

INSIDE:

Area Arts	2
Extra Xs and Os	4
Mardi Gras	7
Camellia show	8
Healthy Living	11
Library displays	12
Page 13-18 online at www.WessonNews.com	

Wesson News

SPOTLIGHT

Regional Economy

Pages 3,5,6,9

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Volume 10, Number 2

"Good News You Can Use"

February, 2022

Ten receive Chamber awards



Special to Wesson News

Citizen of Year Sonya Cowen.



Special to Wesson News

Co-Lin Educator of Year Dr. Reed Freeman.



Special to Wesson News

Wesson Attendance Center Educator of Year Wendy Harrell.



Special to Wesson News

Dr. Jane Hulon Sims (left), president of Co-Lin, accepts Innovative Business Award on behalf of the college from Chamber's Stephanie Duguid.



Special to Wesson News

Sharon Langley and Bobby Thornton accepted Organization of the Year award for American Legion and Ladies Auxillary.



Special to Wesson News

Ana Mason, owner of Copiah Nutrition, which was recognized for Positive Social Media Presence.



Special to Wesson News

Featured speaker Dwayne McLemore, owner of Steel Outdoors.



Special to Wesson News

Michael and Jennifer Johnson, owners of Park Place Ice Cream, accepted Best New Business Award on behalf of their organization.



Special to Wesson News

Ken and Kris Sullivan, owners of Dump's Barbeque, accepted Best Business of Year Award on behalf of their restaurant.



Special to Wesson News

Tim Sutton, owner of Wesson Ace Hardware, accepts Best Customer Service Award on behalf of his business from Chamber's Dr. Steve Liverman.

By Bob Arnold

Ten individuals and organizations that contribute to the life of Wesson through business, education and not-for-profit service have been recognized by the Wesson Chamber of Commerce.

Dump's BBQ, a local restaurant, the American Legion and its Ladies Auxiliary and Sonya Cowen received the Chamber's Business of the Year, Organization of the Year and Citizen of the Year awards in a special presentation ceremony last month. Also honored were:

- **Wendy Harrell** as Wesson Attendance Center Educator of the Year
- **Dr. Reed Freeman** as Co-Lin Educator of the Year
- **Wesson Garden Club** Community Spirit Award recipient
- **Wesson Ace Hardware** Best Customer Service Award recipient
- **Copiah-Lincoln Community College**, Innovative Business Award recipient
- **Copiah Nutrition** for Positive Social Media Presence
- **Park Place Ice Cream** as Best New Business

The award recipients and their families attended the private ceremony held instead of the Chamber's annual public banquet -- the usual presentations venue -- because of the resurgence of COVID-19.

Dwayne McLemore, who owns and manages Steel Outdoors, a custom metal products fabricator based in Wesson, talked about the ingredients of success as featured speaker. McLemore, who said a church pastor's question -- "why do you do what you do" -- set him on his life-changing journey to start his own business -- cited "positivity," "always getting up when you are down" and "goals" as keys to success.

Wesson Alderman Michael King and Co-Lin President Dr. Jane Hulon Sims also spoke to the honorees and their families, focusing on happenings in town and at the college.

At the event, the Chamber introduced its 2022 Board of Directors: Stephen Ashley, president; Stephanie Duguid, vice president; Deemie Letchworth, secretary; Brent Duguid, treasurer; and members Jessica Breazeale, Phillip Knight and Ken Sullivan. Outgoing board members Kayla Bereh, Marilyn Britt and Steve Liverman were also recognized.

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Discovering buildings as art form

By Guest Columnist R. Shaw Furlow

Every year at Christmas, I receive books from my family. In fact, I have a box next to my bed filled with volumes yet to be read. I was not a reader in high school, but a summer school class in freshman English at Co-Lin introduced me to *Beowulf* and changed that. While it is no longer my preferred genre, I remember curling up on a couch in the living room and reading the whole thing in one setting.



Wesson News

This year, my son and daughter-in-law gave me *Buildings in Mississippi*, a book by Jennifer V. O. Baughn and Michael W. Fazio. The book is not standard shape, and is printed on thick, slick paper. But it opened my eyes to an art I have not covered -- buildings. It's also a good read.

Breaking up the state into twelve areas, the authors discuss unique or interesting buildings in each Mississippi county. Our little corner of the world includes two of those areas:

- The Jackson Metropolitan Region. The authors highlight many of the iconic buildings in the capital city -- the Standard Life Building, the Old Capital, the Lamar Life Building and the Governor's Mansion. Also mentioned are buildings like Union Station and Eudora Welty's home. Old houses, municipal buildings, college campuses and churches all get several paragraphs describing their architectural styles and contributions to their neighborhoods.
- Copiah and Lincoln Counties in the chapter entitled "Southern Illinois Central Corridor" (for the railroad through the area). The authors point to Crystal Springs High School as representative of "Jacobethan Revival," a term I had never heard, but learned is part of the Revival of English Renaissance dating back to the 1500s and 1800s. The school's location at the end of Marion Avenue assures its prominence in the city.

In Hazlehurst, the authors note the County Courthouse and its Neoclassical construction, and the United Methodist Church representative of Tudor Revival style.

In Wesson, the authors call the Old Wesson School the "finest representation of Romanesque Revival style in the state." When built, it was among the largest public schools in Mississippi, and featured a cafeteria on the ground floor, an auditorium on the second floor, ten classrooms and offices. Its more interesting features are the twin, square, three-story towers and the double-tiered wooden porch that runs the width of the building. Mill Town Mall, built in 1875, is also discussed with a brief history



of Mississippi Mills.

In Brookhaven, the emphasis is on the corner of Cherokee and Jackson Streets, where the post office, First United Methodist Church and Mary Jane Lampton Auditorium are located. The Italian Renaissance and Classic styles of the post office and auditorium contrast, even though both were built in the same year. The post office is the first documented building to be built by bricks from Brookhaven Pressed Brick Corporation. The First United Methodist Church used the same brick. The Brookhaven coverage also references the twin houses on South Jackson Street built in 1904 for the sons of builder A E Morton. Also cited as one of the best Modernist designs is Alexander High School, now Alexander Junior High, built in 1956.

The book covers well known and lesser known buildings from the Gulf to the Delta to the hills. It is entertaining and educational. Not bad I say.

That's it, folks. Until next time, support the arts.



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



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March meet for new consortium

By Bob Arnold

Co-Lin and Southwest Mississippi Community College (SMCC) are planning to bring together economic development leaders throughout Southwest Mississippi sometime next month to begin partnering on planning and implementing strategies to grow the region's economy and advance overall community development.

