

INSIDE:

Meet Your Neighbor.....

2

Area Arts.....

4

ILR painting class

5

Hydration services.....

9

Sports Shorts

11

Living Healthy.....

12

Page 13-17 online at www.WessonNews.com

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SPOTLIGHT

National Legion
Commander

Page 6

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County officials focus on resources

Special to Wesson News

County elected officials from throughout Mississippi’s Second Congressional District reflected on their leadership responsibilities and learned how to pursue and capture an array of state and federal government resources for their communities at a special conference hosted by Second District Congressional Representative Bennie G. Thompson (D) at Co-Lin last month.

In workshops and breakout sessions during the morning of February 20 at the college’s Thames Center, speakers and panelists from state and federal agencies advised county administrators, sheriffs, supervisors and Chancery Clerks on culling resources for housing, community and economic development, managing immigration issues, emergency assistance, facilities and property management, training, transportation and roads and law enforcement, among other community needs.

Speakers stressed two main themes: interaction and involvement with agencies that are the source of resources and building relationships with them. In addition, they focused on effective leadership -- being reachable, knowledgeable and accountable, and a visionary and communicator in touch with community and citizen needs.

Sheriff Travis L. Patten, the youngest elected in Adams County and first African American since reconstruction, Jefferson County Administrator Brenda Turner-Buck, who was active in community and economic development for 30 years before her retirement, and Philip West, Vice President of the Natchez-Adams School Board of Trustees and an advocate of equal opportunity and equal justice under law for 58 years, moderated the sessions focused on environment and health, transportation and infrastructure, law enforcement and public safety and economic and community development.

More than 30 speakers headlined the event, including Representative Thompson, Co-Lin President Dr. Dewayne Middleton and state and federal agency representatives:

• **Environment & health.** Taaka Scott Bailey (Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality), Chris Thomas (Environmental Protection Agency), Dr. Daniel Edney (Mississippi Department of Health) and Clayton French (Mississippi Emergency Management Agency).

• **Transportation & infrastructure.** Willie Simmons (Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) Central District Commissioner), John Caldwell (MDOT) Northern District Commissioner), Dr. Keither Stamps (Mississippi Public Service Commission (MPSC) Central District Commissioner), Brad White (MDOT) and Katie Funderburk (Broadband Expansion and Accessibility of Mississippi (BEAM)),

• **Law enforcement & public safety.** Marshay Lawson (U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI)), Kyle Smith (United States Secret Service (USSS)), Joshua Jackson (U.S. DOJ Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)), Anessa Daniels-McCaw (U.S. DOJ Department of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)), Mark Shepherd (U.S. Marshal Service), Ragan Lewis (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)), Nicole Lemacks (U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)), Anthony Acocella (Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC)), Kara Spadaccini (Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)) and Ray Sims (Mississippi Department of Public Safety & Public Safety Planning).

• **Economic & community development.** Milton Cochran (Economic Development Administration), Dr. Trina George (U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development (RD)), Jason Shelton (U.S. General Services Administration (GSA)), Nicole Alexander (Mississippi Department of Finance & Administration, Office of Surplus Property), Dr. Corey Wiggins (Delta Regional Authority (DRA)), Baxter Kruger (Mississippi Office of Homeland Security (MOHS)), Janeiro Smith (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)), Wirt Peterson (Southwest Planning and Development District), Chuck Carr (Central Mississippi Planning and Development District), Jenifer Buford (East Central Planning and Development District), Sam Mozee, Jr. (Mississippi Urban Research Center, Jackson State University (MURC)) and Ty James (National Telecommunications & Information Administration (NTIA)).



Special to Wesson News

In their focus on leadership, the speakers discussed what county governing boards need to do to be successful, telling elected members to:

- Understand their statutory authority.
- Have current audits, and be current on federal tax and Social Security Trust Fund filings and payments.
- Maintain a record-keeping system.
- Require employee training, certifications or licensing.
- Attend training for elected officials and participate in continued learning opportunities.
- Update and maintain a strategic plan.
- Understand the operations and roles of departments under their supervision.
- Assure that contracted professionals are qualified.
- Build a support team for themselves and help grow the county.

For government officials seeking grants, they recommended:

- Signing up and opting in at web sites -- Grants.gov, Delta Regional Authority, Federal Register -- for newsletters, updates and announcements relevant to your interests.
- Subscribing to web feeds that provide aggregated information from a variety of sources via email.
- Maintaining electronic or hard copy files of communications from funders relevant to your interests.
- Utilizing search engines, such as Google, to identify funding sources and track their funding cycle, programs and project areas, amount of funding and locations or regions services.

Conference participants left with a guide and resource directory that is also available online at <https://benniethompson.house.gov>.

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WHY GO ANYWHERE ELSE?

Area special events recruiter



Special to Wesson News

By Bob Arnold

It may be a circus, a baseball game or rodeo, a light show or fireworks display, perhaps a shopping extravaganza or exhibition, or charity ball, among other events. If you're looking for something special to do around here, thank Chaston Bullock, Director of the Lincoln County Civic Center, who books the events.

His journey to the job that he started last year included a career as a fire fighter interspersed with service in the Army, National Guard and Air Force over more than 20 years; five years with the Kansas City Southern Railroad and three years with Mississippi Emergency Management.

Local folk who like having fun are happy he found his way here. Born April 9, 1975, at Hazlehurst, Bullock spent the first five years of his life in the Jackson area, where he went to Sykes Kindergarten, and then landed in Mendenhall with his parents. He started 12 years at Mendenhall Attendance Center in the first grade, and graduated from its high school in 1993.

Bullock recalls his childhood and youth revolved around country living, surrounded by horses, chickens and other animals, and learning to hunt and fish -- "things I still like to do, but don't have time to pursue." During high school, he also worked as a stockman at the Walmart store in Magee.

Recognizing that college wasn't affordable, he chose the military instead at age 18 and went to U.S. Army basic training in February 1994 "after the Air Force passed me up," rising in rank from an E1 private to E7 Sergeant First Class. He first shot cannons as a member of a cannon crew, was a supply clerk for three years, and then a parachutist after graduating from the Army's airborne school at Fort Benning, Georgia, instead of the ranger he aspired to being.

