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Parade stirs Christmas spirit

By Bob Arnold

Wesson's annual Christmas parade rolled last week (Friday, December 6) for the 52nd year, with Santa again returning to town as a highlight of the event framed thematically as “Christmas through the Eyes of a Child.”

Santa on his sleigh and others tossed candy to bystanders lining the sides of Highway 51, who also came to see the bands playing holiday music, high school and college beauties and local dignitaries riding in convertibles and on decorated floats reflecting the creativity of organizations and businesses, along with the jolly gift-giver from the North Pole. — all helping them prepare to celebrate this special time of year in Wesson.

Wesson Volunteer Fire Department (WVF), which organizes the parade, worked to create an event that “expresses Christmas as wondrous, amazing and magical,” according to WVF Chief Ken Carroway.

Parade participants lined up at 3:30 p.m. at Grace Foam Solutions (the old Sunflower store),



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and they started marching at 4 p.m. led by Grand Marshall Nena Smith, honored as she began her retirement after 50 years teaching students at Nena Smith School of Dance.

“Along the parade route, hot chocolate was available on the cool evening, and punch and cookies, too,” Carroway said.

The parade proceeded south to the Highway 51 stoplight and reversed direction northward, with trucks and vehicles from Copiah and Lincoln County volunteer fire departments and the Wesson Police and Copiah County Sheriff Departments at the front and Santa Claus in the rear as the climax for whom everybody -- particularly the kids -- were waiting.

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

The floats were numerous this year, including those built by the American Legion, the Wesson Junior/High School Beta Club, Butterbeans Wesson Garden Club youth organization, Copiah County government, Fastpace Healthcare and Mossy Oak Properties, among others.

Then there were the cheerleaders who danced to the music and fired up the Christmas spirit, along with the Co-Lin Wolf mascot, Collette dancers, and students from Nena Smith Studio.

Following the parade, Santa Claus brought a bag of goodies to the Wesson Volunteer Fire Department, where he met with children and punch and cookies were served. Friends of the Library also hosted an open house at Wesson Public Library, where Mrs. Santa Claus read stories to children and they could catch a train operated by the Brookhaven Exchange Club to ride around the decorated town.

Library helps town Christmas celebration



Wesson News

Librarian Marilyn Brit spotlighted more than 50 Christmas-themed books.

Special to Wesson News

Wesson Public Library is ready to help the town celebrate Christmas.

Visitors to its open house following the town's annual Christmas parade were the initial beneficiaries. Throughout the Christmas season, the Library is inviting town folk to drop in to see its special displays and check out a book related to the holiday:

Librarian Marilyn Britt delved into the book collection and discovered more than 50 fiction and non-fiction tomes with Christmas themes. They are easy to find atop shelves and on tables throughout the Library.



Wesson News

Special exhibits included a miniature Christmas village built by Chad, Rebecca and Aeplea Harrison, Jean Ricks' collection of Santas handmade by Hattiesburg artist Sherry Dole, a nativity scene provided by Kim Roberts and Julia Arnold's Christmas dolls. Britt also strategically placed nutcrackers from her collection throughout the library.

Those who didn't visit the Library at its open house following the Christmas parade missed Mrs. Santa Claus (Linda Merhri), who read stories to children; the Grinch (Lee Meredith) and a train operated by Brookhaven Exchange Club that rode children around town. At the open house, the Library also gifted children with Christmas themed bookmarks and glow bracelets.

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BLT launches 2024-25 season

Special to Wesson News

Brookhaven Little Theater kicked off its five-play 2024-25 season Friday, December 6, with ten performances of *Annie* through Sunday, December 15.

The season also includes five performances of *Charlotte's Web* from Thursday, February 6; through Sunday, February 9; ten performances of *Shrek -- The Musical* from Thursday, April 3, through Sunday, April 13; four BLT Teen Camp performances of *Bye Bye Birdie* from Friday, June 6, through Sunday, June 8; and four BLT Kid Camp performances of *Seussical-KIDS* on Thursday and Friday, June 26 and 27.