Co-Lin President Dr. Jane Hulon Sims announced the initiative at the culmination of an economic development summit hosted by her college and SMCC at the Thames Center on the Co-Lin campus in October. Resurgence of COVID-19, however, slowed the organizing process of the consortium.

Co-Lin's Kenny Goza, who is spearheading the college's involvement in the consortium, says the colleges will invite 20 to 30 local economic developers, business and community leaders and elected officials from Adams, Amite, Copiah, Franklin, Jefferson, Lawrence, Lincoln, Pike, Simpson, Walthall and Wilkinson Counties to an initial



Southwest Mississippi Community College President Steven Bishop (left) and Co-Lin President Jane Hulon Sims (right) discuss economic development with Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves.

consortium organizing meeting and start strategic planning around a SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) analysis.

"In Southwest Mississippi, we need to cultivate a mindset that

what is good for one is good for all -- that it's not about one of us, but all of us," Goza says. He points out that the most effective community and economic development is happening regionally on the Gulf

Coast, in the Hinds-Madison Counties area, around DeSoto County and in the Golden Triangle area around Tupelo.

"The idea is that there is strength in numbers and we can leverage an 11-county voice to recruit new business, support business expansion and create jobs," says Goza. "Perhaps participants can identify a super site and jointly market it to businesses that will contribute to the economy of all 11 counties." Goza points to the Golden Triangle-Tupelo model of cooperative community development which was launched 30 years ago and created a foundation.

"State agencies are excited about what is happening in Southwest Mississippi, particularly two community colleges working together to facilitate economic and community development in an 11-county region," Goza says.

In announcing the Co-Lin's partnership with SMCC and its President Steven Bishop, Hulon Sims declared that "it was time to act" and go beyond talk. "If not now, when?" she implored.



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EXTRA Xs and Os – We all need love

By Guest Columnist Mika Hartman

My husband and I have been married over 24 years. Celebrating us today is as important as it was our first Valentine's Day. The first one, CJ came to my work and left perfume on my windshield. "Tommy Girl" perfume became my new favorite; I can still smell it. Not because it was the most wonderful smell out there, but because it smelled of love - his love for me. No, I don't still wear "Tommy Girl," but I can't forget how this little box made me feel. We hadn't known each other very long... and 24 years later, I remember that day perfectly.

CJ and I have three children together. Our hopes and daily prayers consist of the exact same thing for all three children, even though they all have a decade between them: True love, passion for life, determination, and success at a level they feel successful (all up to each of them to decide what these are to them) - all with God as the priority. This list is the same for many parents, including mine.

For my two older children, these are achievable milestones, as they should be. They will be on a path of their choosing, and all doors are open them. They can dream big and do whatever their determination level goes for. It is up to them to achieve the life they desire. I don't have to advocate or change laws to see them reach their full potential or to walk through life with someone they love. Just prayers are needed.

My youngest child, Hudson, has roadblocks set up that many have no idea about. I didn't know all of them until his arrival. He's only 3, and, while the laws may be improving, there is still so much that dictates the life he can have. Hudson was born with Down syndrome, a large hole in his heart and transient leukemia.

It's "Love Day" month - did you know many people with disabilities are unable to be married because of the penalties that they would face?

If two persons with Down syndrome fall in love and want to walk in this world together, they are penalized if they officially wed. The Federal Government says that they (the persons living with Down syndrome) will lose needed benefits if they marry, punishing them for seeking love at a deeper level. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid would deem incomes as joint, making the couple ineligible. And all cash gifts to the couple have to be reported as income, as well.

Other helpful programs, like Childhood Disability Benefits (CDB) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), would be affected because of the parent connection that automatically goes away upon marriage.

As it stands today for our friends: You can fall in love, but you can't get married. Or, you can get married, and face your challenges with no help. That's not American.

Love is a powerful gift, but it is not so powerful that your medical needs vanish.

When I asked for guidance on this issue, I was told by a good friend that he has a friend who is calling her wedding ceremony "fake" in order not to lose their benefits. How awful to need to lessen or degrade the most important day in your life as "fake." Heartbreaking. But the person with Down syndrome recognizes that needed benefits trump a real ceremony.

It's also unknown that our friends with Down syndrome can be paid "subminimum" wage.... It's not even a real word, but it happens all over. This program was originally created to help open employment doors for people with disabilities. It was intended to help integrate the disability community and provide income that wouldn't disrupt any health services already provided.

But it worked against them, and it gave society the opportunity to devalue a person based on their disability. We are valued in life by our worth, productivity, opportunity and abilities. When a person is paid as little as 20 cents per hour, the message becomes that they are only worth that. Many states are making changes to this, but Mississippi hasn't yet.

Now, we don't pay 20 cents an hour that I am aware of, but how often do you see a person with a disability like Down syndrome working in your community? I live on the Coast, and I personally know of only one. You read that right! Many families find themselves in this very situation and either choose to keep their adult child at home or create an opportunity for the family to open a business.

Now let's put these two big dreams I have for my children together: Hayden and Henley can get married with a ceremony and a celebration of love; Hudson can't, not legally, at least, and still maintain the benefits he needs. My older children can do whatever job they seek and be valued and earn raises/have new opportunities; Hudson will be devalued by society and paid under minimum wage for doing his job,

or I will have to create him real opportunity.

This is the first time I've typed this, and my heart is skipping beats.

Hudson's diagnosis is Down syndrome. He has a life expectancy of greater than 65 years old. He has a strong will, and he CAN do big things. Every other person in life gets to choose a path. Why can't Hudson? I also want to add this: God gave Hudson his extra chromosome. Hudson didn't ask for it. He was created this way. And he's wonderful. Different isn't bad; his different is beautiful. The world needs the love he gives.

Some will argue that raising the pay to minimum wage across the board for all will lead to unintended consequences; not all good intentions play out as all good. I have heard this one already several times on my path to bringing the needed change. If you force employers to pay more, then they may not hire at all a person with Down syndrome.

And that is the problem.

It is embedded in us that they (people with Down syndrome) don't deserve better and fair wages. If a person has the heart to hire based only on the bottom line, they missed the mark. This wasn't created to make a bottom line better. It was designed to integrate wonderful, loving, happy people into the workplace and provide opportunities for them to grow and learn as active and productive citizens in our communities.

Some will argue that marriage isn't important, either, or that it is not a reasonable request. I disagree. Having someone you love to walk through this world with and be your best friend on the deepest level possible is everything!