"I had more than 100 jumps to my credit at special ceremonies and in training for warfare scenarios," Bullock says. "I jumped for President Clinton in one ceremonial jump."

In 1997, he returned to live at Mendenhall with his first wife -- "a lady I met in Kansas," joined the National Guard as a military policeman in Brandon, Mississippi, and the Ridgeland, Mississippi, Fire Department, where he served off and on until 2014. Over the next seven years, the National Guard checkered Bullock's fire fighting career with deployments to Nicaragua and Karshi Khanabad Air Base in Pakistan and for service in Iraqi Freedom. Divorced in 2001, he left the National Guard in 2004

to study to become a paramedic and earn an Associate's Degree at Holmes Community College.

In 2005, Bullock returned to the military -- this time to the Air Force, where he rose from an E5 Staff Sergeant to an E6 Technical Sergeant. He trained at Shepherd and Nellis Air Force Bases in Wichita Falls, Texas, and Las Vegas and the Water Survivor School at Pensacola, Florida, and Sea School at Spokane, Washington, before becoming a medic and Licensed Practical Nurse for service in the 183rd Air Evacuation Unit based at Jackson, Mississippi.

After he completed flight school in 2006, the Air Force deployed him on patient pickup missions in Germany, Hawaii and Japan; and for four months of service at Kandahar, Afghanistan, transporting wounded soldiers to Germany. He received the Air Medal for his role in seven urgent, 113 routine and 29 priority medical evacuations.

In addition to service as an Air Force medical specialist, he also worked as an equal opportunity specialist and a licensed mediator trained to interact with people regardless of their race, color, religion, sex, national origin or sexual orientation.

From 2014 to 2019, Bullock was a conductor and engineer on the Kansas City Southern Railway. In 2019, he went to work for Mississippi Emergency Management as an operations specialist and assisted local emergency managers in responding to disasters as an area coordinator before coming to Lincoln County Civic Center in 2022.

Now remarried, Bullock and his wife Stephanie, a friend since childhood, live on 16 acres in Lloyd Star, and over the past ten years have shared in rearing his son and daughter, aged 26 and 24, and her three sons, aged 21, 20 and 16 from previous marriages. She is Director of Strategic Initiatives for the Mississippi Institute of Higher Learning, which works with the state's four-year colleges.

What are your hobbies?

I still enjoy hunting and fishing on my 16 acres, and nurturing the land where I am growing pine trees -- maybe for a business in the future. I like to travel -- anywhere. My wife and I cruised in the Caribbean last year, and I hope to travel to Alaska. I am also Associate Pastor at Center Point Baptist Church at Brookhaven.

Are you a reader?

I am not an avid reader, but enjoy the Bible and conducting Bible studies. When I was serving in Afghanistan, I recall the pleasure of reading *Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen about a veterinary student who joins a traveling circus.

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

Do you have a special interest in music?

I don't sing, but would like to learn to play the saxophone, violin or banjo. I like Country, Gospel and even appreciate Christian rap, or at least its message.

How about movies or theater?

When I travel, I will take in a play. I like Brookhaven Little Theater. My preference is comedy. I want to laugh!

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

I would tithe, giving 10 percent to the church. I would also become a philanthropist, blessing people who need financial help as I am able.

How would you change the world?

That's easy. Bringing people to Christ and his love.



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Army Colonel turned novelist

Special to Wesson News

Strong Hope native and current Gluckstadt resident Dale Beasley started evolving into a novelist while serving in the Iraqi War.

In Iraq, the now-retired Army Lieutenant Colonel tried focusing on good things back home -- his memories of his grandmother taking him to Yazoo City for the summer, for example. The memories became notes. The notes turned into chapters. And presto. A book -- *What I Learned at the Zoo*.

There were a couple of more steps.

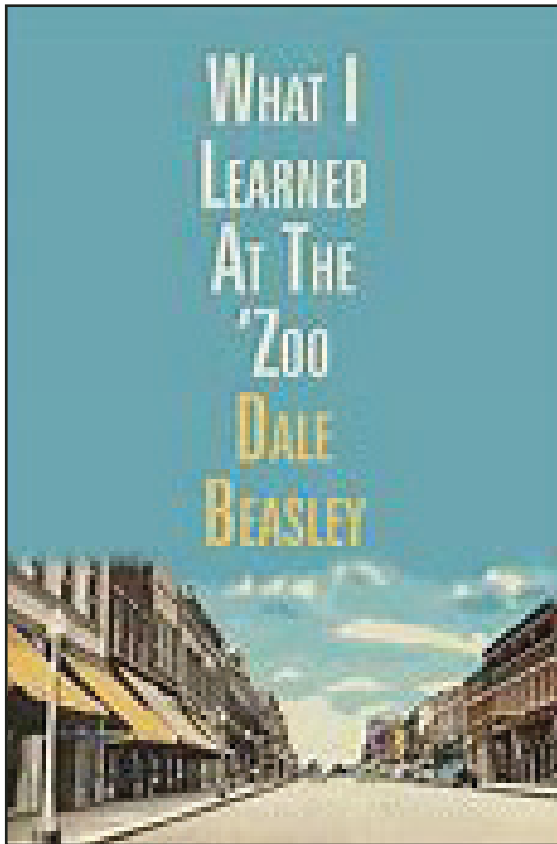
His father (the late Brigadier General Glenn D. Beasley, Sr.) laughed when he read the book, finding it humorous, and encouraged him to publish it. Then he returned to college for nursing classes after his service as an army trauma nurse, and took literature courses as well as electives that helped polish his own writing skills. Since high

school, where he became a Willie Morris fan, he had always been drawn to Southern literature.

Beasley's first novel is a fictionalized version of a teenage boy coming of age in the 1970s during a summer in Yazoo (Zoo) City. The boy is surrounded by an eccentric family and colorful characters set in locations spanning Copiah County, Yazoo City, and even Germany. Beasley says there is something for everyone in the story. The teenage protagonist has grandparents in both Yazoo and Copiah Counties, and there are scenes of old Hazlehurst businesses, many of which no longer exist. Part of the story revolves around a plot to smuggle Cold War secrets from Mississippi to spies in East Germany.


