson Attendance Center.
- Raiford is the daughter of Lance and Marsha Raiford of Wesson. She is a Co-Lin sophomore majoring in Cosmetology. She is a member of the Colettes dance team and the Baptist Student Union. Raiford is an honor graduate of Wesson Attendance Center.

Other contestants selected among the top 10 were Kamryn Bridges of Wesson, Kortne Nelson of Brookhaven, Alyssa Touchstone of Roxie, Reagan Newman of Wesson, and Adyson Parks of New Hebron.

Ross wouldn't have changed anything



Special to Wesson News

Artist Tom Ross died at 73.

Special to Wesson News

An artist widely known throughout Wesson for his paintings of familiar landscapes, a long teaching career at Co-Lin and his dedicated participation in the life Decell Memorial United Methodist Church has died.

Tom Ross settled with his family in Wesson near the Co-Lin campus when he came to the college in 1975 to teach drawing, painting, art history and appreciation and ceramics -- work he continued until his retirement in 2013.

He was 73 years old.

Asked for a *Wesson News* story a few years how he would change his life, he asserted enthusiastically: "Nothing!"

A Jackson native, Ross graduated from Murrah High School (1968) and Mississippi College (1972), where he earned his degree in art after deciding not to pursue studies in chemistry or mathematics. In 1974, he received his Masters Degree in Fine Arts from the University of Georgia (UG). He turned down his first opportunity to teach art as a graduate assistant at UG for a better-paying job as a janitor at the school until Mississippi College invited him to return as a visiting art professor to substitute during the summer for a teacher, who was on leave. The next stop was Co-Lin.

During his teaching career and into his retirement, Ross also honed a reputation as an accomplished painter. His favorite subjects were landscapes in which he incorporated family members and friends when he painted them. His most recent paintings were watercolors, but he worked in oil, acrylic, water-miscible (mixable) oil and egg tempera. When he wasn't teaching or painting, the chances are you could find him fishing somewhere -- in the fresh waters of his backyard pond, Lake Lincoln and varied rivers in Mississippi, the Ozarks and Wyoming; or in saltwater at Orange Beach and off the Mississippi coast. In his retirement, he maintained a studio at his beloved Decell Memorial United Methodist Church where he was a lay leader and volunteered as yard man on its property. He worked on his own private paintings and commissioned projects, and experimented with colors and shapes on computer in his studio two or three days a week.

Over the years, Ross supported work of the Southern Poverty Law Center and United Methodist Committee on Relief, and organizations that assist orphaned animals.

Ross and his wife, the former Gayle Megginson, whom he met at Mississippi College and married in 1971, lived on the Co-Lin campus for twenty-five years before moving to the Brookhaven area after the college sold their house. They adopted a daughter, Arwen, and had three grandchildren.

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Four words of Christmas



By Guest Columnist Rev. Patti Hardacre

Advent is the season before Christmas. During this season, we look forward to the coming of Emmanuel.

The four weeks before Christ's birth are important because we need to live in anticipation of the coming of Christ. Advent is about the amazing grace which comes in the Son of God. There are four words for us to ponder deeply during Advent and Christmas: hope, peace, joy and love.

Christ's light of grace offers us hope. Grace given by Christ leads us to a future where we can leave behind the shadows of sorrow and suffering and sin and forsakenness. May Christ's gracious light of hope shine upon us.

Christ's light of grace also brings us peace. This peace is given to the world which is so overcome with division, violence and conflict. We must allow the light of Christ to bring peace to shine over the world of discord and grief.

The light of Christ's grace also allows us to have room for joy. We are to be glad in Christ and find joy in his holy kingdom. When we find joy, we can let go of our lamentations, sorrow, and hurt. We can open ourselves to songs and carols of good cheer. Pray for this joy to brighten our lives this season and throughout the year.

The fourth word is love. Christ's light of grace is grounded in love. This love is given to us rather than receiving judgment for our sins. Jesus' love for us overcomes all hatred and lovelessness. Show love to others and be covered in the shining light of Christ.