Now let's put these two together: Marriage and a great job that values your contributions... the dream for all of us, right?

Now the money part. Better wages and two incomes becoming possible for our friends may deem that all the extra assistance isn't needed. But I want to ask you to think about it this way: a person living with Down syndrome has many health challenges, ones you'll never face, and the cost of healthcare is very expensive.

Hudson was born with a large hole in his heart that will require multiple surgeries, transient leukemia, hypothyroidism, missing tear ducts, and more. All require medical attention. He also eats by a g-tube. His feeding equipment is over \$2,000 per month. I've recently been denied a wheelchair for Hudson. The cost is thousands for his chair. Hearing that items on a wheelchair are "a luxury" is ridiculous. I need it for his safety on long walks, trips, and doctors' visits, because of his low muscle tone. His adaptive bike was \$9,000. My point in sharing is that even with fair wages and two incomes through marriage, the necessary medical expenses that would no longer be covered by benefits if a couple marries can reach astronomical proportions, and a couple should not have to choose between medical care and love.

Love comes in many forms. It comes in a hand holding yours as you walk; it comes in a smile that cheers you up just when you need it; it comes in looking to the future with that special person.

Love can also be found in a mom moving mountains. I love Hudson so much, I will move these mountains; I have to. My dreams for my children will remain, though my prayers are different for Hudson. I pray I can be the voice he needs. I pray that he won't know all the discrimination that is out there when I am done. I pray he gets the life he deserves. I pray that life gives him the love in return that he gives. With God, all things are possible. Any help moving these mountains is truly appreciated.

February is Congenital Heart Defect (CHD) Awareness Month. Hudson is a CHD Warrior! Celebrate all our little fighters with me; they are heroes!

To help, please contact your local Down Syndrome organizations to find out how to get involved. If you'd like, you can follow Hudson's journey on Instagram at TeamHudsonTheStrong.

Extra hugs and extra kisses this February. Remember that love conquers all.

EDITOR'S NOTE: CJ and Mika Hartman are personal friends of The Wesson News' publisher, Clay Mansell. We wanted to use our publication to share Mika's journey as she works to change laws, perceptions and anything else she chooses to tackle to make our state a better, more inclusive one. Her son, Hudson, has Down Syndrome, and she will share his journey and hers as she works with lawmakers to make Mississippi a better place to live for everyone. Please visit our website to view her blog and important information on how we can all help make Mississippi better.



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Major expansions drive area economy

By Bob Arnold

In a year in which new variants of the COVID-19 virus stalled the pace of recovery from the pandemic and drove business on-site visitors looking for expansion locations to retreat to email, teleconference and virtual internet meetings to do their work, Brookhaven and Lincoln County managed to nail down two huge employer corporate commitments to job creation and investment.

Southwest Electric (SE), which provides electrical power to area business and residential customers, and AITX, which repairs rail cars, both announced historic industrial expansions in Brookhaven, but have not yet started physical and construction work on their projects, reports Garrick Combs, who is responsible for economic development in Brookhaven and Lincoln County as executive director of Brookhaven-Lincoln County Chamber of Commerce (BLCCC) and of Brookhaven-Lincoln County Economic Development Alliance (BLCEDA).

SE, based at Lorman, Mississippi, in Jefferson County, plans to invest \$16 million and create 100 jobs with location of a district office on 65 acres in Brookhaven's Linbrook Business Park. SE, which incorporated in 1937, operates its headquarters facility at Lorman and a work center at Natchez. Its new Brookhaven district office will include a dispatch office, IT services, a full warehouse, mechanic shop, a truck staging area and laydown yard to house emergency storm crews so its staff, material and equipment are distributed across the SE service area to better serve its 25,000 members in Lincoln, Copiah, Franklin, Amite, Adams, Hinds, Jefferson and Wilkinson Counties and increase overall system reliability.

"SE has purchased the acreage in Linbrook Business Park and is doing the pre-construction work," Combs says. "Construction of the facilities, which will encompass several buildings on the property, could start in 2022, but SE's work is progressing methodically."

Combs says AITX is planning the region's largest industrial expansion in decades -- as much as \$32 million for property, redevelopment, construction and equipment, and creation of more than 100 job on Industrial Park Road in Brookhaven. The project will also include bringing a new rail spur into the area.

AITX, formerly American Rail Car, will do complete repair and maintenance of all types of rail cars at the new facility, while continuing a similar rail car operation in Franklin County as long as there is short line service to the location. Wages and benefits for the new jobs at the Brookhaven operation will be 110 per cent of the state average, Combs says.

Combs cites two economic negatives last year:

- Closure of a Keystone Electrical Manufacturing Company (KEMC) production facility in Linbrook Business Park after the Des Moines-based company was acquired by another manufacturer.
- The sudden end of on-site visits to prospective industrial locations in Lincoln County with the resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the Delta and Omicron variants.



Wesson News

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

The two expansions, Combs notes, will more than make up for the loss of KEMC facility, which Brookhaven native KEMC owner Fred Buie brought to his hometown in 2020 to produce electrical power generation controls. The facility closed because it duplicated operations of the new KEMC owner. "It was bad timing, but Buie repaid incentives that enticed him to locate in Brookhaven and helped find jobs for his local workers who were willing to relocate," Combs adds.

Combs looks for the industrial site visitors to return with COVID "coming under control one way or another," and towards that end will focus 2022 economic development efforts on a new 50,000 spec building in Linbrook Business Park ready for a business to set up operations. "We have a new web site set up to begin marketing it," he says.

BLCC and BLCEDA have developed an economic development model recognized by the Mississippi Economic Development Council (MEDC), Combs points out. The key component of the model is construction of a speculative industrial building in Linbrook Business Park to lure an employer that wants to deploy workers and machinery to get its product to market as quickly as possible without a long wait for construction of manufacturing facilities. KEMC's decision to locate in Brookhaven culminated a three-year marketing effort in which a special web site wooed interested businesses followed by numerous meetings and telephone calls to sell the spec building to various prospects.

"Along with working with existing companies in Brookhaven and Lincoln County, we'll be doing that again to attract new business in the coming year," says Combs.

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Pandemic drives economic development

By Bob Arnold

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused Copiah County businesses to be more cautious in exercising their plans, but record low unemployment and soaring tax collections are confirming the opinion of local economic developer Arthur Lee (Pokey) Evans, Jr. that it has complemented his work as well as complicated it.