Beasley has since written a prequel to the novel that features many of the same characters -- *What I Learned in Havana*. He is also co-author of *Will I Be Home for Christmas*, which features letters from soldiers.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The 2023 Copiah County Bicentennial year has ended, but Wesson News continues to feature sketches of past and present visual artists, musicians, authors and photographers who are natives of the county 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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DAVE PACE
KEVIN LAIRD 

Artist teaches painting on cypress

Special to Wesson News

A few may have dabbled in paints to express their creative sides, but the vast majority became artists last month when Dawn Marks helped them get in touch with their creative sides at an Institute for Learning in Retirement (ILR) workshop on the Wesson Co-Lin campus.

Marks gave them the paints and planks from cypress timbers with the border lines of three crosses, a tomb with a rock rolled away and the bright sun and help them go at creating an Easter painting they can be proud to hang in their homes.

Co-Lin was the latest stop for Marks, who teaches the painting skills she has honed over the years to children, youth and adults who want to manifest their creative drives in small classes (no more than a dozen students) that assemble at churches, other not-for-profit groups and house parties in southwest Mississippi and Louisiana from Wesson to Houma.

Marks offers her classes through Original Cypress, a small home-based company she operates with her husband Mike. Original Cypress began 15 years ago, selling her cypress works with Louisiana motifs, such as pelicans and swamp scenes, to gifts and crafts stores. While Marks continues to paint her own works to sell, teaching others to paint has become the main thrust of Original Cypress. She teachers, on average, five classes a week.

It all started in 1983 when Mark's father, a fisherman in the Louisiana bayous, started encouraging his daughter to begin expressing herself as a painter on a wood plank, which he gave her. For the past 35 years, she hasn't stopped painting, and wood has been her primary medium -- initially on those distinctive structures that grow above the roots of



ILR painting class in February.

Special to Wesson News

cypress trees, called cypress knees, later on the planks cut from cypress timbers and, occasionally, on old tin.

"We have been blessed," she says. "The classes have really taken off." Marks sees her teaching as a ministry that provides a venue, where people can enjoy food and fellowship, while "creating something meaningful which they can hang on their walls." "God has given me this tool to use my talent," she summarizes.

Mark's husband dives into Lake Maurepas, adjacent Lake Pontchartrain at New Orleans, to retrieve the cypress timbers -- some thousands of years old, which he fashions into planks and prepares for the painting. Marks draws the outlines of subject matter on the media for her student painters to add colors. Many of them are religious in nature, although others are whimsical like one with a deer eating a snowman's carrot nose. With Mike's help or the assistance of her good friend, Debbie Bertrand, Marks brings all the materials to the class -- the cypress planks or sometimes old tin, which she also uses as a medium; usually house paints and sometimes watercolors for the palettes of her student painters. "We make things as easy as possible for our classes," she says.

Marks grew up in Prairieville, Louisiana, south of Baton Rouge, graduated from high school in Louisiana, and studied fashion design in college for two years. After leaving college, she worked in a variety of jobs, while continuing to paint as an avocation before starting Original Cypress. Marks and her husband acquired an old farm, where they rode horses, in Amite County, Mississippi, and resettled there from Louisiana.

Contact Dawn and Mike Marks at 601-551-5467 or through Facebook @Original Cypress.

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National Legion Commander visits Wesson



Special to Wesson News

Wesson American Legion Post 79 officers feted National American Legion Commander Daniel J. Seehafer last month. Left to right are Adjutant Alicia Coleman, 2nd Vice Commander William (Butch) White, 1st Vice Commander Richard Miller, Sergeant-at-Arms Wayne Johnson, Commander Bobby Thornton, Commander Seehafer, Sons of the American Legion Squadron 79 Commander Jimmy Smith and Finance Officer John Wesley.

Special Report by Wesson Post 79 American Legion Commander Bobby Thornton

Excitement filled the American Legion Drane-Prine Post 79 in Wesson as National Legion Commander Daniel J. Seehafer and his party arrived in their motorcade last month (February 20, 2024) -- the first National Commander to visit the Post.

Department of Mississippi Commander William (Bill) Whatley accompanied Seehafer. The two Commanders were visiting Posts and attending veterans' events as part of Commander Seehafer's tour through Mississippi. They stopped at Drane-Prine Post 79 because of its dedication and service to veterans and their families.

The local Legion hut was filled to almost compacity, with close 80 people attending this special event. The National Commander's Aide Mike Rohan, Mississippi Department Historian Steve Meredith and American Legion Rider escorts for the National Commander Charmain Woods -- Jerry Woods, Mike Spiers and Donna Spiers -- were there. Among invited guests from the area were District 2 and 3 Copiah County Supervisors Johnny Smith and Perry Hood and Wesson Mayor Alton Shaw, Aldermen Michael King and Chief of Police Chad O'Quinn. Also on hand were American Legion District 7 Post Commanders, Legionnaires, Sons of the American Legion and Auxiliary members from Monticello, New Hebron, Tylertown, Liberty and Wesson.

Commander Seehafer, the keynote speaker for the evening, challenged Legionnaires to "Be The One," a campaign embraced by The American Legion to help prevent veterans suicides that he has continued as the organization's theme since coming to his position in August, 2022. In his remarks, he addressed quality of life issues facing active-duty Legion members and veterans and shared events from his past six months of travels across America and the world, including his recent visit to the Republic of South Vietnam on a mission to help recover the remains of the many veterans remaining on the foreign soil. He noted "America is the only nation taking the full accounting of Prisoners of War and those

Missing in Action." Finally, he turned to his upcoming visit to Congress: "I intend to make it my personal mission to provide a testimony to Congress on what the American Legion is all about in supporting the veteran family and that every single member matters."