- Based on the popular comic strip by Harold Gray, *Annie* has become a worldwide phenomenon, the winner of seven Tony Awards, including Best Musical. The beloved book and score by Tony Award winners, Thomas Meehan, Charles Strouse and Martin Charnin, features some of the greatest musical theatre hits ever written, including "Tomorrow." With equal measures of pluck and positivity, little orphan Annie charms everyone's hearts despite a next-to-nothing start in 1930s New York City. She is determined to find the parents who abandoned her years ago on the doorstep of a New York City Orphanage that is run by the cruel, embittered Miss Hannigan. With the help of the other girls in the Orphanage, Annie escapes to the wondrous world of NYC. In adventure after fun-filled adventure, Annie foils Miss Hannigan's evil machinations and even befriends President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. She finds a new home and family in billionaire, Oliver Warbucks, his personal secretary, Grace Farrell, and a lovable mutt named Sandy.

- The Children's Literature Association named *Charlotte's Web* "the best American children's book of the past two hundred years," and Joseph Robinette, working with the advice of E.B. White, has created a play that captures this work in a thrilling and utterly practical theatrical presentation. It's the story and relationships that make the show. All the enchanting characters are here: Wilbur, the irresistible young pig who desperately wants to avoid the butcher; Fern, a girl who understands what animals say to each other; Templeton, the gluttonous rat who can occasionally be talked into a good deed; the Zuckerman family; the Arables; and, most of all, the extraordinary spider, Charlotte, who proves to be "a true friend and a good writer." Determined to save Wilbur, Charlotte begins her campaign with the "miracle" of her web in which she writes, "Some pig." It's the beginning of a victorious campaign which ultimately ends with the now-safe Wilbur doing what is most important to Charlotte.

- Based on the Oscar-winning DreamWorks Animation film, *Shrek The Musical* is a Tony Award-winning fairy tale adventure, featuring all new songs from Jeanine Tesori (Thoroughly Modern Millie; Caroline, Change) and a sidesplitting book by David Lindsay-Abaire. Shrek brings all the beloved characters you know from the film to life on stage and proves there's more to the story than meets the ears. "Once upon a time, there was a little ogre named Shrek...." And thus begins the tale of an unlikely hero who finds himself on a life-changing journey alongside a wise-cracking Donkey and a feisty princess who resists her rescue. Throw in a short-tempered bad guy, a cookie with an attitude and over a dozen other fairy tale misfits, and you've got the kind of mess that calls for a real hero. Luckily, there's one on hand... and his name is Shrek.

- A loving musical send-up of the early 1950s, *Bye Bye Birdie* features small-town America, teenagers, and rock & roll, and remains as fresh and vibrant as ever. Teen heartthrob Conrad Birdie has been drafted, so he chooses all-American girl Kim McAfee for a very public farewell kiss. Featuring a tuneful high-energy score, plenty of

great parts for kids, and a hilarious script, *Bye Bye Birdie* remains one of the most popular shows in schools across the country. Hit songs include "Put on a Happy Face," "One Last Kiss," "One Boy," "A Lot of Livin' to Do," "Kids!" and "Rosie."

- Horton the Elephant, the Cat in the Hat and all of your favorite Dr. Seuss characters spring to life onstage in *Seussical KIDS*, a fantastical musical extravaganza from Tony-winners, Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty ("Lucky Stiff", "My Favorite Year", "Once on This Island", "Ragtime"). Transporting audiences from the Jungle of Nool to the Circus McGurkus, the Cat in the Hat, our narrator, tells the story of Horton, an elephant who discovers a speck of dust containing tiny people called the Whos, including Jojo, a Who child, who gets in trouble for thinking too many "thinks." Horton's challenge is twofold — not only must he protect the Whos from a world of naysayers and dangers, but he must also guard an abandoned egg that's been left in his care by the irresponsible Mayzie La Bird. Although Horton faces ridicule, danger, kidnapping and a trial, the intrepid Gertrude McFuzz never loses faith in him. Ultimately, the powers of friendship, loyalty, family and community are challenged and emerge triumphant!