During 2021, Copiah County did not see the location of any major new employers, but its unemployment rate tumbled to 3.4 per cent, and sales and property tax collections increased.

Evans, Executive Director of Copiah County Economic Development District (CCEDD), attributes the good news to what he calls "economic localization" driven by COVID-19. "Local retail stores are teeming with customers who have curtailed travel, but still want and need to do business," Evans points out. "People have learned they can shop locally and continue to utilize local sources that create jobs and generate tax revenues to boost the economy of our villages, towns and cities."

In a year characterized by business caution and a sluggish business recruiting environment, CCEDD also completed work focused on getting old large industrial buildings that were lying idle returned to the Copiah County tax rolls, with businesses either moving forward with operations or ready to begin operations when the status of COVID-19 and other opportunities are favorable.

The new owner of the old Katon industrial building at Lake Hazel hasn't moved forward on turning the site into a magnet for AAU sporting events. Nor has Duct Fab, a subsidiary of Encore Group LLC in Houma, Louisiana, yet launched its planned commercial and residential air conditioning ductwork production at a long-deserted facility near the Hazlehurst South Interstate 55 exit where Cherry Bark once made hardwood flooring. Manufacturing wood pellet fuel at the old Universal building in the industrial park at Gallman also remains stalled as the owners look for financing. A venue for events -- receptions, weddings, birthdays -- is planned at the old Candy Factory on North Jackson Street in Crystal Springs, and health-related services are expected to start up at an old Marion Street site in Crystal Springs.

Perhaps the most dramatic use of a once idle industrial building has been the ongoing expansion of Steel Outdoors' custom metal fabricating business at the former API building in Wesson, a 55,000 square foot facility on Highway 51. The manufacturer, which purchased the building in 2019, recently announced introduction of a new metal building products line that will nearly double its workforce to some 50 employees.

Beyond the new business that he expects to emerge at the old industrial buildings, Evans says several other Copiah County companies are drawing up expansion plans that could be unveiled in 2022. He also points to an upsurge in the county's housing and building industry, which he attributes to relocations from urban areas to the more rural areas of Copiah County.

"Overall, I can't cry about very much," Evans says. "There haven't been a lot of negatives. We're making the most of what we have, and I am proud to be part of a team that gets what economic development is all about."

Evans says CCEDD tells its economic development story to the business community through a web site and Facebook page,



Special to Wesson News

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

emphasizing:

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

CCEDD offices located at the Robert Johnson Blues Museum on Marion Avenue at Crystal Springs is an asset as well, Evans adds. "We use tourist visits as an opportunity to talk about Copiah County as a good place to do business," he explains.

At CCEDD, Evans is assisted by Brenda Harper. Five board members appointed by each Copiah County supervisor oversee their work. The board members are James Mitchell of Copiah Bank; Michael Hutchison of Trustmark Bank; Jerry Hood, a business leader; Chris Palmer, retired Crystal Springs police officer; and Jimbob Brock, a builder.

Contact Evans for information at 601-421-1249.

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Brookhaven events frame Mardi Gras

Wesson News

Locals looking to celebrate Mardi Gras without traveling to events outside the area can find the magic of New Orleans' Jackson Square with its painters, musicians and street performers in downtown Brookhaven this month.

The annual Downtown Jazzed Up will feature loads of family fun and entertainment on Whitworth and Railroad Avenues, in railroad park and in the municipal parking lot from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday, February 26.

The event, sponsored by the Lincoln County-Brookhaven Chamber of Commerce (LCBCC) Tourism Council the weekend before Mardi Gras on Tuesday, March 1, will help frame the actual date of the celebration with the Goin To Town Car Show the following weekend on March 4 and 5.

There will be no parade, but the fully outdoors festivities will feature live music, bounce houses and face painting for the kids and much more, including plenty of beads, to assure a Mardi Gras experience for all visitors. Restaurants will offer specials, and there will be sidewalk sales. Event organizers are still accepting registrations from people and organizations with contributions that

will add to the Mardi Gras ambiance.

The entertainment lineup for the event is:

- 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. -- Kelsey Smith & Maddie Brabham
- 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. -- Jason Nix, Steve Fee & American Idol winner Trent Harmon
- 6 p.m. -- Everyday People Band

The car show on March 4 and 5 is also sponsored by the Tourism Council in partnership with Fielder's Pro Shop. Last year's car show featured more than 250 vehicles displayed on downtown Brookhaven streets, with owners ready to engage in conversations about their entries.

Car show entry forms are available from LCBCC. The pre-entry fee is \$10 and day-of-show entry fee is \$15. For out-of-town entrants, the Holiday Inn Express is offering special rates. Call 601-833-1411.

A third major Tourism Council event during 2022 is Girl's Night Out on June 16, when Brookhaven merchants will offer

shopping specials to women of all ages who purchase participation tickets.



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Camellia Society Hosts 69th Show

Special to Wesson News

The Brookhaven Camellia Society will hold its 69th annual show Saturday, February 19, at Homestead Whittington Farm (946 US 51 South), the former Brookhaven Nurseries. Blooms from local gardens and around the region and a plant sale will be at The Event Center on the property.

Participating in the show and public viewing are free, thanks to the generosity of sponsors.

Entries may be submitted from 8 a.m. until 10:30 a.m. Mizell's Camellia Hill Nurseries at Folsom will start the plant sale at 8 a.m. The viewing of approximately 1,000 blooms will be open to the public after judging from 2 p.m. until 5 p.m.

Show planners encourage wide participation, noting that blooms may be placed on a Novice Table. So many people who have camellias growing in their yards and gardens could be participating, yet haven't, they say. Potential entrants should not be concerned about their varieties. It is very simple with reds, pinks, whites, striped and other categories. As in the general competition, prizes will be awarded. Anyone may win, with more than 80 prizes. There are K-12 youth categories, as well.

For more information, contact Bill Perkins, BCS President, at 601-757-4502.



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Workforce attitudes challenge economy

By Bob Arnold

Worker attitudes towards jobs emerging for two decades, but accelerated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and now confronting employers, are presenting new challenges for the Workforce Education program at Co-Lin in its mission to provide a quality labor force for business.

Fewer employers are asking Co-Lin to provide workers for an economy in which jobs are relatively scarce, and, increasingly, they want to fill jobs that are readily available with workers who are increasingly picky about the pay and benefits they'll accept to take them.

The dollars that flowed into the economy to stimulate businesses and assist workers affected by measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and a naturally shrinking labor force as baby boomers retire has given job seekers the money and power to demand higher wages, flex hours, less work time, work-from-home benefits, independent contractor status and more that can be prohibitively costly for many small businesses. While big companies may be able to address the demands creatively, small organizations with tighter budgets are facing tougher times.