An ordained minister from Wisconsin, Seehafer earned his American Legion eligibility through service in the U.S. Navy and Navy Reserves, where he served as a military chaplain. He has served in a number of Legion offices, including national chaplain and commander of the Department of Wisconsin. Born and raised in Merrill, Wisconsin, he has a bachelor's degree in pastoral ministry from Concordia University and Master of Divinity from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Seehafer was installed as assistant pastor of St. Stephen Lutheran Church at Horicon in 1997 and continues as the administrative pastor of its school. His Legion honors include the District Commander's New Post Achievement Award, Silver Brigade and Post 157 Legionnaire of the Year. In 2023, he earned an Outstanding Heroism Award for administering the Heimlich maneuver to a choking victim at an American Legion dinner. Seehafer and his wife, Stacey, an American Legion Auxiliary Unit 157 member, live in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. They have a son Jacob and daughter Emma, also members of the Post 157 family.

Drane-Prine Post 79 Commander Bobby Thornton presented Seehafer with a custom-made wood plaque in the shape of Mississippi with a star designating Wesson to commemorate his visit. It also featured the logos of The American Legion, Sons of the American Legion and Auxiliary along with "Be The One."

American Legion Drane-Prine Post 79 at 1014 Main Street in Wesson welcomes all veterans and their families. Meetings are on the third Tuesday of each month stating at 6:30 p.m. Its next meeting is March 19.

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- 2015 Ford F150 SuperCrew 4wd Platinum with only 89k miles, leather, pano sunroof, navi, sharp!
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Austin is new Director of Bands at Co-Lin

Special to Wesson News

Chad Austin has been named Co-Lin's Director of Bands effective July 1, 2024.

Austin has been employed in the Fine Arts division of the college since 2018 as Assistant Band Director and Percussion Instructor. As assistant director, he's been an important part of the instruction and organization of the marching band, percussion section and ensemble, the basketball pep band, the Sojourners, and in assisting with the concert and jazz bands. He spearheaded the Delta Music Institute partnership with Delta State University, creating new entertainment industry classes offered at Co-Lin. Austin has also been heavily involved in band recruitment and helped to grow the Blue Wave Show Band to the largest band in Co-Lin history.

"Austin has been a true asset to Co-Lin," says Co-Lin Dean of Academic Instruction Dr. Amanda Hood. "He is passionate about what he does, and it shows in his work ethic, his relationships, and the growth and success we've seen in the Blue Wave Show Band. We are fortunate to have him stepping into this well-deserved position."



Special to Wesson News

Austin earned an associate's degree from East Central Community College, a bachelor's degree in K-12 instrumental music education from Mississippi State University and a master's degree in band conducting from Sam Houston State University.

In 2009, Austin received the A.E. McClain Award for Mississippi's Outstanding Young Band Director from the Mississippi Bandmasters Association and was named Co-Lin's Outstanding Academic Instructor in 2022. He is a member of the Mississippi Community College Band Directors, Mississippi Bandmasters Association, Percussive Arts Society, and is also a Yamaha Corporation of America Artist and Innovate Percussion Artist.

He and his wife Renee reside in Brandon.

MDWFP fishing rodeos this month



Special to Wesson News

Area families will head off for the Brookhaven Hansel King Sportsplex later this month with their poles, bait and stringers to participate in a unique fishing rodeo hosted by the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP).

MDWFP is inviting anglers 15 and younger to youth fishing rodeos across the state. These events are free and provide the opportunity for young anglers to fish in a lake that is well-stocked with catfish. Brookhaven's fishing rodeo will be on March 23.

"Families are invited to come enjoy quality time together in a safe environment," MDWFP officials say.

The pond at Hansel King Sportsplex is part of a Community Fish Assistance Program with MDWFP. The pond is open daily to people who are 14 years old or younger and disabled persons of any age. Anglers can find bass, bream and catfish in the stocked pond. Daily limits are 10 for bream, five for catfish, 0 for bass and all other species under the statewide bag limit.



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Hydration services for better health



By Bob Arnold

A new specialty healthcare service in Brookhaven is assisting the large numbers of persons who do not get enough fluids to adequately hydrate themselves.

That's 75 percent of the population, says Sharon Hughes, who operates Halo IV Hydration.

"If you're experiencing low energy, gastro-intestinal distress, muscle weakness, joint pain, fatigue, or chronic illnesses like fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis or POTS, we might be able to help," Hughes told the Wesson Lions Club. "Athletes can enjoy faster muscle recovery; older persons can address varied issues associated with aging; and people who need to lose weight can find assistance."

IV hydration, she explains, involves a registered nurse administering fluids with varied vitamins and nutrients, depending on the healthcare need, directly into a client's veins. It allows for rapid absorption of fluids, electrolytes, and nutrients to effectively treat dehydration or deliver specific vitamins and/or specific medications to provide relief or recovery related to other health issues.

Each treatment usually lasts 40 minutes to 60 minutes. Before treatments can begin, a \$25 tele-health consultation with a healthcare provider is required. Follow-up consultations are required every six months unless changes in health require earlier consultations.

Treatments at Halo IV range in price from \$99 for a basic hydration, including 1,000 ml of fluids -- the equivalent of two and one-half gallons of water -- with electrolytes to \$179 for specialty hydrations. The Anti-Aging Glow includes vitamins, nutrients and electrolytes that add volume to hair and nails, boost energy and detoxify. The Athletic Recovery fluids and electrolyte mix quickens muscle recovery after intense physical activities. Nutrients, antioxidants and amino acids in a special treatment boost energy and mental clarity. Pyridoxine to improve vascular functions, Taradal, anti-inflammatory, Fofran to decrease nausea combine in a Migraine Relief hydration formula. The Myers' Cocktail created by late Maryland physician Dr. John Myers mixes an assortment of vitamins with fluids to treat migraines, chronic fatigue, auto-immune disorders, fibromyalgia, upper respiratory infections, sinusitis and seasonal allergies, among other health problems. The Skinny Drip mix helps the body break down adipose tissue and boost metabolism, while suppressing appetite, to promote weight loss. The After Party hydration even staves off hangovers.

At its 127 Cherokee Street location in Brookhaven, Halo IV Hydration provides treatments in a comfortable, serene environment with a fireplace, dim lights and recliners and snacks. For \$20, its professionals will also visit homes. New clients receive 10 percent discounts, and groups, discounts of 15 percent (three to five) to 20 percent (six or more).

Call 601-320-9513 for information or an appointment.

Wildfires are spring threat



Special to Wesson News

Special to Wesson News

March is wildfire prevention month, and again area firefighters are finding the spring one of their busiest times.