These four simple words for Christmas may change our lives and the lives of others. Let us be prepared to share in hope, peace, joy and love with all of God's children. Michael Hoy's simple prayer reminds us: "May we hold firmly to Christ's amazing grace through faith, and may that grace light the way for our Advent and Christmas."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Rev. Patti Hardacre is pastor at Wesson's De-cell Memorial United Methodist Church.

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Cold weather chores for gardeners



By Guest Columnist Gary R. Bachman

When leaves fall and landscapes begin to look bare for winter, it can be easy to think it's time to stay indoors. But it is a time for a variety of landscape chores.

Maybe you've noticed gray, moldy-looking stuff on the branches and trunks of various trees and shrubs. This is lichen, and it causes much consternation when first discovered. It is a naturally occurring organism that is quite fascinating. It is a combination of fungi and algae that live in symbiotic relationship. Contrary to what the gardener thinks when seeing it on their plants, lichen does not harm the trees and shrubs. It only uses the plant for support. The algae photosynthesize and provide the food, while the fungi collect the water and other nutrients.

Most common are the lichens that develop into a sheet-like, wavy form, called foliose form, and a form that looks like a hairy, fuzzy growth, called fruticose form. All of the lichen forms we commonly see in Mississippi landscapes feature a gray-green coloration that I like to call garden patina. Sometimes, we'll see little, round structures appear on lichen, especially after a rain. These are fruiting bodies, and they are mostly gray-green, but I've noticed some lichen with dark-red fruiting bodies.

While lichen does not harm trees and shrubs, it can indicate that the plant is under some kind of stress, especially if the tree canopy starts thinning in the middle of summer. So, keep an eye out and use lichen as a tool to gauge tree and shrub health. The best way to reduce the appearance of lichen is to keep your landscape and garden trees and shrubs in great shape with proper fertilization and watering.

One job for chilly weather is planting and preparing for spring-flowering bulbs. Tulips, daffodils, hyacinths and crocuses are among the first plants to give us colorful signs that winter is almost over. Many gardeners refer to all of these as bulbs, even though some grow from underground structures that include corms, rhizomes and tubers. Anytime up to and after Thanksgiving is a great time to plant bulbs, tubers and corms. The soil temperatures are lower, and there is sufficient moisture most years.

Planting bulbs in the past was a difficult chore, but using bulb augers attached to cordless drills makes the task much easier. An 18-volt or larger drill works best. Drill the holes to the proper depth, place the bulb in the ground, and cover. Done! The depth of the hole is determined by the size of the bulb. Generally, you need to dig a hole that is two and a half times the bulb diameter. Always plant the widest end of the bulb down, as this is usually where the roots are formed. But even if you slip up and plant some upside-down, the roots and shoots find a way to grow in the proper directions. Some bulbs and corms have a papery, protective cover called a tunic. Do not remove this before planting, and clean up any debris that could signal to squirrels that there are bulbs in the ground. Fertilization is not required the first year. In subsequent years, apply a 10-10-10 garden fertilizer at about 1 1/2 pounds per 100 square feet.

If you have a squirrel problem, the best protection is a physical barrier. Chicken wire fashioned to cover the bulb-planting area is foolproof. Leave it in place over the winter, but remove it when new growth appears in the spring.

Some gardeners are not big fans of bulbs because the foliage looks ratty after the flowers are spent. No matter how bad the foliage looks, I advise gardeners to leave the foliage as these leaves are vital for flowering next year. Knowing there will be a time in the landscape when the bulbs don't look their best, I borrow an idea from the apparel industry: accessories. In the spring, you can interplant early-spring annuals with the bulbs. Their blooms and color can hide the bulb's foliage as it begins to decline.

This is also the time of year to appreciate the great cool-season vegetables we can grow. From broccoli, cauliflower, kale and collards to cabbage and Brussels sprouts, these vegetables are commonly called cruciferous or cole crops. I think they are delicious, especially after a freeze takes out my tomatoes and peppers. The variety of shapes, sizes and colors within this group of vegetables is amazing. But what is even more amazing is that these vegetables are all closely related genetically. In fact, they have a common ancestor.