Schedule of performances:

Annie: Friday, December 6, 7 p.m.; Saturday, December 7, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.; Sunday, December 8, 2 p.m.; Monday, December 9, 7 p.m.; Thursday, December 12, 7 p.m.; Friday, December 13, 7 p.m.; Saturday, December 14, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.; Sunday, December 15, 2:00 p.m.



Charlotte's Web: Thursday, February 6, 7 p.m.; Friday, February 7, 7 p.m.; Saturday, February 8, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.; Sunday, February 9, 2 p.m.

Shrek the Musical: Thursday, April 3, 7 p.m.; Friday, April 4, 7 p.m.; Saturday, April 5, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.; Sunday, April 6, 2 p.m.; Monday, April 7, 7 p.m.; Thursday, April 10, 7 p.m.; Friday, April 11, 7 p.m.; Saturday, April 12, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.; Sunday, April 13, 2 p.m.

Bye Bye Birdie: Friday, June 6, 7 p.m.; Saturday, June 7, 2 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.; Sunday, June 8, 2:00 p.m.

Seussical kids: Thursday, June 26, 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.; Friday, June 27, 11:30 a.m., 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.

The BLT Teen and Kids Camps teach students in grades seven through 12 and one through sixth grades theater and the performing arts. The Teen Camp is May 27-June 6 and the Kids Camp is June 16 to 25 during the evenings.

Registration for each camp starts December 2 and the fee for each camp is \$200. All registered students are guaranteed a role in the shows, with auditions Saturday, May 17, for the Teen Camp and currently undetermined for the Kids Camp.

Live concerts are also on the BLT calendar. Brookhaven native nationally-known artist Randy Redd performed live in October with stories, standards and show tunes from his book, *The Black & White*, and two area groups — The J.T. McCaffrey Band and The Lincoln Outfit — will be on the BLT stage on January 11 in Keys vs Strings concert.

For ticket information, call 601-669-9200 or email tickets@brookhavenlittletheater.com.

Founded in 1968, BLT is the longest continuously running community theatre in Mississippi!

For more than 50 years, it has entertained theatre-goers with an array of musical and dramatic classics, as well as modern Broadway hits. In recent years, the theatre has expanded to include the BLT Teen and Kids Camps. BLT is led and sustained by volunteers who give generously of their time and resources to produce shows.

BLT is based at the historic Haven Theater at 126 West Cherokee Street in downtown Brookhaven, where its plays and other productions are staged.



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Community dedicates new Veterans Memorial



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Special to Wesson News

Declaring that honoring the nation's armed forces to be an everyday occasion, Wesson Alderman Michael King led an array of speakers and special guests on Veterans Day in dedicating a new Veterans Memorial that will make sure the town does just as he said.

A crowd of veterans, residents and members of the Wesson High School band participated in the celebration that also featured commentary by Wesson Mayor Alton Shaw and guest speaker Mississippi Air National Guard Brigadier General Tommy Tillman and a presentation of Colors by local American Legion members and Tori Earls from Woodmen of the World, which donated flagpoles for the Memorial site.

The Memorial is located at Wesson Municipal Park on Church Street, and Mayor Shaw said it will be a venue for people to respect service members who served America. Shaw explained that the Memorial started with an artist's design, and the Town looked at potential locations and how to generate funds for the project.

"Perseverance over time led to this," Shaw said. He singled out Blue Cross-Blue Shield, which provided grant money, for thanks, along with varied town leaders and public officials.

Tillman said it was his privilege on Veterans Day to celebrate men and women who have

served the country, and noted people throughout the nation are gathering in the name of peace to say thank you for their courage.

"The land of the free and home of the brave, a beacon of hope in an often troubled world," Tillman proclaimed. "From the minute men to today's warriors, the line of Americans willing to risk their lives is never ending. They have served with honor and dignity. They have all served and sacrificed and have preserved peace. They have lived uncommon lives under a common banner."