With spring breezes and relatively low humidity, all it takes is one spark to cause a wildfire.

In recent weeks, Ruth, East Lincoln, Bogue Chitto, Zetus, Hog Chain, Loyd Star, Heucks Retreat and New Sight Volunteer Fire Departments in Lincoln County worked together to keep 21 fires contained and protect homes and property.

Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC) reports fighting 239 fires over a total of 10,000 acres. The acreage includes active and completely contained or extinguished fires. MFC Outreach Officer Kevin Craft reported a stubborn Jefferson Davis County fire on 1,360 acres. Craft serves Region 4 which includes Lincoln, Franklin, Lawrence, Pike, Amite, Wilkinson, Adams, Walthall, Jefferson Davis and Marion Counties in Southwest Mississippi.

Craft says it doesn't take long for south Mississippi to dry out, and low humidity and winds have made conditions favorable for wildfires in spite of rains that ended the summer drought.

MFC reminds locals that 90 percent of wildfires are caused by human error and thus preventable. One way to prevent fires is to use a fire break or container when burning trash, and not to burn on windy days. Once fire hits pine straw or dry grass it can get out of hand quickly. If you do decide to burn a brush pile or a pile of leaves, make sure you check the wind forecast before you burn.

Smokey Bear always says: "Only you can prevent wildfires."

WAC's Star student & teacher



Special to Wesson News

Jackie Johnson and Julianna Wilson

Special to Wesson News

Julianna Wilson and Jackie Johnson are 2024 STAR Student and Teacher at Wesson Attendance Center (WAC).

Through its STAR program, the Mississippi Economic Council (MEC) each year recognizes students across the state for academic and ACT test achievement. STAR Students, in turn, designate a STAR Teacher -- active, former or retired -- from their elementary or secondary classrooms who made the greatest contributions to their scholastic achievements.

The STAR Student must have an overall ACT composite score of at least 25 and an overall average of 93 or above in selected subjects in the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and first-semester twelfth grades. At WAC, Wilson had a composite ACT score of 28.

Wilson is the daughter of Albert and Deona Wilson, a WAC Hall of Fame inductee, president of her Senior Class, an honor roll student and a member of her school's Beta Club service organization. She was chosen Miss Wesson, has received numerous academic awards throughout her school career and is an active member of Wesson Baptist Church.

Wilson chose Jackie Johnson as her STAR Teacher. Johnson is a graduate of Copiah Academy, has an Associate's degree from Co-Lin and Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Delta State University. She has been a teacher at Wesson Attendance Center since 2009, is married to Nick Johnson and has three children -- Makinley, Reagan and Jace. She and her husband are active members of Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

MEC honors STAR Students and Teachers in the spring at its Education Celebration, awarding them certificates and medallions. They may also receive scholarships through the Kelly Gene Cook, Sr. Charitable Foundation, Inc., if they are U.S. Citizens or from other organizations, but the STAR program does not award them directly. The STAR Hall of Fame honors teachers honored for 10 separate years. Seventy-six teachers have been inducted into the Hall of Fame since 1985.

Mississippi Economic Council is a leading force for business in Mississippi, using factual, data-driven research to promote collaboration between top private and public sector leaders, developing feasible solutions for economic competitiveness, and advocating proactive public policy to expand opportunities for state. It seeks to be the essential organization for Mississippi businesses to cultivate job creation and economic growth.

Students participating in leadership camps



Special to Wesson News

Six Wesson High School students are going to 2024 Lions Club leadership camps.

Special to Wesson News

Six Wesson High School students -- three girls and three boys -- are participating in state Lions Club leadership camps this month.

The girls -- Abbey Berch, Cailley Duplantis and Kala Nhem -- met this past weekend (March 8-10) and the boys -- Tate Brister, Kemari Brown and Alan Luong -- are going March 22-24.

Local Lions Clubs from throughout Mississippi have been sending some 60 to 80 high school sophomores, juniors and seniors to each of the camps for more than 40 years.

The camps, held at Lake Tiak-O-Khata in Louisville, Mississippi, offer a supportive and inclusive environment in which the students can connect with like-minded peers and form lasting relationships through interactive workshops, team-building, engaging discussions, among other activities. Participants gain valuable insights into effective communication, problem-solving and decision-making and are empowered to navigate the challenges they face with resilience and grace.

While local Lions Clubs cover the cost for the students from their areas, they also look to their communities for monetary and in-kind donations. Wesson Lions Club is currently seeking funds and material contributions for necessities, such as food and drinks, paper goods and project supplies, and items are needed to fill goodie bags given to each camper when they arrive.

For information, contact Wesson Lion Gail Freeman at 601-757-9591.

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Men & women return to diamond

Special to Wesson News

While the Lady Wolves softball team was sitting at number two in preseason national polls going into its 2024 season, Co-Lin's baseball coaches thought they had laid a foundation last year for a great season.

At the end of February, the softball nine, with a 7-1 record, looked like it could repeat its success last year -- the first national championship for any Co-Lin athletic team. For the baseball Wolves, with an 8-10 record, the verdict was uncertain.

So far, the Lady Wolves have breezed through the season with a lone 6-4 loss to Parkland College, two victories over Southeast Arkansas (31-1, 17-0) and Dillard University (8-0, 9-0), and three wins at the expense of Baton Rouge (7-2, 5-2 and 9-4). In recent weeks, the baseball team has sputtered with three-game and two game-losing streaks that included losses to Jones (6-1), East central (11-1), Delgado (3-2), Hinds (7-5) and Southwest (8-4). The baseball Wolves also picked up wins against Mineral Area College (8-5), Pensacola State (6-2), Delgado (8-5, 6-4), Coastal Alabama (7-1), Nunez Community College (6-4), Rend Lake (8-3) and Baton Rouge (7-3). Other losses came at the hands of Pensacola State (6-3), Delgado (22-9), Nunez (6-4), Rend Lake (3-2) and Baton Rouge (10-9).

