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Volume 11, Number 11

“Good News You Can Use”

November, 2023

Republicans sweep amid Reeves challenge

By Bob Arnold

While election results last week, in general, heartened Democrats nationally, Mississippi voters remained staunchly Republican for the most part, with a mediocre turnout from both parties returning incumbent GOP state officials to their offices by landslides, except for Governor Tate Reeves, who eked out a victory in the face of an aggressive campaign by his challenger, Brandon Presley.

The pattern was similar in both Republican and Democrat counties, including Lincoln and Copiah, where voters returned incumbents or stayed loyal to their party if they chose someone new.

The Governor, however, narrowly escaped a runoff, capturing only 1.6 percent more than 50 percent of the vote, which would have triggered another matchup against Democrat Presley, who received 47 percent of the vote. Independent Gwendolyn Gray garnered 1.4 percent of the vote, assuring Reeves a clear win. Presley had hoped to perform better than Jim Hood’s 2019



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campaign in northeast Mississippi, but Reeves held his ground there from four years ago. His campaign did turn out Blacks in higher numbers than in 2019, but he didn’t receive sufficient white support to offset Reeves’ success, particularly on the Gulf Coast, where he swamped Presley.

Other office holders had an easier time than the Governor: Incumbent Lt. Gov. Delbert Hosemann, seeking a

second and final term, easily defeated challenger D. Ryan Grover with 66% of the vote. Incumbent Republican Lynn Fitch defeated Democratic challenger Greta Kemp Martin with 64% of the vote. Martin had made access to reproductive rights a main plank of her campaign platform, after Fitch’s office helped overturn *Roe v. Wade* abortion rights with a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in a Mississippi lawsuit. Incumbent Republican Secretary of State Michael Watson defeated Democratic challenger Ty Pinkins with 65% of the vote. Incumbent Republican State Auditor Shad White defeated Democratic challenger Larry Bradford with 64% of the vote. Incumbent Republican Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney was reelected to a fifth term, defeating Democratic challenger Bruce Burton with 65% of the vote. Incumbent Republican Agriculture and Commerce Commissioner Andy Gipson defeated Democratic challenger Robert Bradford with 63% of the vote. Incumbent Republican Treasurer David McRae defeated Democratic challenger Addie Lee Green with 64% of the vote.

In other state races related to Lincoln and Copiah Counties’ interests, Charles Busby (R) and Willie Simmons (D) and Nelson Wayne Carr (R) and DeKethner A. Stamps (D) won the offices of Southern and Central District Transportation Commissioners and Southern and Central District Public Service Commissioners. Carr ran unopposed and Busby got 72 percent, while Simmons won 55 percent against his Republican opponent and Stamps narrowly beat his opponent with 50.6 percent of the vote.

“I know that over these 20 years, I’ve made mistakes, but I’ve never stopped trying to earn your trust,” Reeves said. “I promise you, going forward, I’ll work hard. I commit that I’ll stand firm, and I’ll do everything in my power to rally our fellow Mississippians ... I want you all to know I value your trust. I’m humbled by your support. And I’m fired up for the next four years.”

In key area races, predominantly Republican Lincoln County elected District 14 District Attorney Bradon Adams (R) with 61 percent of the vote over Pat-

cont. on page 4

Mississippi’s first car museum celebrated

By Bob Arnold

Wesson Chamber of Commerce members and folk from around the community helped Brian and Mandy King officially open Mississippi’s first antique vehicles museum at a special ribbon cutting.

The ceremony culminated almost three years of work by the Kings, collecting early Twentieth Century cars, trucks and other vintage items and constructing the display building for the Good Old Days Museum located at 4179 Anderson Road in rural Wesson.

Although the new museum started out as storage building for Brian King’s car collection, which his wife



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Chamber of Commerce members and townspeople celebrated the official opening of the Good Old Days Museum. The Museum has a 1920s America look featuring early Twentieth Century vehicles in scenes appropriate to their time with varied antique relics.

first jokingly suggested might well be a museum, it realizes a long-standing dream of King, an electrician at the Brookhaven Aptiv plant and a mechanic who is passionate about early automotive vehicles and is attracted to the period in history in which they were introduced, when times were simpler and craftsmanship valued.

Inside and outside the 40-foot x 80-foot metal structure are a variety of functional and drivable antique vehicles, including four Model Ts, first sold in 1908, a 1929 Model A, a 1919 Dodge pickup with a moonshine still in the bed, and a 1922 Roadster. They must be hand-cranked and have more complex transmissions than

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WHY GO ANYWHERE ELSE?

Randy Chance – land caretaker

By Bob Arnold

It is said “if we take care of the land, the land will take care of us.”

For Randy Chance, the Grounds Supervisor Team Leader at Lake Lincoln State Park, it is now his turn to take care of the land that has taken care of him over the years since he settled with this family in the area near where the park now serves thousands of visitors every year.

“I grew up there,” he says. “My parents and brother and sister lived not far away in a two-bedroom ranch style house on 100 acres. I fished in nearby creeks, was baptized in one of them and learned about the outdoors in a Boy Scout Camp.”

The Chances built their home on Mission Hill Road when Randy was five years old next to the Baptist Church with the same name as the back country byway.

As part of a logging family, Chance started working at a tender age during the summers, but while he was cutting down trees for the family business between 11 and 19 years old, he also found time to play baseball on the field he remembers was on the current location of the Wesson Attendance Center (WAC) gymnasium and earned the Eagle rank in the Wesson Boy Scout Troop guided by then Co-Lin basketball Coach Alton Ricks. He went to elementary school through the eighth grade in the initial building on the site of what became WAC after the addition of the ninth through twelfth grade facility. He graduated from the high school housed at Co-Lin in 1979.

His return to care for the land that nurtured him took nearly five decades, work stops in every U.S. state except Alaska and Hawaii and a career that encompassed carpentry, the oil fields, installing fire protection equipment and making shirts.

After high school, Chance stayed around the area for a few years – first as a carpenter for Troy Pitts at the former Timberlane camp grounds and the company doing construction at the new Lake Lincoln Park next door, then as a delivery man for Georgetown Furniture. Soon, however, he was off to the offshore oil fields and living in Leesville, Louisiana, and moving on to do oil exploration as a seismograph operator for Jackson-based GFS from Lafayette, Louisiana.

With Goss Fire Protection headquartered in Forest, Mississippi, from 1984-1996, Chance was dispatched throughout the continental United States to install sprinkler fire protection systems. “I lived throughout the nation near government and private facilities where we did the work,” he relates. “We installed sprinkler systems at the FBI Academy at Quantico, Virginia; stealth bomber hangars in New Mexico, Saint Dominic’s Hospital in Jackson and throughout government agencies Washington, DC, among other places.”