Wild cabbage is a little plant from the region around the Mediterranean. Because of its nutritious foliage, farmers grew and domesticated selected plants based on their desired traits. Over many, many thousands of years, we have developed leafy versions -- kale and collards; buds -- cabbage and Brussels sprouts; and flowers -- broccoli and cauliflower. Because these vegetables are so closely related, they have similar growing needs and conditions.

Like so many of our landscape and garden plants in Mississippi, good soil drainage is a must. Raised beds are a great choice for good drainage, and adding composted materials creates an optimum planting bed. I really like growing these plants in containers because of the superior growing media available that allows for good drainage. I never have to worry about my plants having wet feet. While we want good soil drainage, we can't let the plants dry out. They need consistent soil moisture to be productive. Apply mulch to help retain moisture, but be prepared to water as needed. For best growth of cruciferous vegetables, do not neglect fertilizing the plants. These vegetables are heavy feeders all through the winter crop season. I like to add slow-release fertilizer at transplanting to get the plants off to a great start. Then I use a water-soluble fertilizer on a monthly schedule to keep the plants healthy and growing strong.

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. Contact him at southerngardening@msstate.edu. Locate Southern Gardening products online at <http://extension.msstate.edu/shows/southern-gardening/>

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Revenue, flu, suit, Delta & Medicaid

Special to Wesson News

Revenue outlook disputed. Still hoping to eliminate the state's income tax, Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves has refused to approve a proposed revenue estimate of top state lawmakers in advance of the 2024 legislative session. Amid economic headwinds pointing to a future slowdown, members of the legislature's budget committee, dominated by Republicans, tried to adopt a revenue estimate for the upcoming fiscal year of just over \$7.5 billion -- the same number legislators approved during the 2023 legislative session. But Reeves, a fellow Republican, said he was caught off guard because other experts told him the number should be higher. He said state law required that he agree with the estimate. "For those of us who are very interested in cutting taxes, arbitrarily lowering the number for no apparent reason hurts our ability to justify those tax cuts," Reeves said. The revenue Estimating Group, which consists of five state officials who analyze state revenue collections, had recommended a figure that was about \$117 million higher than \$7.5 billion. Reeves said adopting the lower figure could undermine support for an income tax cut during the 2024 legislative session. In a presentation to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, State Economist Corey Miller said the state's economy is expected to grow more than projections at the beginning of the year indicated, but slower future economic growth combined with the effects of additional decreases in individual income tax rates could also lead to a slowdown in general fund revenue growth. Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hosemann, who chairs the committee, said he believed the recommended figure represented a realistic view of the economy, but plans to meet with the Governor to resolve the issue.

Flu state. Mississippi is one of seven states reporting high levels of illness in the new flu season. Along with Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, New Mexico and South Carolina are among states where flu cases are prevalent. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also has the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico on its high flu activity list. There are different kinds of flu viruses, and the version that's been spreading the most so far this year usually leads to a lesser amount of hospitalizations and deaths in the elderly -- the group on whom flu tends to take the largest toll. Traditionally, the winter flu season ramps up in December or January, but it took off in October last year, and made a November entrance this year. Tracking during flu season relies in part on reports of people with flu-like symptoms who go to doctor's offices or hospitals. Many people with the flu are not tested, so their infections aren't lab-confirmed. COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses can sometimes muddy the picture. So far this fall, the CDC estimates at least 780,000 flu illnesses, at least 8,000 hospitalizations and at least 490 flu-related deaths -- including at least one child. It's not yet clear exactly how effective the current flu vaccines are, but the shots are well-matched to the flu strains that are showing up. In the U.S., about 35% of U.S. adults and 33% of children have been vaccinated against flu, current CDC data indicates.

Pot ad suit. The owner of a Mississippi medical marijuana dispensary has filed a federal lawsuit challenging state regulations prohibiting medical marijuana businesses from advertising in any media. Clarence Cocroft II, who operates Tru Source Medical Cannabis in Olive Branch, Mississippi, says he is struggling to reach customers because of the Mississippi Department of Health ban that he charges violates business owners' First Amendment rights. "All I want to do, like any other business owner, is have the opportunity to advertise," he says. "If I pay taxes in this business, which I do, I should be able to advertise. All I'm asking from this state is to provide us with the same liberty that they've provided other businesses." Cocroft's lawsuit

accuses state regulations of prohibiting business owners from engaging in truthful commercial speech to promote their legal businesses. Arkansas, Louisiana and Alabama also have regulations that prohibit dispensaries from advertising through public mediums, but Cocroft's attorneys said Mississippi's regulations are more stringent than those in neighboring states. The state Health Department cannot prevent dispensaries from placing "appropriate signs" on their properties or displaying products they sell on their websites. All other advertising restrictions are up to the Health Department, which prohibits dispensaries from advertising or marketing "in any media."