At the dedication, Wesson American Legion Commander Brigadier General Bobby Thornton, Chamber of Commerce President Teri Bath and veterans cut the ribbon in unveiling a bronze battlefield cross monument that will be the central feature on the new memorial.

Other participants in the dedication ceremony were Skylor James ("The National Anthem"), Alton Ricks (the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag), Wesson High School Band (the Armed Forces Medley of service music), Mississippi Army National Guard Staff Sergeant Steven Lane (gun salute), Pastor James Harris and Mississippi Army National Guard Chaplain Captain Chris James (invocation and benediction) and Mississippi State Guard First Lieutenant Chuck Wallace "Taps").



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Fixing Mississippi's maternal health issues

By Guest Columnist Stephanie Duguid

Maternal health in Mississippi is a pressing concern, according to Dr. Vernesia Wilson, Director of the Maternal and Infant Health Bureau at the Mississippi State Department of Health. The data reveals alarming disparities and challenges faced by women, particularly women of color, in accessing equitable and effective maternal care.



The Reality for Women of Color

In partnership with Teen Health Mississippi, focus groups shed light on systemic inequities. Participants shared experiences of feeling dismissed or overlooked by healthcare providers. "Doctors tend to underestimate the level of pain for women of color," one participant remarked. Others echoed similar sentiments, noting difficulties accessing essential services and a lack of meaningful communication with medical professionals. These testimonials underscore the need for a healthcare system that listens and responds equitably to all patients.

The Challenge of Severe Maternal Morbidity

Severe maternal morbidity (SMM) includes unexpected complications during labor and delivery that can lead to significant or life-threatening consequences. In Mississippi, the incidence of SMM has been rising, with 300 cases reported in 2021. While the statewide rate of SMM cases has declined slightly from 90.7 per 10,000 delivery hospitalizations in 2021 to 76.2 in 2023, it still exceeds the Healthy People 2030 target of 64.4. Racial disparities are stark: Black women consistently report the highest number of cases compared to other racial groups, highlighting an urgent need for targeted interventions.



Preventable Deaths and Root Causes

Tragically, 80% of pregnancy-related deaths in Mississippi are deemed preventable, with black women making up 77% of these cases. Contributing factors include social determinants of health, such as access to insurance, financial stability, and systemic bias in healthcare. Many deaths result from a chain of preventable events, suggesting opportunities for early intervention and better systemic support.

A Path Forward

Dr. Wilson emphasizes the urgent need for change, starting with acknowledging maternal and infant health as a priority. Ensuring that physicians respond to women's concerns during pregnancy and postpartum care is critical. Educating communities about maternal warning signs and addressing broader issues are also part of the solution.

Mississippi has the tools and data to make a difference. With continued effort and a focus on equity, the state can move toward better outcomes for all mothers and infants. For more information or to get involved, contact Dr. Vernesia Wilson at Vernesia.Wilson@msdh.ms.gov.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Stephanie Duguid is the owner of Do Good Pro-Health (CPR classes) and Do Good Leadership (motivational speaking, and leadership and success coaching).

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Local beekeeper shares his secrets

Special to Wesson News

Humans started keeping bees primarily for honey production 10,000 years ago, a tradition maintained locally by John Whitiker, who talked to the Wesson Lions Club last month about his operations.

Whitiker manages about 50 artificial hives with up to 60,000 bees, rebuilt from 35 hives during the COVID-19 pandemic. A healthy hive, he says, will produce 80 to 100 pounds of honey in a traditional ten-frame deep box which houses the bees.