In 1996, Chance returned to his boyhood home on Mission Hill Road and started working with his mother, who was the recipient of 20 sewing machines from

the retiring owner of T’s Apparel at Crystal Springs, to produce and sell their own line of Hawaiian rayon shirts. “We changed the name of the company to Chance Apparel and made specialty shirts for organizations and events such as the New Orleans Jazz Festival,” he says. “Mom did the sewing with employees as needed, and I was a cutter, boxer and shipper.”

Chance devoted most of his time to his ailing father after he became ill in 2006, hunting and fishing with him and caring for him as needed; and Chance Apparel cut back the nature and volume of its business while he still worked as he could. In 2014, Lake Lincoln State Park, which encompasses more than 1,000 acres of his youthful stomping grounds, hired him to help do its maintenance following his father’s death in 2013.

On October 22, Chance celebrated his sixty-fourth birthday. He lives in the old house built by his parents

on ten acres of the 100 acres in which he shares ownership with his brother Greg Chance, who is retired, and his sister Pam Stamps, a Brookhaven accountant. Saying “I guess I just stayed on the road too much to get married,” he is still single, and now as the Grounds Supervisor Team Leader at the state park, he is responsible for cleaning its physical facilities, general park maintenance, electrical and plumbing systems, delimiting and other landscaping, among other needs. Helping

care for at least part of the land that has helped care for him.

What are your hobbies?

I fish in Lake Lincoln and hunt behind my house. I’m a member of Mission Hill Baptist Church, but am not the most faithful attender.

What kind of music do you like?

I don’t sing or play an instrument, but I listen to country music and old rock and roll on Pandora. Maybe you could also call me a sound man for my brother-in-law Ken Stamps, who has played guitars in local bands over years. I have helped him with equipment, and he seems to like what I do.

How about movies?

I am into old westerns, particularly those with John Wayne – *Rio Bravo*, *Rio Grande*, *Rio Lobo*, *Big Jake*, *McClintock* and just about anything else that comes on *Grit TV*.

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

I would divide it with my family. I certainly couldn’t spend any big winnings on myself.

How would you change the world?

A day at a time. I can’t single out any one thing, but I would take it a day at a time.



Randy Chance

Wesson News

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR



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Brister at Trustmark follows Marilyn Britt

By Bob Arnold

A fourteen-year banking veteran has joined the Wesson branch of Trustmark Bank as Bank Supervisor, moving into the position Marilyn Britt left vacant following her retirement after more than four decades.

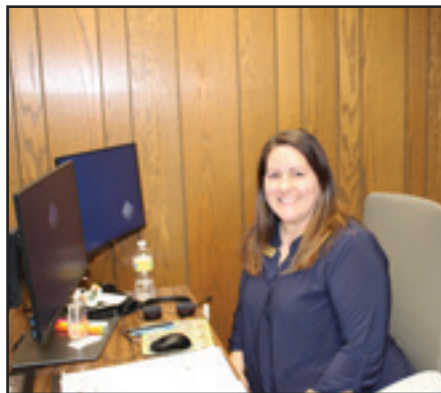
Brittany Brister comes to Trustmark after serving at the Regions Bank Brookhaven branch since 2010.

A native of Enterprise, she graduated from Enterprise Attendance Center and studied at Co-Lin before starting her career as an assistant teller and moving up the ranks to become head teller, assistant manager and a relationship banker.

As Bank Supervisor at Trustmark in Wesson, Brister will serve as overall bank manager, while assisting loan applicants, addressing account needs, and working the cash line as needed.

Brister and her husband Blake, who works with Hitachi (formerly ABB) at Crystal Springs, are now residing in the Midway area of Wesson on Sylvarena Road with their two children – Raelynn, 4, and Noah, 1.

Brister started at Wesson Trustmark in September with the departure of Britt, who had risen to Vice President and branch manager there from her initial job as a bookkeeper after graduating from Wesson High School



Wesson News

Brittany Brister

at Co-Lin and studying at the college. During her service at Trustmark, she climbed the job ladder as a teller, head teller, customer service representative, assistant branch manager, branch manager and assistant vice president and finally vice president and branch manager. Except for ten years with Trustmark in Hazlehurst, she worked at the bank's Wesson branch throughout her career. Her distinguished service had been recognized by the Mississippi Bankers Association, and she received the 2017 Trustmark President Club award. Outstanding Young Women of America also recognized her for her accomplishments.

Veteran & entrepreneur CLCC Alumnus of Year

Special to Wesson News

Co-Lin's 2023 Alumnus of the Year is a retired Air Force veteran and entrepreneur.

Co-Lin honored Charles Fortenberry, of Fayetteville, North Carolina, originally from Bogue Chitto, at the college's Alumni Association Awards Reception during its Homecoming on last month at the Thames Center on the college's Wesson campus.

Fortenberry is a 1961 graduate of Co-Lin, where he played on the Wolf Pack basketball team under Coach Alton Ricks. Coming from a small high school, he said Co-Lin served as a great transition point to prepare him academically for the university level.

"We just felt uncomfortable going to a large place like Mississippi State, so we chose Co-Lin," he said. "It was easier to be a part of the basketball team and know your teachers."

After Co-Lin, Fortenberry transferred to Mississippi State University, where he received a Bachelor of Science in 1963. He received a master's degree from Troy State University and completed additional studies at Campbell University.

After completing his education, he started his 25-year career with the United States Air Force. For four years during

the Vietnam War, he flew more than 500 combat missions in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. He also received 11 air medals and two Distinguished Flying Cross medals.

He then returned to the United States and worked his way up the ranks. In 1979, he established and commanded a combat operations school for National and International C-130 crewmembers. In 1982, he became commander of a C-130 squadron, which consisted of more than 1,000 crew members and maintenance personnel. He was promoted to colonel in 1984 and assigned to the Joint Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, as the air component commander.

When Fortenberry retired from the military in 1987, he joined the cosmetics business his wife, the former Patrica Ann Moak ('61), had built. She was recognized as Co-Lin's Alumna of the Year in 2021. The couple grew the business, reaching more than \$40 million in annual sales through seminars, conferences and workshops in the U.S. and internationally.

The Fortenberrys have two children, Craig and Pam, and five grandchildren, Noah, Joshua, Allie Kate, Jacob and Katie.



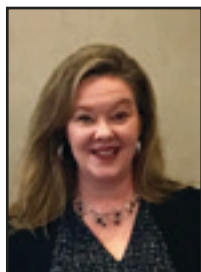
Wesson News

Fortenberry

Confronting the opioid crisis

By Guest Columnist Stephanie Duguid

Stand Up Mississippi, a leading voice in the fight against opioid overdose, is making strides in raising awareness and providing life-saving training in the state. "A saved life is better than an unnecessary loss" is the mantra and quote that inspires the organization's push for proactive measures that mitigate the harrowing statistics of drug overdose in Mississippi.