As they prepare to roll out their programs, training planners and developers like Stephanie Sullivan, Workforce Education Director at Co-Lin, are struggling to find new ways to help their constituents.

While unemployment is hovering around a record low, workforce participation has dipped. Across Mississippi, some 50,000 jobs are unfilled. "It will probably get worse before it gets better," Sullivan admits. "There are more jobs than workers."

To address the challenges, Co-Lin is actively networking students, posting jobs and referring clients at the WIN Job Center, which it operates. At Co-Lin this year, Sullivan will also deploy programs to generate record numbers of new workers for the utility, construction and healthcare industries in the college's district encompassing Adams, Copiah, Franklin, Jefferson, Lawrence, Lincoln and Simpson Counties. Co-Lin's March 24 Pathways Job Fair looks to be bigger and better in trying to match job seekers and employers.

Among its key 2022 programs, Co-Lin will roll out round three of its Electrical Lineman School and Construction Academy in the coming weeks, and an Advanced Emergency Medical Technician class will start this month:

- The Electrical Lineman School is a 16-week training program designed to provide personnel for the Southwest, Entergy and Magnolia electrical systems. The instructor is Tony Martin, a retired Lineman from Magnolia Electric Power, who serves as both a mentor and a coach to help push students to be their best. The non-credit program, when completed, provides graduates with nine credentials: National Electric Codes, National Safety Electric Codes, Multi-Meter, OSHA-10, Forklift, First Aid/CPR, 40-hours climbing, Pole-Top Rescue, and CDL- Class A-License. "They grow, are challenged, and mature in ways that we can't explain through the course of the program," says Sullivan. Among other things, they learn to attach lines, climb poles and conduct a mock rescue. To register for the next Lineman School, contact Co-Lin's Workforce Education Director Stephenie Sullivan at 601-643-8707 or visit <https://workforce.colin.edu/program-info/lineman/> for more information.
- The Co-Lin Construction Academy targets the shortage of skilled building trade workers in Mississippi through a \$180,000 grant awarded by the Mississippi Department of Employment Securities through the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Governor's Reserve funds. Initially, the 16-week class includes three courses in foundational plumbing, concrete masonry, and brick masonry, with future training planned in carpentry, construction framing, and roofing on the drawing board, as well as, secondary level plumbing. Upon successful completion, participants will be skilled for an apprenticeship with an experienced tradesman. Additionally, students will earn an OSHA Construction card



Wesson News

Co-Lin will roll out its third round of linemen training.

and a CPR/First Aid certification. Participants in the program must be 18 years of age or older, achieve a minimum of Bronze level on the ACT WorkKeys Assessment, and submit a valid background check and negative drug screen. College credit is not available for these programs. Application packets may be downloaded and printed from the Co-Lin website (www.colin.edu/constructionacademy). Visit careertraining@colin.edu for information.

- Co-Lin's non-credit Emergency Medical Technology programs prepare students for careers in the fast-paced and challenging field of emergency medicine. The college trains Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), Advanced EMTs (AEMTs) and Paramedics. EMTs, AEMTs and Paramedics provide immediate, life-saving care to the sick and injured, normally working on ambulances. Paramedics have more advanced training and assessment skills than EMTs, and manage many emergencies, including cardiac, respiratory, and trauma events. They administer medication, perform and interpret electrocardiograms (EKGs), perform endotracheal intubations and use other complex biomedical equipment. AEMTs can function as the primary care provider of an ALS unit and can be used to run 911 ALS emergency calls or ALS transfers to other hospitals. They are also equipped to deliver medications outside the scope allowed for an EMT, such as medications delivered via intravenous access (IV). For information, call 601-643-8707.

Sullivan also notes that Workforce education courses are seeking to provide more on-the-job training, pointing to Co-Lin's culinary arts classes on its Natchez campus as a model. She also cites a truck driver training partnership with the Coastal Truck Driving School at Co-Lin's Simpson County Center

cont. on page 18 in the online edition

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Aldermen hike police pay

Wesson News

The Wesson Board of Aldermen has jacked up the pay of the town's police officers.

Base pay of full time officers is now \$35,000 -- a \$2,500 raise -- and the Assistant Police Chief's salary will go up \$2,000 to \$37,000, with Chief's pay remaining at \$40,000.

In other actions, the Aldermen:

- Accepted resignations of Keith McElvin, a full-time police officer, and Chad O'Quinn, the former Police Chief, who returned to serve temporarily as an officer; and terminated Brandon Williams as an officer.
- Decided to continue its contract with Copiah County to handle garbage collection and address communication issues with county officials rather than negotiate the town's own contract.
- Approved a low-speed vehicle ordinance based on state law that will regulate golf carts on town streets. The ordinance requires a one-time \$25 ownership fee, police inspections of vehicles for properly working headlights, taillights, mirrors, among other things; and drivers to be licensed.



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- 2015 Nissan Altima 2.5 S package, super nice with great gas mileage, Silver beauty!
- 2013 Mercedes C250 Coupe, Low Mileage, Sunroof, Leather, Super Nice!
- 2010 Lincoln MKZ, Red w/ Tan Leather, Sunroof, Chrome Wheels, Loaded, Come look!
- 2009 BMW X5, xDrive48i, AWD, Black with Peanut Butter Leather, Sunroof, Nice!

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Start practicing heart-healthy living

By Guest Columnist Stephanie Duguid

In our annual celebration of Heart Month, it's appropriate to look at healthy heart living.

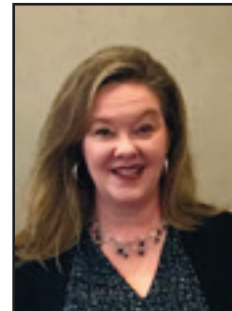
There are many conditions that affect the heart. Of course, heart attacks, arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythm), cardiomyopathy (issues with the heart muscle), and congenital heart defects (heart conditions you are born with) are directly related to the health of our hearts. But did you also know that many other conditions including, but not limited to, cholesterol, diabetes, and high blood pressure, can lead to heart disease, heart attack, or stroke? And now, COVID seems to have varied effects on many individuals.

There are factors you can control such as diet, exercise, smoking, and alcohol consumption that are related to our heart health. Age, hereditary, and gender are things we cannot control that are also related to our cardiovascular status.