The baseball roster features 33 players, including 18 sophomores (16 returners and two transfers) and 15 freshmen. Returning sophomores include Connor Pittman (Waynesboro), Brayden Evans (Florence), Brentley Berry (Magee), Isaac McClenty (Ridgeland), Coby Gallott (Ocean Springs), Braden Freeman (Terry), Jayden Duncan (Foxworth), Craig Bass (Brookhaven), Sam Thomas (Madison), Riley Easterling (Brookhaven), Christian Cameron (Brandon), Jordan McKenzie (Franklinton), Andin Bolen (Lucedale), Hagan Coumbe (Utica), Hayden Babineaux (Churchpoint, LA), and Ryland Hemphill (Florence) while the two transfer sophomores are Spencer Wilson (McComb) and Jon David Weed (Terry) who came to Co-Lin from Hinds and Meridian respectively.

The freshmen class includes Judson Griffin (Brookhaven), Tucker Jones (Brandon), Tyler Ferguson (Bossier City, LA), Sam Cook (Shubuta), Dee Morgan (Tallulah, LA), Wade Barr (Collins) Brayden Cooley (Flora), Ben Stringer (Brandon), Caleb Flynn (Laurel), Brayden Bankston (Terry), Reise Thomas (Florence), Dylan Wesson (Brandon), Easton Boyte (Brookhaven), Lucas Harrington (Youngsville, LA), and Sawyer Dunn (Magee).

"I think that a big difference in this season will be the fact that we are returning a ton of experience from last season," says second-year Head Coach Adam Chamblee. "Last season, we had a ton of freshmen players in the field, and we were sophomore heavy on the mound, which saw us



Baseball team.

Special to Wesson News



Softball team.

Special to Wesson News



falter late at times when we had a lead or were trying to stay in games throughout last season. This year, we have experience throughout our team in every phase of the game, which I hope will help us to keep our foot on the gas throughout each game."

He singles out sophomore pitchers Pittman, Bolen, Gallott and Duncan; Evans, a catcher; Cameron and McKenzie at first and third bases, middle infielders Berry and Babineaux, and Thomas and Coumbe, Easterling and Hemphill, who are battling for positions. He likes freshmen Jones and Wesson in the outfield, Bankston at shortstop and Ferguson, Morgan and Harrington on the mound.

The 2024 softball roster features 21 players, with nine returning sophomores and 12 incoming freshmen. Returning sophomores include Zykeria Cole (Magee), Laney Waguespack (Bayou Gauche), Leia Phillips (Philadelphia), Kat Case (Monticello), Cara Biswell (Brandon), Sarah Grace Smith (Crystal Springs), and Madison Moak, Bailee Goodson, and Abby Grace Richardson (all of Brookhaven). Incoming freshmen include Olivia Banes (Pelahatchie), Avery Williams (Lewisburg), Kynlee Madere (Paulina, LA), Kinley Ainsworth (Brandon), Emeri Warren (Sebastopol), Karley Rouse (D'Iberville), Emma Kate Fimiano (Petal), Emily Richarde (Lakeland, TN), Keegan McCorkle (Tyronza, AR), Maddie Bruner (Brandon), Carson Hughey (Brookhaven) and Taylor Efferson (Holden, LA).

"All our sophomores coming back with the championship winning experience gives us a leg up and boost in confidence heading into the season," says Head Coach Meleah Howard. "We have seen improvement from a lot of our sophomore group, and we expect big things from them. Players like Sarah Grace and Kat have shown a lot of offensive improvement throughout the fall while players like Zykeria, Leia, Madison, and Bailee have carried over their success from last season to this one.

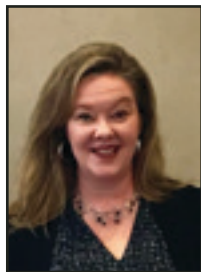
"Our freshmen are right there in the mix with our sophomores and have been displaying their talents as well. Ainsworth can swing the bat well; Banes is very versatile and super athletic; Hughey is a super fast, athletic outfielder; Warren can swing the bat well; and McCorkle, Richarde, Rouse, and Fimiano will help our pitching staff. Being able to secure a player like Efferson, who is a Division I transfer from Nicholls State, is huge for us, and we are excited about her joining the team," added Howard. "She will add depth in both pitching and hitting for us this season."

Howard wants to win the conference outright, and the Region 23 Championship, "but we ultimately want to get back to the national tournament again this season. I have told our team that if we can get back there, I firmly believe that we can win it again."

Simple 7 heart health guidelines

By Guest Columnist Stephanie Duguid

As part of the Mississippi Health Ambassador Initiative, Dr. Trey Clark from the University of Mississippi Medical Center sheds light on the critical importance of heart health through Heart Healthy 101's "Life's Simple 7."



Cardiovascular disease strikes hard and fast, claiming a life every 36 seconds nationwide. Shockingly, 1 in 4 deaths in Mississippi is attributed to this silent killer, highlighting the urgent need for proactive measures to safeguard our communities.

"Life's Simple 7" -- a comprehensive guide endorsed by health professionals worldwide -- encompasses seven pillars, each integral to a heart-healthy lifestyle, that are beacons of hope in the fight against heart disease:



1. Manage Blood Pressure: Keeping blood pressure within a healthy range (typically below 120/80 mm Hg) is crucial for preventing heart attacks and strokes. Simple lifestyle changes like reducing salt intake, exercising regularly, and managing stress can make a significant difference.

2. Control Cholesterol: High LDL cholesterol levels can clog arteries and increase the risk of heart disease. Monitoring cholesterol levels through regular check-ups and adopting a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, while limiting saturated and trans fats, can help maintain healthy cholesterol levels.

3. Reduce Blood Sugar: Elevated blood sugar levels not only increase the risk of diabetes but also contribute to heart disease. Monitoring blood sugar levels, staying physically active, and consuming a balanced diet low in added sugars can help prevent complications related to high blood sugar.

4. Get Active: Regular physical activity is essential for maintaining a healthy heart. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise per week, along with muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days per week.

5. Maintain a Healthy Weight:

Obesity is a significant risk factor for heart disease. Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight through balanced nutrition, regular exercise and adequate sleep is crucial for reducing the burden on the heart.

6. Eat Healthy: A heart-healthy diet emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats while limiting processed foods, sugary beverages, and excessive salt intake. Small dietary changes over time can lead to significant improvements in heart health.