According to the organization, addiction can be categorized into three perilous phases:

Phase 1: This first phase typically starts with workplace injuries after individuals have been prescribed narcotics and, unfortunately, develop a substance abuse disorder.

Phase 2: As the addiction deepens, these individuals lose access to their prescription and transition to heroin use.

Phase 3: In the quest for a stronger

high, individuals turn to fentanyl, which is alarmingly 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times stronger than hydrocodone.

Adding to the distressing panorama is the emerging threat of Zylazine, FDA-approved solely as an animal sedative, now finding its way into human systems.

In middle schools and high schools, most worryingly, seemingly innocent items such as gummies, chips, and vape products are laced with fentanyl. It only takes 2 mg of fentanyl, the amount that can fit on the nose of president Lincoln on the surface of a penny, to cause someone to overdose.

The alarming rise of polysubstance users, who mix opioids and stimulants, often laced with fentanyl, further complicates the landscape.

Shockingly, more than 53 percent of all overdosing incidents are now attributed to fentanyl. The 25-to 55-year-old age group is primarily affected, but 2022 witnessed a tragic toll of 462 overdose deaths in Mississippi, with a staggering 74.8 percent being opioid-related. Heart-

breakingly, many overdose cases were amongst the elderly, who inadvertently double-dosed on their medication.

So what can we do to help?

Naloxone is an antidote that has proven to be a vital tool in countering overdoses. Naloxone is a chemical that attaches to the opioid chemical in a person's body and tries to counter act it immediately. The Mississippi Department of Mental Health offers training and a free Naloxone kit to anyone who visits <https://odfree.org/get-naloxone/>.

The kit has a nasal spray that you administer as soon as you can to help buy some time to get medical assistance. It could be the difference between life and death! Order yours today!

You can gain deeper insights into the world of opiates by watching *Chasing the Dragon*. The movie provides a raw, unfiltered lens into the life and challenges faced by an opiate addict.

The battle against opioid overdose is intense, but five things can make a difference in response:

- Knowing the signs of an opioid overdose.
- Administering naloxone.
- Calling 911 immediately.
- Supporting an affected individual's breathing.
- Continuously monitoring the response to an affected person.

In championing people to confront the opioid crisis, Stand Up Mississippi urges members of the community to join hands: "We are brave, bold, and better together."

By working together, Mississippians can significantly reduce the devastating impacts of opioid overdose.

For more information, reach out to Charlotte Bryant, Outreach Coordinator at Stand Up Mississippi: CharlotteBryant@dmh.ms.gov or call 601-359-6176. You can also visit www.StandUpMS.org.

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



cont. from front page

Republicans sweep amid Reeves challenge

rick Beasley, Sheriff Steve Rushing (R) in an eight-person field with 50 percent of the vote, coroner Blake Wallace (R), Post Two Justice Court Judge Roger Martin (R) and Post Two constable Wade Hinshaw (R); and predominantly Democrat Copiah County elected Circuit Clerk Derrick Cobit (D), Sheriff Bryon Swilley (D), District 2 Supervisor Johnny Smith (D), Justice Court Judge Price Henley and State House Representatives Bob Evans (D) and Gregory Holloway (D) with 69 percent and 74 percent of the vote respectively.

In both Copiah and Lincoln Counties, several candidates ran without opposition, with their elections essentially decided in primaries. They included District 39 State Senator Jason T. Barrett and District 92 State House Representative Becky Currie, both Republicans who serve Lincoln and Copiah Counties. Also running unopposed in Lincoln County were Chancery Clerk Alisha McGehee, Circuit Clerk Dustin R. Bairfield, County Surveyor Joe W. Byrd, Tax Assessor and Collector Blake Pickering, Post One Justice Court Judge Ian Smith, District 2 and District 4 Election Commissioners Janice Hart Haley and Denise White, Post One Constable Justin Case and Supervisors Keith Lewis (District 2), Eli Ferguson (District 4) and Doug Falvey (District 5) -- all Republicans. Copiah County Democrats running unopposed were Chancery Clerk Deborah Sandifer, Coroner Felix A. Stuart, County Attorney Elise B. Munn, Tax Assessor Todd Mooney and Tax Collector April S. Holloway, while Independent Chris Granger and nonpartisan Frances D. Taylor captured Post 2 Constable and post 2 Election Commissioner offices in unopposed races.

Among the take-aways from the election cited by analysts:

- Hinds County is fast becoming the last and only populous stronghold for Democrats. Reeves took back Madison County, which Hood won in 2019. Take away Hinds County's large Democratic vote, and a statewide Democrat stands no chance with today's Mississippi electoral maps.
- Record levels of spending by both Reeves and Presley -- much used to produce mudslinging ads -- seemed to turn off voters, as suggested by the mediocre turnout. Spending totals by the campaigns will likely top \$20 million, and outside interests poured in millions more.
- Former President Donald Trump's endorsement of Reeves on election eve may have played a role in turning the tide in favor of Reeves, with polls showing a tighter race than played out and Republicans worried about an anemic voter turnout.
- With 46%-47% of the vote an apparent ceiling for Democrats in state elections, third party candidates may give them a better chance by making runoffs more likely. Before the election, there was some thinking that Presley's best chance at survival was for little-known independent Gwendolyn Gray (who had dropped out but was still on the ballot) to siphon votes from Reeves and force a runoff, which would have required her to pull around three percent of the vote. Instead, she got 1.4%, and appeared to take quite a few votes from Presley as well as Reeves -- perhaps in protest to negative campaigning.
- The Mississippi Coast remains a Republican stronghold. Presley campaigned hard there, attempting to turn out Black voters, particularly in Harrison and Jackson counties, and a fairly sizable union shipyard vote. But Reeves still ran the tables there, picking up a nearly 19,000 vote margin, only slightly smaller than his Coast take in 2019.

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Aspen prize pursued by Co-Lin

Special to Wesson News

Aspen Institute has named Co-Lin among 150 institutions eligible to compete for the \$1 million Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the nation's signature recognition of high achievement and performance among two-year colleges.

The institutions selected for the honor stand out among more than 1,000 community colleges nationwide as having high and improving levels of student success as well as equitable outcomes for Black and Hispanic students and those from lower-income backgrounds. This is the fourth time that Co-Lin has been recognized as a Top 150 community college.

"I feel especially proud to have Co-Lin ranked as one of the Top 150 community colleges in the nation by the Aspen Institute for Community College Excellence," said Co-Lin President Dr. Dewayne Middleton. "Our mission at Co-Lin is to offer the highest quality instruction in an environment that is centered around our students. This prestigious recognition is a testament to the dedication and hard work of both our employees and our students."