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

Type 2 diabetes is a condition that we typically think of when we mention challenges with glucose levels (sugar) and insulin. Adults with type 2 diabetes are at least 65 per cent more likely to die from some form of heart disease or stroke.

High blood pressure is a condition that measures pressure your blood puts against the walls of your arteries when your heart is pumping



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

Since COVID is such a new condition that we are learning about daily, review the evidence-based information available from the American Heart Association (heart.org/en/coronavirus).

Total cholesterol should be less than 200 mg/dL. LDL (Bad) cholesterol should be less than 100 mg/dL while HDL (Good) cholesterol should be more than 50 mg/dL. If you are unsure of your numbers, consult your doctor!!

Diabetes can be measured by taking your fasting blood levels first thing in the morning. Your reading should be less than 100 mg/dL. If you are consistently higher than 100mg/dL, check with your doctor.

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

It is important to be educated about your health. It is always a great idea to have a heart screening to understand your current status, and to find things about

which you should be concerned early before it is too late to address them. King's Daughters Medical Center in Brookhaven offers a \$100 Healthy Heart Screening that requires no physician referral. The Healthy Heart Screening is a combination of several on site-tests including a HeartSaver CT Scan, Lipid Panel, Electrocardiogram, Assessments for Peripheral Vascular and Stroke Risk, feedback on Blood pressure, Body Composition along with Nutrition Counseling. To schedule an appointment, simply call 601-835-9133.

For more information, be sure to visit the American Heart Association at www.heart.org.

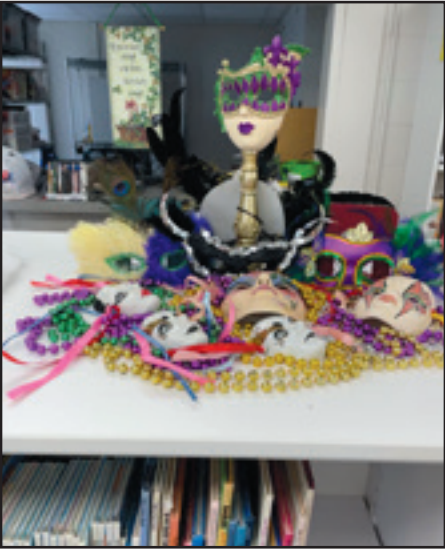
EDITOR'S NOTE: Stephanie Duguid is Dean of Academic Instruction at Co-Lin. She is also an athletic trainer and nutrition specialist and has been teaching courses related to those two areas as well as practicing what she preaches for more than twenty years.

**LIVING
+HEALTHY+**

Library displays

By Bob Arnold

Wesson Garden Club's educational committee has created five displays for Wesson Public Library that highlight the winter and spring seasons and holidays celebrated in February and March. Thru March, the displays will decorate a prominent library shelf that patrons see as they enter the facility.



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Teacher helps build small business

By Bob Arnold

Locals who knew Pam McLemore during her 25-year career as an elementary and secondary school teacher, mostly at Wesson Attendance Center (WAC), may be surprised to encounter her these days as a successful businesswoman who has helped her husband grow Steel Outdoors, a custom metal fabricator they started in an old trailer of a truck and is now a major Wesson employer.

"I went into teaching because I love children -- what they say and do," she says. But McLemore grew up in a business environment in Brandon, Mississippi, where her father owned a country general store near the Ross Barnett Reservoir. At age eight, she priced and put out stock at the store, pumped gasoline when her brother was unavailable and operated the cash register along with her other siblings.

The business world continued to be a part of her life.

"I wanted to attend cheerleader and basketball camps when I entered middle school, and my dad, saying he would 'invest' in my future, bought me a push mower to earn my way," McLemore recalls. "I pushed that mower around my neighborhood and found loyal customers, cutting yards in spring and summer." One of her yard customers hired her on at age 13 to work 12-hour Saturdays selling snow cones off a truck. She also earned money helping out at Belhaven University basketball camps which she attended. "In high school, when I was old enough, I worked at retail stores at Christmas and during summer," McLemore adds.

McLemore graduated from Mississippi Baptist High School, where she was an All-State girls basketball player. She attended Hinds Community College and transferred to the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) from which she graduated in 1991. At USM, McLemore played quarterback for the girls dorm intramural football team, and met her husband Dwayne, a student athlete, who earned extra credit as its



Pam McLemore, former teacher, helps her husband Dwayne operate Steel Outdoors, which has introduced a new building products line, including the roofing system pictured here.

coach. They married in 1985 and celebrated their thirty-seventh anniversary on February 2.

McLemore completed her Master's degree in education at Mississippi College and started her teaching career at McLaurin Attendance Center in Rankin County. Before joining WAC, she taught briefly at Terry High School. McLemore taught an array of subjects as an elementary school teacher, and focused on math and science at the secondary level. She retired from teaching in 2021.

The seeds for her business career had been planted early, and McLemore and her husband had a shared dream of

feeders. He was designer and welder, and taught me to handle the plasma cutting, grinding and painting. I also did all the book-keeping and paperwork."

Steel Outdoors expanded its production facility in the McLemore's backyard from a truck trailer to a 10,000 square foot utility building, and then moved to its 55,000 operation on Highway 51 in Wesson in 2018, where it plans to gradually increase its workforce to 50 with a new building products line -- metal roofing and siding and purlins.

If helping her husband operate Steel Outdoors isn't enough to keep her busy, McLemore has just earned a real estate license, and is working for Brookhav-

challenges in the Jackson area. They also have two grandsons -- Baiden, 5, and Mathis, 3.

What are your hobbies?

I love starting a new project, and love the satisfaction of completing it. I usually walk three to five miles four days a week. I listen to Spotify if I am walking alone. If Dwayne is walking with me, we use the hour to hold our business meeting. We try to exercise together because we set a good pace for each other. It is also more fun as a couple to do things together. As soon as I can, I also want to travel more. This summer, I spent a day with one of my good friends touring Laurel, Mississippi, enjoying the site.

Are you a reader?

I read research articles about health. The last book I read was *The Case for Easter: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Resurrection* by Lee Strobel.

Are you into music?

My favorite musical artist is Lauren Daigle, a contemporary Christian musician.

Do you enjoy movies or theater?

We don't watch much television, and haven't been to a movie theater in a few years. We watch *Hometown* on HGTV because it is a show about a small Mississippi town with good people that work hard and value relationships. Ben and Erin reflect small town American value.

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

I wouldn't tell anyone about winning, save the money and spend it slowly as needs and opportunities arise.

How would you change the world?