Saving the Delta. Louisiana State University and Tulane University are receiving \$22 million from the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine to lead a consortium seeking ways to save the ecologically fragile Lower Mississippi River Delta. The consortium will explore ways to combat the effects of increasingly intense hurricanes, rising seas, ground subsidence and the diminishing of river sediment that builds the delta. The University of Southern Mississippi, Jackson State University and Alcorn State University are participating in the consortium along with Southern University of Baton Rouge, Xavier University of New Orleans, Grambling State University and Dillard University -- historically black institutions like Jackson State and Alcorn State -- and the University of Central Florida, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium, the Water Institute of the Gulf and the College of William & Mary in Virginia. They will work with students in middle schools and high schools to increase the number of persons from underrepresented groups participating in coastal research and activities. "A sustainable Mississippi River Delta is critical for both the region and the nation," said Colonel Cullen A. Jones, commander of the New Orleans district for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. "We look forward to the insight and contributions of the consortium as we collectively strive to identify the best long-term management approach for the river."

Medicaid disenrollments. Some 90,000 Mississippians have been removed from the state's Medicaid rolls in an "unwinding" process in the aftermath of the federal COVID-19 response when regulations prevented states from disenrolling beneficiaries. Now, millions of Medicaid beneficiaries across the nation are losing their coverage. More than half of the people dropped thus far in Mississippi have been children -- almost 55,000. Most of those people were not found to be ineligible, but lost their coverage due to problems with their paperwork -- called "procedural disenrollments." Mississippi reports an overall 76.5% procedural disenrollment rate thus far. Mississippi Medicaid reached its highest enrollment in the agency's history -- more than 900,000 beneficiaries -- before unwinding disenrollments began. At least 10,135,000 Medicaid beneficiaries have been disenrolled nationally, and 24 million people could lose coverage during unwinding.

Whale delay lifted. The auction of 73 million acres in the Gulf Mexico, originally set for September will begin this month under a ruling by the Fifth District Circuit Court of Appeals that rejects environmentalists' arguments against the sale to protect an endangered species of whale. The ruling also nixed plans by the Biden Administration to scale back the area covered by the lease sale to 67 million acres as part of an agreement to protect the endangered Rice's whale. The appeals court examined the case after a federal judge in southwest Louisiana ordered the sale to go on without the whale protections, which also included regulations involving vessel speed and personnel.

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Wesson PD celebrates new home

Special to Wesson News

Wesson City Hall hosted the grand opening of the new Wesson Police Department (WPD) headquarters last Saturday (December 9).

The celebration included a ribbon cutting presided over by the Wesson Chamber of Commerce and a two-hour public open house with tours of the new facility and refreshments served.

State bond monies funded construction of the new Spring Street home of WPD, a \$300,000 project carried out by municipal employees. Brad Turner, Wesson Public Works Director, drafted specs for the building, and he and his crew did the building work.



Wesson News

Community dinner



Special to Wesson News

More than 300 persons enjoyed Co-Lin's community dinner in November -- a two and a half hour event (11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.) that begins to churn the holiday spirit with a festive meal and fellowship among diverse folk from around and about Wesson. They included Co-Lin employees, members of social and civic organizations, employees of area businesses, families and individuals who paid \$20 per person for a buffet luncheon prepared by Head Chef Chris McSweyn and his staff that featured turkey, ham, country vegetables, salads and a variety of desserts. The community dinner evolved from a 2002 marketing showcase of Co-Lin's Thames Conference Center facilities and food service into a venue for food, fun and conviviality involving an increasingly wider representation of organizations and people from the area.



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