7. Stop Smoking: Smoking is one of the most significant risk factors for heart disease. Quitting smoking is one of the best things individuals can do to improve their heart health and overall well-being. Support resources and cessation programs are available to help individuals kick the habit for good.

The essence of Heart Health 101 lies in knowing your numbers. Regular check-ups and screenings empower individuals to track their progress and make informed decisions about their health. However, while the concept may be simple, the execution is anything but easy. It requires dedication, perseverance, and a commitment to sustainable lifestyle changes.

Contrary to popular belief, our genetic makeup doesn't dictate our destiny. We hold the reins on our health, capable of steering it in the right direction with the right choices. Motivation is our compass on this journey, guiding us through the ups and downs with unwavering resolve. Remember, it's not an all-or-none scenario. Every step, no matter how small, contributes to the greater goal of optimal heart health. Sustainability is key, emphasizing the importance of building habits that stand the test of time.

As we navigate the complexities of modern life, let us not forget the beating heart at the center of it all. With Heart Health 101 as our roadmap, we embark on a journey of self-discovery, empowerment, and resilience. Together, let us rewrite the narrative of cardiovascular disease in Mississippi, one healthy heart at a time.

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



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Universities, governor, portrait, spat & rodeo

Special to Wesson News

Paring universities. A bill introduced in the Mississippi legislature would close three of the state's eight public universities, but lawmakers in the House and Senate said that it is unlikely to pass. Republican Sen. John Polk of Hattiesburg has proposed the board that governs the eight schools choose three to close by June 30, 2028, based on enrollment, federal aid, tuition rates, degree programs and local economic impact. House Universities and Colleges Committee Chairman Donnie Scoggin, a Republican from Ellisville, says a study committee to evaluate those metrics would be a necessary prerequisite. Citing declining enrollment at several institutions, Polk says the Legislature is appropriating too much money to keep the universities afloat. In 2009, then-Gov. Haley Barbour said Mississippi could not afford to keep all eight. He proposed reducing the number to five by merging Mississippi University for Women into Mississippi State University and consolidating the three historically Black universities — Alcorn State, Jackson State and Mississippi Valley State — into one school with Jackson State in charge.

State of state. Intentionally avoiding what he called “hot button issues and political conflict” in his state of the state address, Republican Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves called for legislators to support economic development by funding roads, ports and bridges, establishing 12 magnet schools that concentrate on mathematics and engineering and creating apprentice programs for high school students to develop career skills. Reeves, who was inaugurated for his second term in January, said government should interfere in people's lives as little as possible. “We must be prudent and cautious,” he said. “We must demand lower taxes and regulations. Their money circulating in their towns will do more than any additional government program ever could.” Reeves said that Mississippi must become “masters of all energy.” “We must and will do it all — from oil derricks on our Coast to solar panels in the Delta,” Reeves said. “I don’t care if it’s green wind power or black crude oil or anything in between. It’s going to be made in Mississippi. All of the above and as much as we can do. As long as it is reliable, it is resilient, and it is affordable.”

Capitol portrait. Former Representative Alyce Clarke, the first Black woman elected to the Mississippi Legislature, is now the first Black person and first woman whose portrait is displayed in the state Capitol. The artist, Ryan Mack, said he based the portrait on a photo of Clarke from the mid-1980s. Clarke, an 84-year-old Democrat from Jackson, served 39 years before deciding not to seek reelection in 2023. “Thank God, I’ve had more good days than I’ve had bad days,” she said during a ceremony. “And I’d just like to thank everybody who’s here. I’d like to help everybody who’s helped me to get here because I did nothing by myself.” Other portraits in the Mississippi Capitol are of former governors and former House speakers, who were all white men. Clarke won a March 1985 special election. Several other Black women have since been elected to Mississippi’s 122-member House and 52-member Senate, but women remain a small minority in both chambers. Clarke pushed early in her legislative career to establish Born Free, a drug and alcohol treatment center for pregnant women. In the 1990s, she led an effort to establish Mississippi’s first drug courts, which provide supervision, drug testing and treatment services to help keep people out of prison. She was instrumental in establishing a state lottery. Clarke was also persistent in

seeking support for her alma mater, Alcorn State University.

NEWS NUGGETS

Broadband spat. Mississippi's plan for spending \$1.2 billion in federal funds to expand broadband access does not ensure the neediest communities in the state will benefit, a coalition of statewide organizations charge. The coalition called for the Broadband Expansion and Accessibility of Mississippi office — the state entity created to manage billions in grant dollars — to ensure impoverished communities in the Mississippi Delta would benefit from the federal windfall and develop more plans for addressing racial disparities in broadband access. “BEAM's current strategy and approach would benefit wealthy and well-resourced communities, leaving poor and unserved communities in the same or worse state that they're in today,” said Vangela M. Wade, president of the Mississippi Center for Justice, a nonprofit legal group focused on racial and economic justice. The coalition also said state leaders haven’t met often enough with locals in the Mississippi's most disenfranchised areas. Among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, Mississippi ranks the 45th worst for internet coverage, according to the research group BroadbandNow. Mississippi established BEAM after Congress passed the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act, which allocated almost \$42.5 billion for states to administer grant programs to shore up broadband access. The agency's five-year plan includes initiatives to increase broadband access through infrastructure updates, job training and digital skills courses at schools.

Rodeo returns. The 59th annual Dixie National Rodeo returned last month (February 9) to Jackson’s Mississippi Coliseum, with two weeks of live music, livestock shows, and rodeo competition. The rodeo produced by Harper & Morgan Rodeo and sponsored by Southern AgCredit, is billed as the largest professional cowboys and cowgirls rodeo east of the Mississippi River. Rodeo competitions paid out \$265,639 to winners in bareback riding, steer wrestling, team roping, saddle bronc riding, tie-down roping, barrel racing and bull riding, with Toby Deudney taking away \$3,703 as All-Around Cowboy in bareback riding and bull riding. Live concerts following each rodeo performance featured Conner Smith and Colin Stough, Tracy Bird, Chris Cagle, Megan Moroney, Sammy Kershaw, Corey Kent and Parmalee. The Dixie National Parade, including the national wagon train, antique cars, rodeo queens, decorative floats, mounted horses and marching bands led by the Mississippi Fire Academy Elite Honor Guard and Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson, kicked things off on Saturday morning (February 10) along a mile-long route. Also part of the fun were a Rodeo Days Expo, the Mississippi Ag and Outdoor Expo, which is the largest display of everything for the outdoors in Mississippi, the Dixie National steakhouse, Miss Dixie National Rodeo Pageant and the retro night costume contest.