The Aspen Prize spotlights exemplary community colleges in order to drive attention to colleges achieving post-graduate success for all students, and is a central way Aspen researches highly effective student success strategies that are shared with the field. The 150 eligible colleges have been invited to submit student success data and narratives about strategies to achieve better and more equitable student outcomes as the next step in an intensive review process that culminates in the naming of the Aspen Prize winner in spring 2025. The eligible colleges represent the diversity and depth of the community college sector. Located in urban, rural, and suburban areas across 30 states, these colleges serve as few as 169 students and as many as 49,619.

"The Aspen Prize is rooted first and foremost in an assessment of whether colleges are walking the walk," said Josh Wyner, executive director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. "As community colleges face enrollment variations, enroll students with pandemic-related learning loss, and graduate students into a rapidly changing labor market, it is easy to lose track of what matters most. The best community colleges are continuing to focus on advancing the core mission: making sure as many students as possible graduate with credentials that lead to fulfilling careers and reflect the development of diverse talent that communities, states, and our nation need."

While community colleges are an essential contributor to the nation's success, student outcomes vary substantially among institutions. Aspen measures those variances using multiple data sources and honors colleges with outstanding achievement in six critical areas: teaching and learning, certificate and degree completion, transfer and bachelor's attainment, workforce success, equitable access to the college, and equitable outcomes for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

"These 150 colleges have achieved high and improving levels of student success for all students, including those who are often failed by our institutions," Wyner said. "We're excited to learn over the coming months how they achieved that success so we can share the most impressive practices with others in the field."

In this first round, eligibility for the Aspen Prize is based on publicly available data. Colleges must show strong, improving, and equitable student outcomes in first-to-second year retention, credentials awarded, and completion and transfer rates. Nationwide, about 15 percent of community colleges have been invited to apply (150 of just under 1,000 public two-year colleges assessed for Prize eligibility).

The next steps in the process include:

- **April 2024:** Announcement of 25 semifinalists, selected based on assessments of extensive data and strategy documents by the Prize selection panel, a group of 16 experts in community colleges, higher education, and workforce training; and interviews with institutional leadership teams.
- **June 2024:** Announcement of 10 finalists, selected by the Prize selection panel.
- **Fall 2024:** Site visits to each of the ten finalists, during which the Aspen Institute and partners will collect additional information, including employment and earnings data and insights about promising practices.
- **January 2025:** Prize award decisions made by a distinguished, independent Prize jury at a full-day meeting.
- **Spring 2025:** Announcement of the Aspen Prize winner and celebration of the 10 finalists in Washington, D.C.

To see a full list of the top 150 eligible institutions and to read more on the selection process, visit <https://highered.aspeninstitute.org/aspen-prize/>

The Aspen Prize is generously funded by Ascendium, the Joyce Foundation, JP-Morgan, and the Kresge Foundation. The Aspen Institute is a global nonprofit organization whose purpose is to ignite human potential, to build understanding and create new possibilities for a better world. Founded in 1949, the Institute drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve society's greatest challenges. It is headquartered in Washington, DC and has a campus in Aspen, Colorado, as well as an international network of partners. For more information, visit www.aspeninstitute.org.

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Socks for Heroes & ILR partner

Special to Wesson News

Wesson-based Socks for Heroes (SFH), which seeks to show appreciation for the service of military veterans through holiday gifts, is teaming up with Co-Lin's Institute for Learning in Retirement (ILR) to make sure it can bring its seasonal cheer again this year.

ILR, which provides a program of luncheons, travel and continuing education for retired persons, collected gift items for residents of veterans homes, which SFH volunteers deliver on visits to them during November and December.

ILR asked its members to acquire and donate regular and gift socks, furry socks for ladies, Christmas cards, blankets, word search books with high lighters to help on crossword puzzles, small notebooks, pullover caps, dominoes, pens, card games, along with other clothing, personal care and practical items and knick knacks.

Last year, ILR partnered with area churches to collect gift items

and pack them in holiday gift shoeboxes for overseas missions.

"This year, we want to direct the gifts to folk near our homes," says ILR Co-Lin Coordinator Erin Johnson.

ILR members joined some 30 individual volunteers, support of Strong Hope Baptist Church members and assistance from participants in groups who need community service

hours, such as Mississippi Scholars and the Wesson Attendance Center Beta Club.

"They help collect donations, attend Christmas ceremonies at veterans homes and bag the gifts that are part of our Christmas packages," says SFH founder Cathy Stroud from Wesson. "Most of them are drawn to Socks for Heroes because they have relatives who served in the military."

SFH teams visit veterans homes at Collins, Kosciusko and Jackson in Mississippi; Reserve Jackson Monroe, Bossier City

and Jennings in Louisiana; and two others in Arkansas. In addition to the small individual gifts and cards given to residents of the homes, bigger gifts, such as television sets, are given to the homes for group use

"The gifts are important, but the one-on-one holiday visits with veterans may be more important to bringing joy and cheer to the homes," Stroud says.

SFH started "Veterans Appreciation Days" when COVID-19 curbed visits to home, and they have continued. "Rather than

going to veterans, we invite them to come to us at designated locations to pick up free 'thank you' bags," Stroud explains.

A porch conversation between Wesson's Stroud and her sister and a separate discussion with a friend about Christmas gifts were the beginnings of SFH. Stroud, her sister and friend agreed gifts were unimportant for them, and they would like to find a way to

help people in need through their Christmas giving. The concept of the unique Wesson-based charity took shape after Stroud's husband Marty told her about fish fries Walmart, his employer, held at Veterans Administration homes, and a moving experience he had with a young disabled veteran at one event.

"We aren't about collecting money and sending it to the Veterans Administration in Jackson," Stroud says. "We're about providing direct personal assistance through gifts that show appreciation."

Before COVID 19 interrupted its service, SFH collected upwards of 15,000 pairs of socks, 800 blankets and other items for the 11 veterans homes in Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas. SFH has 501(c) 3 not-for-profit status and is rebuilding a fundraising program that had traditionally included a fishing tournament for youth at Lake Hazle, a 5K run/walk at Hazlehurst, and an annual veterans appreciation fair -- all cancelled during the COVID-19 pandemic.



cont. from front page

Mississippi's first car museum celebrated



Wesson News

cars today, but are easier to work on. Interspersed with them are an old hearse, an 1868 rockaway carriage, some of the first gas pumps, antique plows and farm equipment, a pot belly wood stove, an old record player with a horn speaker, early household appliances, furniture pieces and clothing. The facade of an old general store and blacksmith shop and the interior of an old western saloon decorate the walls. It all creates a 1920s America look that sets the antique cars in scenes appropriate for their times.