There are so many needy people around us, but we don't see them readily. I want to find ways to become more aware of them and see them clearly, and assist them as I am able.

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

starting their own business, which they made a reality in 2007. "I fully embraced Dwayne's vision of a business making products for the outdoors," she says. "I had a full time job as a teacher, Dwayne worked in maintenance at Sanderson Farms in Crystal Springs, and together we started producing deer

en-based LandMax Realty as a land and housing agent.

The McLemores reside in rural Copiah County, and have two grown children -- Brandon, 33, who works with his parents at Steel Outdoors, and Kristen, 27, a psychometrist who tests and works with individuals with cognitive

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Governor's agenda, infrastructure & hospitals

Special to Wesson News

Governor's agenda. Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves prioritized tax cuts, teacher pay hikes, infrastructure investments and expanding state police presence in Jackson in his State-of-the-State speech last month. Reeves — now in his third year in the state's highest office — called on the Republican-controlled Legislature to eliminate the state income tax, said the state's teachers deserved higher wages because they "did not back down amid the unprecedented educational battle between a virus and a child's right to learn," opposed teaching in schools that "either the U.S. or Mississippi is inherently racist," supported spending \$1.8 billion in federal pandemic relief money on "transformative" projects and advocated for increased presence of Capitol Police to stop a "deadly cycle" of violence and homicides in Jackson.

NEWS NUGGETS

Infrastructure \$\$\$. The Town of Wesson could get as much as \$800,000 in federal and state funds to repair and upgrade its old water and sewage infrastructure. The town will receive \$400,000 for the work from federal funds designated for COVID-19 recovery and could receive \$400,000 in matching funds from state monies coming from the same federal program.

Strained hospitals. The COVID-19 omicron variant is pushing already strapped Mississippi hospitals to their limits, as health care workers attempt to treat a growing volume of patients despite having record low numbers of nurses on staff. Most, if not all, hospitals across the state are at or near their capacities. While patients are, in general, experiencing less severe symptoms, there are a higher number of patients coming into hospitals than during the last surge in the fall. At the University of Mississippi Medical Center, the state's biggest hospital, about 90 health care workers have been out each day because they have contracted the virus. UMMC is also trying to fill 360 registered nurse positions. Nurses have been leaving Mississippi hospital jobs to take on lucrative temporary positions, commonly called travel nurse jobs.

Early learning collaboratives. Mississippi will gain five new early learning collaboratives in August 2022 to serve more of the state's youngest learners. The State Board of Education approved the additional collaboratives, which will serve 840 new 4-year-old students. Early learning collaboratives are pre-K programs made up of partnerships among school districts, Head Start agencies, childcare centers, and nonprofit groups. There are currently 18 collaboratives serving more than 3,000 children across the state. The new early learning collaboratives will be located in the Brookhaven School

District, Kosciusko School District, Rankin County School District, Scott County School District, and South Panola School District, bringing the total number of early learning collaboratives across the state up to 23.

MDOT worker aid. The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) is using drones equipped with light detection and ranging (LiDAR) technology to improve safety in construction and maintenance of roads. LiDAR technology determines ranges or distances by targeting an object with a laser and measuring time it takes for reflected light to enhance MDOT worker safety and performance speed. Mississippi is one of the first Southeastern states to use LiDAR.

Natchez visitors



Wesson News

Members of The Wesson Garden Club visited Natchez, Mississippi, last month. While in the historic city, they enjoyed having lunch, visiting Magnolia Hall and touring Dunlieth Inn. Pictured from left to right are Jean Ricks, Dixie Thornton (first row), Denise Jackson, Debbie Hoaglin (second row), Meghan Shepard, Cathy Warren (third row), Lisa Smith, Sherry Davis (fourth row), Debbie Smith and Jennifer Peets (fifth row). Marilyn Britt, who visited Natchez as well, is not pictured.



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College athletes can now work

By Guest Columnist Yancy Methvien

If you are a college sports fan, there is a strong chance that you’ve heard the term “NIL rule” by now. If you haven’t, you will.

NIL stands for Name, Image, and Likeness as it pertains to an athlete. It continues the long-standing rule that athletes cannot be compensated directly for their on-field performances, but otherwise it frees them to earn money in any way that does not bring discredit to their universities or their respective sport. They can now go to work like any other student. As with all things new in college sports, however, a big fuss has been made over the NIL rule.

The reason the new rule exists is due to decades of legal arguments from universities and athletes finally coming to a head in the form of court rulings over labor. It isn’t easy to comprehend if you haven’t been keeping up, but it will impact college sports, and it’s good for you to have a basic idea about what it is.

All college athletes are considered “amateur,” and the National Collegiate Athletics Association, (NCAA) maintains strict guidelines on the eligibility of athletes to compete in collegiate sports as an amateur or not compete because they are professionals. This would not be an issue if the NCAA’s definition of what constituted a professional athlete was not so excessively broad, especially when it comes to employment.

While college athletes often receive scholarships, housing and meal plans from the schools that recruit them, they still have other needs that are not covered. This often leaves athletes in a situation where they need to get a job, in many cases simply part-time employment. This makes the situation difficult or even ridiculous for many college athletes. While any other student in college can simply work wherever they want and make as much money as they can, things were not so simple for college athletes. The jobs and income that athletes are offered are highly scrutinized by the NCAA.

NCAA rules have basically stated that athletes could not use their name-recognition to gain employment and they could not use their own pictures or images to promote any businesses for which they worked, even in jobs not sports-related. Further, they could not use their names or pictures (i.e., selling autographs) to increase their salaries or make any extra money for themselves independently.

If the NCAA determined that jobs were offered based on an athlete’s status, or

if the monetary compensation athletes received for their work was considered excessive or tied to their on-field ability, they forfeited their amateur status and were ineligible to compete in college sports. The problems mounted because of instances in which the NCAA limited athletes so severely that it stripped them of their ability to earn any kind of living. No other students had to deal with these restrictions.

Last year, things came to a head. Student athletes had finally had enough, and through the power of social media, they started organizing and publicly airing their feelings on the existing policies. They also hired lawyers specializing in labor rights to take their case against the NCAA’s rules governing employment to court. Judges, including now Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, ruled strongly in favor of the athletes, and the NCAA had to abandon their old rules.

There are still several details that need to be hammered out in state and federal courts before the NIL rule is in its final version. So what it means for college athletics going forward is uncertain. For now, barring businesses related to products like gambling or alcohol, athletes are relatively free to do as they please for employment.