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Dixie National Rodeo returned to Mississippi last month.

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Use ferns for shaded gardens

By Guest Columnist Eddie Smith

If you wonder what plants can be used in shaded areas of your landscape, I suggest that hardy and low-maintenance ferns are a great choice for adding lush, green foliage.

Ferns come in a variety of sizes, textures and colors that can add visual interest to darker areas of the landscape. While we can grow lots of ferns in hanging baskets and pots, picking the ones to plant in the ground is a bit trickier.

Imagine a fern that's both bold and beautiful, and you've got the Autumn fern. It's not very tall and has frilly leaves. The best part? The leaves start off a green-copper color and then turn a deep, lush green as the seasons change. The Autumn fern is a reliable friend for your shade garden, always looking good and providing a pop of color. It is a deciduous fern that typically grows up to two feet tall and wide, preferring partial to full shade and well-drained soil. It is deer-resistant and drought-tolerant, making it a great choice for many different types of garden settings.

If you're into evergreen ferns, the Japanese Holly fern is a winner. I love this fern because its dark green fronds are shiny and look a bit like holly leaves. Fronds are pinnately lobed, which means lobes are arranged on either side of a central axis, and their sharp, serrated edges give the plant a spiky texture. This fancy fern

is a favorite for folks who like their gardens to look good all the time. The Japanese Holly fern typically grows up to two feet tall and wide, preferring partial to full shade and well-drained soil rich in organic matter. It tolerates a wide range of soil types but does best in slightly acidic soil with a pH between 5.5 and 6.5. It is relatively easy to care for and a great addition to shady gardens or landscapes.

If you are looking for a native plant, the Southern Wood fern is a great selection. These plants are bright green with leaves that appear lacy and sit on woody stems. The little leaf parts are paired up along the stem and have a fancy, serrated edge. As you move up the stem, the leaves get smaller, creating a cool pattern. The Southern Wood fern is a natural decoration that adds texture and interest to shady areas.

So, if you're thinking about creating a charming shady space, consider the Autumn, Japanese Holly and Southern Wood ferns. They each will bring their own style to your garden, adding different colors, textures and shapes. Watch your shade garden turn into a beautiful and timeless place filled with nature's green beauty.

Eddie Smith is Pearl River County coordinator with the Mississippi State University Extension Service. He is also host of the popular Southern Gardening television programs. Locate Southern Gardening products online at <http://extension.msstate.edu/shows/southern-gardening>.

Medicaid expansion advances in Jackson

Special to Wesson News

Mississippi legislators may be on the cusp of expanding Medicaid to encompass low income workers after more than a decade of blocking it.

Late last month, the House passed legislation enabling the expansion 98-20 and advanced it to the Senate, which seems poised to pass similar legislation in the coming weeks.

Governor Tate has consistently opposed Medicaid expansion as "welfare" and "Obamacare," but the Mississippi legislative bodies could well deliver it to him veto-proof when a final version has been passed by the House and Senate.

House Medicaid Chair Missy McGee, R-Hattiesburg, explained the policy as a "moral imperative" and said it "should transcend politics." She also said that lawmakers have yet to propose a viable alternative to expansion to deal with Mississippi's lack of health care access and poor health outcomes and that "'No' is not a policy that has helped."

Authored by new House Speaker Jason White, R-West, and McGee, the bill would expand Medicaid eligibility to 138% of the federal poverty level or about \$20,000 annually for an individual. The bill contains a work requirement for recipients of Medicaid expansion, but states that the expansion would go into effect even if the federal government does not approve the work requirement.

"Finding affordable access to health care is not only compassionate, but it is a smart investment in our workforce," White said in a press conference after the floor vote. "As this bill is transmitted to the Senate for their consideration, I want to acknowledge that they, too, are drafting legislation that will provide health care accessibility options. Today we have sent them a conservative plan that addresses our shared goal to provide health care coverage for hardworking, low-income Mississippians."

White expressed optimism the governor would sign the bill, saying he believed Reeves recognizes the importance of expanding health care access.

"A healthy workforce projects to a healthy economy," White said. "I'm not ant-

icipating a veto at this point. I'm anticipating a business-minded, reasonable governor who weighs all options and all things and I think he is just that."

McGee in the press conference said: "Moving beyond a decade of simply saying 'no' to finding a workable solution to health access takes effort. But it's a task I believe lawmakers from both parties in both chambers are up for. Most importantly, I'm excited about the hundreds of thousands of working Mississippians that now, and in the future could have a way toward a better, healthier quality of life."

The federal government pays 90 percent of the cost for those covered by Medicaid expansion. Various studies have concluded Medicaid expansion in Mississippi would be a boon for the state economy and provide health care coverage for about 200,000 Mississippians -- primarily the working poor. For the first four years, there is projected to be no cost to the state because of \$600 million in additional federal funds, offered as an incentive to expand Medicaid.

The bill also has a built-in repealer, meaning the program would automatically end after four years unless the Legislature chooses to renew it. This likely made it more palatable to Republicans on the fence.

McGee called it a "free pilot program" during a committee meeting and said "if it doesn't work out, if we decide that our health outcomes have not improved, if it costs too much for the state, if for any reason we do not believe that it is doing the things that we want it to do, the program will simply repeal in 2029."

Unlike the proposal Senate leaders say they are crafting, the House bill would not make expansion contingent on the Biden administration approving the work requirement. That's important, since during the Biden administration CMS has rescinded work requirement waivers previously granted under the Trump administration, and has not approved new ones.

Speaker White acknowledged his House colleagues for the overwhelming vote, his Republican colleagues for "strong support on an issue we have neglected for so long," and the Senate for also drafting expansion legislation.

"In most uncomfortable times is where we make our best marks," White said.

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