"It's largely about vehicles, but most car museums are sterile and boring," says King. "So we're complementing them with other items and décor that recall the Good Old Days."

Before the museum commanded their attention, King and his wife expressed their passion for art and set design building up and maintaining a local Halloween tradition on their Anderson Road property -- Silent Oaks Cemetery, a



Wesson News

Chamber of Commerce members and townspeople celebrated the official opening of the Good Old Days Museum. The Museum has a 1920s America look featuring early Twentieth Century vehicles in scenes appropriate to their time with varied antique relics.

family friendly mock graveyard haunted with visiting ghosts from a mausoleum, vaults, tombstones, crypts and the shaft of a mine where workers died in an explosion from which smoke is still wafting.

"The work to complete the museum this year kept our Halloween display on hold, but we will bring it back next year on the museum property," the Kings promise.

In opening the new museum, the Kings singled out the special assistance and support of Kirk and Rita Hill, an older couple who helped generate donations of cars and other items, and encouraged them in pursuing their project. King considers Kirk a mentor who "stepped up and filled a hole when my parents died." "We talk on the phone several times a day," he says. "I don't know what I would do without him."

The Kings say they envision constant change and growth at Good Old Days Museum with expansion of space to accommodate display items still in storage and material and monetary donations which they hope will continue to sustain it. Initially, the museum will be open free to visitors on Saturdays 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

For information about the museum and help with its needs, call 601-669-0860.

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Copiah Countians shaped the blues

Special to Wesson News

Even though the Mississippi Delta is popularly considered the birthplace of the blues, musicians from across the state, including Copiah County, contributed to its development and international recognition. Robert Johnson of Hazlehurst, Tommy Johnson (no relation) of Crystal Springs and Houston Stackhouse of Wesson were three well-known blues artists from the county.

Robert Johnson actually spent most of his short life (1911-1938) in the Delta, recording only 29 tracks, but going down in history as the “Grandfather of Rock and Roll” with his unique style. He was the master of the guitar, so great that rumor had it that he had made a pact and sold his soul to the devil. The 1986 film *Crossroads* was based on his career. The Blue’s Foundation’s Hall of Fame inducted him in 1986, and three markers on the Mississippi Blues Trail honor him across the state. The Robert Johnson Museum is in Crystal Springs, although he is buried at Little Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Greenwood.

Stackhouse was born Houston Goff at Wesson in 1910 and assumed his stepfather’s surname when he moved to Crystal Springs in 1925. Varied local musicians, including his Uncles Luther and Charlie Williams, Lonnie Chatmon of the Mississippi Sheiks, Tommy Johnson and his brothers Mage and Clarence influenced him. He settled into playing the guitar after learning the violin, harmonica and mandolin; was one of the earliest blues guitarists to perform on live radio broadcasts in the Delta and taught the instrument to such renowned blues musicians as Robert Nighthawk, Jimmy Rogers and Sammy Lawhorn. His career encompassed early work with Robert Johnson, Tommy Johnson and his brothers and dozens of other Copiah County musicians; and continuing work in the industry during the 1940s around Helena, Arkansas, and in Memphis in the 1970s. When he returned to Crystal Springs in the late 1970s, he curtailed his work, although he performed in the first two Mississippi Delta Blues Festivals before his death in 1980. A Mississippi Blues Trail marker at the Wesson Old School Community Center honors him.

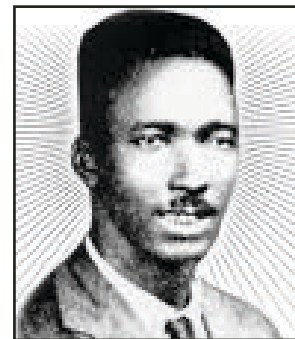
A student of his uncle and brothers, who played instruments, in a musical family, Tommy Johnson sang about what he knew in a raw, raspy voice backed up by a driving guitar. A supreme vocalist of early Delta Blues, he could jump from a falsetto to a growl. His per-



Stackhouse



Robert Johnson



Tommy Johnson

sonalized lyrics and striking blues compositions incorporated fragments of African American folk poetry and fables. The movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* portrayed Johnson, with two scenes shot in Copiah County. In the movie, three escaped convicts ask him why he is at a crossroads in the middle of nowhere, and he reveals he sold his soul to the devil in exchange for the ability to play the guitar – a legend popularly, but erroneously ascribed to Robert Johnson, first told by his brother LaDell in his biography. He recorded only 14 titles between 1928 and 1930, and died of a heart attack in 1938. He is buried in the Copiah County Warm Springs Cemetery.

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





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4th ranked Wolves eye state crown



Special to Wesson News

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Four running touchdowns by Johnnie Daniels and three field goals by Bradon Gilliam led Co-Lin to a 48-14 victory against Northwest Mississippi in the Mississippi Association of Community Colleges Conference (MACCC) football playoff semifinals in Wesson Saturday (November 11) and propelled the Wolves to the state championship game next Saturday with East Mississippi at Scuba, Mississippi.

The Wolves made the MACCC playoffs after finishing their regular season as the number four ranked team in the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) football rankings following a 13-0 victory over Hinds Community College in their season finale. Although they defeated East Mississippi in regular season play and had the best regular season MACCC record (8-1 overall and 5-1 in the Southern Division), they must travel to the championship game at Scuba because Northern Division semifinal winners host it in odd number years.

East Mississippi (7-2 in the regular season) defeated MACCC Southern Division runner-up Gulf Coast 34-14 on Saturday to earn its conference championship berth. Co-Lin upset East Mississippi 23-20 in its season opener at Wesson.

To get to the playoffs, Northwest Mississippi (7-2 in the regular season) defeated Northeast Mississippi 28-27 in overtime in its final game, while Gulf Coast beat Jones 23-0. East Mississippi (7-2) closed out its season with a 52-6 victory over Mississippi Delta.

In its semifinal matchup with Northwest Mississippi, Co-Lin dominated, taking an early 10-0 lead in the first quarter, and adding 14 points to Northwest's 7 in the second quarter. After Co-Lin gave up the ball after four down to start the second half, Northwest cut the Wolf's lead 24-14 with a long scoring drive, but it could do more as Co-Lin added a field goal and three touchdowns over the course of the half.

Co-Lin racked up 425 yards -- 267 rushing and 158 passing -- to 267 yards for Northwest, 178 in the air, but only 62 on the ground. Northwest turned the ball over to Co-Lin six times, four on interceptions, which the Wolves returned for 49 yards, and two on fumbles. Co-Lin turned the ball over only once on an interception.