That means a guy that can make 10 tackles on Saturday can also play a mean guitar on Friday night. He no longer has to hide his name or the fact that he is an athlete when he performs on stage. As a matter of fact, he is now allowed to use all that to his advantage when promoting the band, and he is free to make as much money as he is offered. If a young lady going to school can sprint as fast as anyone on the planet and an automobile company wants to showcase her speed alongside their cars in a marketing campaign that pays her over a million dollars, she can go for it without violating her college eligibility.

We will have to wait a while to see how the new rule plays out over the long-term. To be quite honest, my personal opinion is that not much will actually change for college sports other than student athletes will finally be treated more fairly in the labor market, and I’m totally cool with that.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Yancy Methvien holds the world’s record for the most rounds of golf played in a single year, referees local high school football games and follows all Mississippi sports.

BANKRUPTCY



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Women's tennis



Wesson News

The Co-Lin Women's Tennis team opened the 2022 season with a home contest against Southwest on Friday, January 28. The Lady Wolves earned a shutout win over the Lady Bears, 9-0. In the doubles matches, the number one team of Morgyn Brister and Keegan Thurman won, 8-2, over Larinda Anderson and Skyla Preston, while the number two team of Britany Barnett and Gracee Warren won 8-0 over Kelsey Jones and Anne Speights. The third team of Kassidy Cupit and Makayla Martin also took an 8-0 win in their match. In the singles matches, Brister defeated Anderson in the number one match (6-0, 6-2) while Keegan Thurman rallied after losing the first set by winning the second set and tiebreaker to take the number two singles match against Preston. Barnett took the number three match against Jones (6-1, 6-1) while Warren took the number four match (6-2, 6-1) over Jaslyn Young. Cupit defeated Speights in the number five match (6-1, 6-0) while Martin took the number six match (6-0, 6-0).



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cont. from page 9

Workforce attitudes challenge economy

and on the Natchez campus.

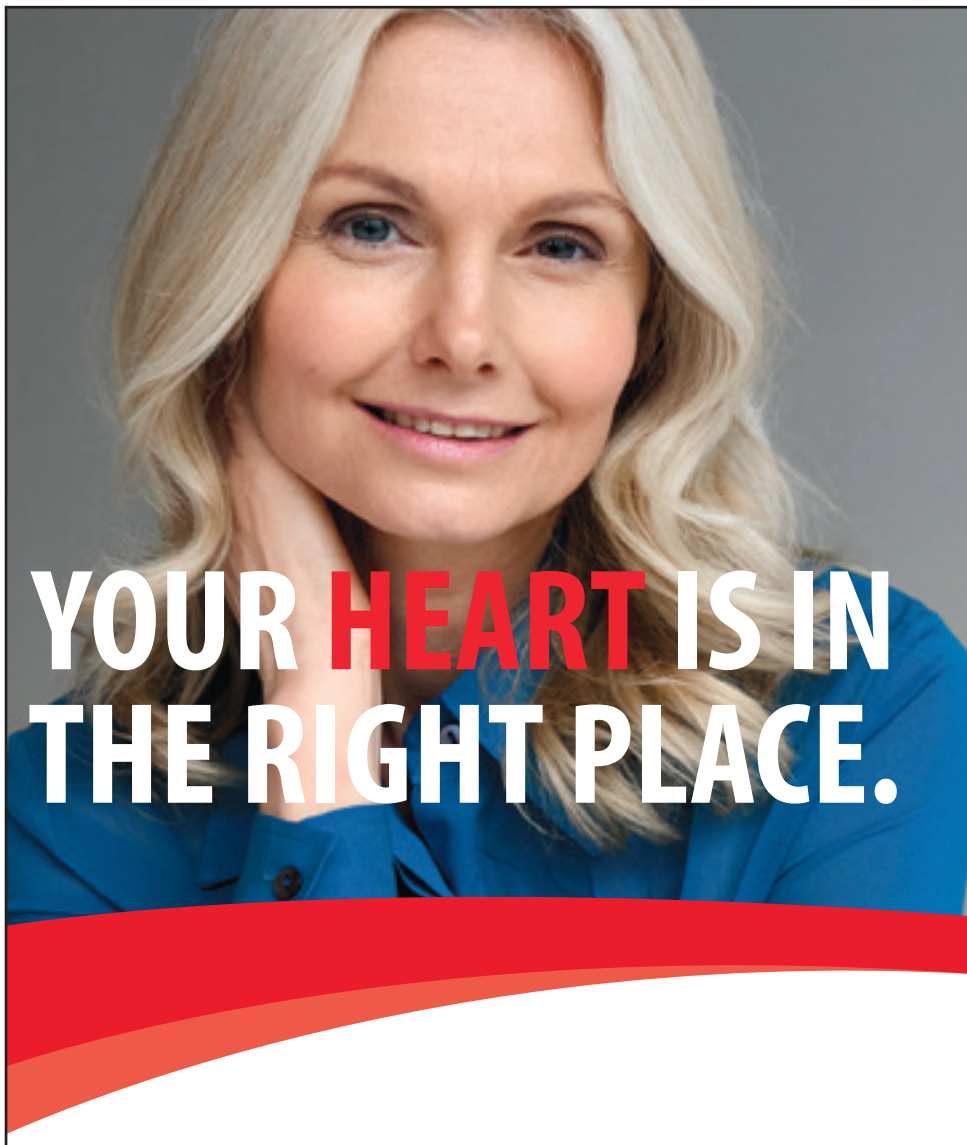
As many as sixty organizations will be participating in the March Co-Lin Job Fair, and this year's event promises to be the "best ever," with Co-Lin designing it for an economy in which employers are facing a shortage of workers and job-seekers want to do more than casually meet people and learn about organizations, Sullivan says.

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

Building partnerships and relationships with businesses and other employers

is the ground of Co-Lin economic development activity, and growing engagement of the Workforce Education division of the college with regional organizations reflects its involvement in addressing economic issues, Sullivan says.

In recent years, Co-Lin's footprint in economic development has become bigger. It has taken on training responsibilities for workers at companies that have moved into the area and recently opened their doors. This year, it will partner with Southwest Community College to promote strategic planning around community and economic development through a consortium of business and economic development planners in the eleven southwest Mississippi counties served by the colleges (see story elsewhere in this issue). The college will also continue to find ways to assist entrepreneurs in advancing business concepts, and it will continue supporting ACT Work Ready program in all seven Co-Lin district counties, administering the WorkKeys Assessment to certify emerging, existing and transitional workforces as Work Ready.



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