Co-Lin's time of possession -- 42 minutes/3 seconds compared to Northwest's 29 minutes/21 seconds -- underscored the Wolf's domination of the game, although the teams were nearly even in first downs -- 16 for Co-Lin to 14 for Northwest.

This is the first time Co-Lin has played in the postseason since 2018, and in playoffs at home since 2014, when it beat Northwest 44-30. Co-Lin hasn't played in a state championship game for more than a decade. If it prevails on Saturday against East Mississippi, it will continue play in a four-game NJCAA playoff for the national championship.



WAC cross country champs

Boys and girls cross country teams from Wesson Attendance Center won their first district championships since the sport was started at the school. Both teams sent qualifiers to state championship competition.



The WAC cross country boys that went on to state championships were (left to right) Walker Breazeale, Slade Oberschmidt, Preston Selman, Brendon Duguid, Aidan Brice, Brody Ponder, and Grady Smith.



The WAC cross country girls that went on to state championships were (left to right): Ella Logan, Kennedy Johnson, Jayden Allen, Eden Hall, Bently Roberson, Courtney Carr and Macy Loy.



WAC boys cross country team members were (left to right front row) Brody Ponder (6th place district), Grant Hynum, Grady Smith (4th place district), Walker Breazeale (5th place district), Nick Raiford, Ayden Lee, Drew Brooks, Chastin Wilson, Canderous White (10th place district), (left to right back row) Collin Watts, Preston Selman (2nd place district), Aidan Brice (1st place district), Brendon Duguid (3rd place district), Quentin Jackson, Leyton Ainsworthand, Slade Oberschmidt (9th place district) and Coach Vance Windom.



WAC girls cross country team members were (left to right front row) Eden Hall (3rd place district), Sarah Logan, Kennedy Johnson (1st place district, a new school record), Macy Loy (5th place district), Bently Roberson, Courtney Carr (6th place district), Ella Logan (4th place district), Anne Houston Peets, (left to right back row) C.C. Smith, Mackenzie Martin (9th place district), Stevie Westrope, Mara Norwood, Jayden Allen, Laney Hux (10th place district), Mary Gwyn Hynum, Ally Selman (8th place district), Emory Britt. and Coach Vance Windom.

Area Soccer champs



Wesson News

The U12 Ole Brook Futbol Club won the championship soccer match, capping undefeated play in the Mississippi Crossroads Tournament at Jackson Futbol Club with an exciting a tie-breaker shootout and Konner Minton of Wesson kicking the winning shootout goal. The Ole Brook Futbol Club, with boys from Pike, Lincoln and Copiah counties, includes (left to right front row) Greyson Deshotel, Santana Silvan, Coaches Richard Bynum and Santana Silvan, Sr, (left to right back row) Rhyder Martin, Easton Bynum, Brantley Smith, Carlos Vasquez, Gage Windham, Konner Minton, Preston Kennedy, Phillip Murray, Griffin Newell and Dawson Deshotel.

Frying turkey for Thanksgiving



Ingredients:

1. 1 10-pound to 12-pound fresh bird without butter or seasoning already injected -- no Butterballs (larger turkeys may not cook thoroughly, with meat still pink at the center).
2. 1 8-ounce jar of injector Creole butter sauce.
3. Your favorite Cajun seasoning (mine is Louisiana).
4. 1 3-gallon jug of peanut oil.

Directions:

1. Thaw frozen turkey for two days before beginning preparation.

After thawing:

2. Remove wings & cook separately to avoid burning. Throw away tips of wings, which have relatively little meat, or give to your favorite dog or cat.
3. Inject turkey throughout (breast, thigh, legs, etc.) and separated wings with butter sauce the night before cooking.
4. Spread seasoning lightly over turkey and wings to absorb flavor overnight, cover thoroughly with cling plastic wrap & refrigerate overnight.

The next day:

5. Remove plastic wrap & liberally cover the turkey and wings with seasoning.
6. Pour cooking oil in pot & heat to the standard 350 degree temperature.
7. Slowly place turkey into the heated oil (wings go into a separate pot).
8. Cook 3 ½ minutes per pound.
9. Remove from pot, slice and serve.

Serve with a happy face to eight to ten.

By Guest Columnist Charles Fortson, Jr.

It's turkey season, with the holidays almost here. These days, fried turkeys, as opposed to baked or smoked ones, are the most popular. If you haven't cooked a fried turkey, it is a relatively easy task. Whole chickens can be prepared similarly.

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

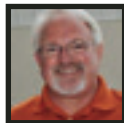


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Hood named Academic Instruction Dean at Co-Lin

Special to Wesson News

Dr. Amanda Hood is the new Dean of Academic Instruction at Co-Lin.

Dr. Hood previously served as Director of eLearning responsible for the coordination of all online college programs, served as the district-wide learning management system administrator, trained faculty and staff in instructional design, managed eResource implementation for all online courses, and supervised the eLearning office staff and proctored testing. She has been employed at Co-Lin since 2011, beginning as a mathematics instructor and academic advisor on the college's Natchez Campus.

At Natchez, she also served as a Phi Theta Kappa advisor and director of the Southwest Regional Science Olympiad. In January of 2018, Dr. Hood transferred to the Wesson Campus to begin serving as Director of eLearning.

"We are fortunate to have Dr. Amanda Hood at Co-Lin and are excited for the new role she will begin as Dean of Academic Instruction," said Dr. Dewayne Middleton, Co-Lin President. "Dr. Hood's strong work ethic, expertise, and dedication to our college are evident to all who work with her. I feel confident she will continue to move our academic programs in a positive direction as we look for new ways to serve our students."

The Dean of Academic Instruction oversees all academic instructional divisions and programs, eLearning and the associate degree nursing program; and supervises all academic division chairpersons and faculty members on the Wesson Campus, the director of library resources and library staff, and associate degree nursing director and instructors. As Dean, Dr. Hood will also monitor all student academic advisement, maintain and update academic programs of study to align with the articulation agreement and ensure articulation and transfer matters are current.

"We are thrilled to announce the appointment of Dr. Amanda Hood as our Dean of Academic Instruction at Co-Lin," said Jackie Martin, Co-Lin Wesson Campus Vice President.

"An esteemed alum, Dr. Hood's journey has come full circle,



Special to Wesson News

Dr. Amanda Hood

bringing her back to lead our academic endeavors. With a distinguished background as a dedicated math instructor and eLearning Director, she embodies our commitment to academic excellence and innovation. Her deep connection to our institution, combined with her passion for education, makes her the ideal leader to inspire and guide our students, faculty, and institution toward new heights of achievement."

A 2000 graduate of Co-Lin, Dr. Hood earned a bachelor's degree in foreign language and international trade and a master's degree in teaching arts from Mississippi College, and went on to earn her doctorate degree from Mississippi State University in community college leadership.

Dr. Hood's many awards and achievements include Co-Lin Outstanding Staff Member, the Horizon Award from MS/LA Region of Phi Theta Kappa, S.O.A.R. Golden Apple Award, and Outstanding Academic Faculty Advisor. She is a graduate of the Mississippi Community College Leadership Academy, Leadership Natchez, and the Community College Policy Fellows program. She currently serves as a Commissioner for the Mississippi Commission on College Accreditation.

She is married to Charles Hood and has a stepdaughter, Lauren and two grandchildren, Bryson and Lilli.

\$2.8 million in scholarship offers



Taylor Herron

Special to Wesson News

Special to Wesson News

Mississippi School of the Arts (MSA) Visual Arts 2023 graduate Taylor Herron received a total of \$2,765,347.00 in college scholarship offers from 38 colleges all over the country, including many of the most prestigious art colleges, like Savannah College of Art & Design (SCAD), Pratt Institute, Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), Minneapolis College of Art & Design (MCAD) and her choice, Otis College of Art & Design in Los Angeles, to name just a few. Herron is from Madison, Mississippi, where her home school was Germantown High School before being accepted to MSA's Visual Arts program to attend her 11th and 12th grade years.

Herron received numerous state, regional and national awards for her art, including Gold and Silver Keys and an American Visions Award in Scholastic Arts at the regional and national competitions, a National New York Life Scholarship and won the Congressional Art Competition multiple times, including "Overall Winner" with her artwork hung in the United States Capitol. Herron, a well-rounded, popular student, was chosen Miss MSA, inducted into the MSA Hall of Fame, selected for the Prom Court, Vice President of the Diversity Club and Student Government Association Floor Rep.

When asked what advice she could give other high schoolers about applying for college scholarships, Herron advised: "Make the effort to apply, and don't be

scared to branch out. Make sure to stay in contact with your admissions counselor and contacts where you have applied, and always be appreciative, humble and gracious."

Herron also attributes the support and encouragement she received from her art teacher Maurice Calvert and MSA's Senior Seminar Class with helping her. When asked about her success, Calvert observed: "I think about how decisive, distinct, lively and creative she and her work are."

Herron graduated from MSA in May. Her advice to MSA incoming juniors is to have a strong work ethic and to find the fun in their work. She added: "Stay positive. "Negativity can stop you in your tracks."

The Mississippi School of the Arts (MSA) is an eleventh and twelfth grade visual and performing arts residential public high school located on the historic Whitworth College campus in Brookhaven. Students meet and exceed the traditional Mississippi high school curriculum, and receive special instruction in visual arts, vocal music, dance, literary arts, filmmaking/media arts and theatre. Students interested in MSA apply in their sophomore year. In addition to consistently winning awards for their work on the state, regional and national levels, MSA students have the second highest ACT average in the state.

Tenth grade students should contact Admissions about applying. For more information, visit www.msabrookhaven.org or call 601-823-1300.

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BSU Director recalls Rwanda



Jed and Heather Moak

Special to Wesson News

The scars from a large-scale civil war some three decades ago that claimed thousands of lives among Hutu and Tutsi peoples in Rwanda continue to make missionary work, and winning the trust of those you want to help a challenge in the country, Co-Lin Baptist Student Union (BSU) Director Jed Moak told Institute for Learning in Retirement (ILR) members at their monthly luncheon.

Moak and his wife Heather worked with prostitutes in Rwanda through the Hagari mission before he returned to his alma mater and the student ministry at BSU. Over two years, they led Bible studies for the organization.

At the ILR luncheon, Moak talked about their service in Rwanda and life in the country, which borders Kenya and Uganda to the south in East Africa.

“Hagari walks alongside families in extreme poverty – especially those vulnerable to survival sex work – by focusing on education, health, discipleship and financial empowerment to disrupt the cycle of poverty,” Moak said. He highlighted Hagari’s Student Partnership project – a part of its empowerment ministry – through which donors can invest in sponsoring Rwanda students, who have to pay to go to school. A \$75 per month partnership provides school fees,

materials, uniforms, meals on school days and health insurance for students and their families.

Moak described Rwanda as a land-locked country of hills and valleys – sometimes called “land of a thousand hills” -- with a trade-based economy in which lack of transportation retards commerce and fosters poverty. It is one quarter the size of Mississippi with twice the population, which is mostly situated in Kigali, the capital city. On the equator, it is a warm country with temperature extremes from lows in the 70s to highs in the 90s, where mosquitos and malaria are problems. A culture of prostitution has flourished there in the midst of the poverty with young women orphaned by the civil war.

“Our ministry was about rescuing, redeeming, educating and empowering – helping families in this poverty culture get out of the lives in which they are entrapped, demonstrating to them that another life was possible, teaching them how to live anew with the help of Christ and supporting them as they built new lives.”

Moak is now in his second year directing the ministry at Co-Lin’s Baptist Student Union, which provides a hangout venue for students, counseling, Bible studies and worship experiences, including a Monday evening service at 6:30 p.m. and chapel on Tuesdays at 12:30 p.m.

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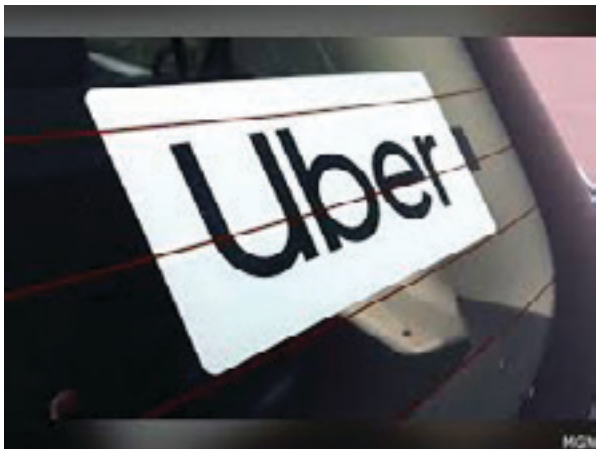
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MSDH offers transportation program

Special to Wesson News

The Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) is launching a program to reduce transportation to healthcare in both rural and urban areas.

Funded by a new federal grant, Transportation to Health, which started November 1, is providing patient transportation to and from county health departments and offices for health services.




In addition, patients will have the opportunity to pick up prescriptions at partnering pharmacies if they were prescribed during their health department appointment.

State Health Officer Dr. Edney explains: "Improving and protecting the health of all Mississippians is the mission of our agency. This new program will assist us in achieving the mission. Creating access to health care is always the best choice."

For new or existing appointments, patients will contact the MSDH call center at 855-767-0170 to request transportation. The Office of Health Equity will coordinate an Uber ride at no cost to the patient, and no need to download an app.

"Transportation to Health can eliminate delayed or missed appointments by the most vulnerable people in Mississippi," said Victor D. Sutton, Chief of Community Health and Clinical Services at MSDH. "With Mississippi being a rural state, this initiative will also create opportunities for community and economic development by creating jobs. Uber will support MSDH in developing a plan to support driver availability within the program service area."

For more information about the new Transportation to Health program, visit HealthyMS.com/rides.




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Reading, flu, water & jail time

Special to Wesson News

Skilled readers. Almost 85 percent of Mississippi third graders have passed a reading assessment after final retests for the 2022-23 school year, the State Department of Education reports. The 2023 final pass rate is practically the same as the final pass rate in 2022 (85.0%) and 2019 (85.6%). Due to the pandemic, the assessment was canceled in 2020, and the passing requirement was waived in 2021. Students are allowed three attempts to pass the test. Although the 2023 final pass rate was nearly identical to previous years, the initial pass rate increased to an all-time high of 76.3% since the passing score was raised in 2019. The Literacy-Based Promotion Act (LBPA) enacted in 2013 was created to help ensure kindergarten through third grade students develop good reading skills. The law was amended in 2016 and requires all Mississippi third grade public school students to score at level 3 or higher on the reading portion of the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program English Language Arts (MAAP-ELA) test to qualify to be promoted to fourth grade. The LBPA takes a comprehensive approach to building the capacity of teachers and school leaders to effectively teach reading and implement an ongoing system to monitor student progress. The law enables the MDE to deploy literacy coaches to schools where data show students struggle the most with reading.

Flu & Covid season. During the fall and winter months, Mississippians need to prepare for respiratory viruses like influenza, RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) and COVID-19, which tend to increase as more people gather indoors, the State Department of Health (MSDH) warns. Being aware of the risks and taking appropriate precautions will curb infections and severe outcomes such as hospitalization and death, health officials say. Simple steps that can be taken to prevent disease: stay home when you are ill, cover your coughs, and wash hands or use hand sanitizer often. This year, there are newly approved options for RSV prevention for certain at-risk individuals -- people aged 60 and older, pregnant individuals and infants or children 19 months and younger. MSDH recommends all individuals aged six months and older get an updated influenza and COVID-19 vaccination. These vaccinations are widely available at many pharmacies and healthcare provider offices. Children 18 years old and younger, as well as uninsured or underinsured adults, can receive influenza vaccinations at MSDH county health departments. "Early diagnosis and treatment can limit poor outcomes with influenza and COVID-19," said MSDH Interim State Epidemiologist Dr. Kathryn Taylor. "Vaccination against respiratory viruses like COVID-19, influenza, and RSV remains the best protection against hospitalization and severe outcomes related to infection." For more information on county health department locations and services, visit HealthyMS.com/locations.

Jackson water flowing. Water is flowing in Mississippi's capital city in a stark contrast from a year ago, when Jackson's 150,000 residents could never be sure what, if anything, would flow from their taps when they needed a drink, a shower or to flush the toilet. The turnaround has been shepherded by Ted Henifin, a seasoned utility manager appointed last year as interim head of the long-troubled water system. Last August and September, infrastructure breakdowns caused many people in Jackson to go days and weeks without safe running water. A federal judge brought Henifin from Virginia in December. "The system is acting like what I would consider a normal water system for a city of 150,000," Henifin said. "In the future, we shouldn't have city-wide boil water notices." Day-to-day efforts have included fixing valves and broken pipes from which gallons of wasted water once spilled into creeks and up through fire hydrants. One of Henifin's top priorities has been

increasing Jackson's revenue collection from the water system without raising rates in a city where roughly a quarter of the population lives in poverty.

Jail time for prisoner abuse. Three former Mississippi Department of Corrections officers have been sentenced to years of jail time for punching and kicking a prisoner in the head while striking her with an aerosol canister, according to federal prosecutors. The former corrections officers — Jessica Hill, LaToya Richardson and Nicole Moore — pleaded guilty to assaulting the prisoner in a July 2019 episode at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility. "The defendants in this case ignored their sworn duty to protect inmates and chose violence instead," said Todd Gee, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi. "We will continue to prosecute those who abuse their positions of authority and violate the civil rights of inmates." Hill and Richardson were sentenced to three years and one month in prison with two years of supervised release. Moore was sentenced to two years in prison with two years of supervised release. They were all fined \$1,500.

Fraud case settled. Attorney General Fitch and Secretary of State Michael Watson, in partnership with the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) and 29 other state regulators, have reached a settlement with precious metals dealer Safeguard Metals, LLC and Jeffrey Ikahn in a federal lawsuit that alleged the parties engaged in a \$68 million fraudulent scheme that targeted the elderly. In Mississippi, six investors were defrauded out of nearly \$892,000 in the execution of a national scheme. A key finding in the Consent Order is that Safeguard and Ikahn deceived more than 450 customers nationwide into purchasing precious metals through false and misleading statements, including misrepresenting of their credentials and the risk and safety of customer investments. "These seniors had worked a lifetime with the hope of living comfortably in their retirement, and found themselves the target of scam artists," said General Fitch. "This kind of exploitation will not be tolerated in Mississippi. The Attorney General's Office is proud to work with Secretary Watson and his team to protect Mississippi seniors and other investors." As part of the court approved settlement, Safeguard and Ikahn agreed to a permanent injunction which enjoins them from violating several federal and state laws prohibiting commodities fraud, securities and investment adviser fraud, and providing unlicensed investment advice. In addition, Ikahn agreed to an order barring him from any position of employment, management, or control of any investment adviser, broker-dealer, or commodity adviser in Mississippi. For questions or concerns, contact the Attorney General's Office at consumer@ago.ms.gov or the Office of the Secretary of State's Securities Division at (601) 359-1334 or securities.customerservice@sos.ms.gov.

Autopsy reports lag. Incomplete homicide autopsy reports continue to pile up in Mississippi despite tough-on-crime talk by state leaders. Police officers and prosecutors rely on medical examiners' autopsy reports to investigate violent crimes and hold perpetrators accountable while families look to the reports to make sense of a loved one's death. Without death certificates, families often have to wait to collect insurance and settle the deceased's affairs. The National Association of Medical Examiners, the office that accredits U.S. death investigations offices, dictates that 90% of autopsy reports should be returned within 60 to 90 days, but homicide autopsies in Mississippi lag behind national standards. As of October 1, Mississippi had 51 homicide autopsy reports that were incomplete for longer than 60 days; and 45 autopsies pending after more than 90 days. Three other autopsy reports for 2023 took over 90 days to complete.

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