Whitiker told the Club he uses four basic tools in his operations:

- **Artificial hives** -- square or rectangular with moveable cedar, pine or cypress wooden honeycomb frames, including a floor, brood box, honey super, crown-board and roof. Hives also use queen excluders between the brood-box and honey supers to keep the queen from laying eggs in cells next to those containing honey intended for consumption. "In construction and utilization of hives, I seek to eliminate waste of wood and materials," Whitiker said
- **A smoker**, which generates smoke from the incomplete combustion of fuels. Although the exact mechanism is disputed, it is said smoke calms bees. Some claim it initiates a feeding response in anticipation of possible hive abandonment due to fire. Smoke may also mask alarm pheromones released by guard bees or bees that are squashed in an inspection. The ensuing confusion creates an opportunity for the beekeeper to open the hive and work without triggering a defensive reaction.
- **Workerwear** -- pale-colored natural color cotton, different from the color of the colony's natural predators -- bears and skunks that are dark-colored. A fabric conditioner may have more impact on bees than the color of the workwear fabric, however, because bees see ultraviolet wavelengths and are attracted to scent.
- **A hive tool** used to scrape off burr-comb from around the hive, especially on top of the frames and to separate the frames before lifting out of the hive.



John pictured with grandchild.

"Varied plants attract bees to our property," Whitiker said. "Among them are white clover, flowers, including wild flowers, hedge, flowering and fruit trees -- peach and apple particularly. We use soap water and vinegar water solutions to ward off pests that harm plants because pesticides ingested by bees compromise their health."

Whitiker explained that honeybee colonies include (1) a queen which lays eggs that develop into workers or drones, regulates activities and signals swarming (2) drones -- the largest bees -- which mate with virgin queens and (3) worker bees which clean and polish cells for new eggs, nectar and pollen, feed the queen, build combs, forage for food and water, create and store honey, guard the hive, remove debris and dead bees from the hive.

Honey, he said, starts as flower nectar collected by bees, which gets broken down into simple sugars stored inside the honeycomb. The design of the honeycomb and constant fanning of the bees' wings causes evaporation, creating sweet liquid honey. Honey's color and flavor vary based on the nectar collected by the bees.

Whitiker described a six-step honey-collection process from hives:

- **Calming the bees** with a smoker to make them less aggressive and to obscure their communication pheromones.
- **Removing the frames** of honey from the hive.
- **Uncapping the frames** -- scraping off the wax caps that seal the honey in cells with a sharp knife.
- **Extracting the honey** -- placing the frames in an extractor, which is a large, round tank that spins the frames at high speed and flings the honey out of the comb.

- **Straining the honey** to remove any remaining wax and other particles.
- **Bottling the honey** to eat.

Whitiker said this process occurs twice a year -- spring and fall, and "I am careful to leave honey for bees to survive."

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Co-Lin's Stovall receives CAST Crusader award



Special to Wesson News

Co-Lin's Keith Stovall received the CAST Crusader Award at the annual One Loud Voice Conference. In attendance were Co-Lin students Drew Jones, Demessia Holloway, Latorin Vigne, and Allie Wall; Stovall; faculty members Neisha Leggett and Dr. Melnee Berry; and student Cliff Jernigan.

Special to Wesson News

Co-Lin instructor and Social Science Division Chair Keith Stovall has received the prestigious CAST Crusader Award.

Each year, Children's Advocacy Centers of Mississippi™ recognizes an outstanding individual who is committed to the Mississippi CAST (Child Advocacy Studies) program and workforce development representing systematic change for the protection of children. Stovall accepted the award at the annual One Loud Voice Conference held recently in Biloxi.

Stovall joined the Co-Lin family as an instructor in 2006 and teaches courses in Child Psychology, Marriage and Family, Adolescent Psychology, General Psychology, Introduction to Sociology and Perspectives in Child maltreatment. In 2022, the Child Advocacy Response and Education for Students (C.A.R.E.S) student organization was created with Stovall as faculty advisor. Stovall also launched the Virtual CARE House, a simulation project to enhance child advocacy education through immersive online learning.

"Keith has dedicated his career to child advocacy in Southwest Mississippi and is incredibly deserving of this recognition," said Co-Lin Dean of Academic Instruction Dr. Amanda Hood. "The countless hours he has poured into creating the Virtual CARE House, now recognized on a national level, are a testament to his unwavering passion for education and his commitment to advocating for healthy children and families. We are proud to have Keith at Co-Lin, and we are grateful for the impact he is making on our students, his colleagues, and the community."

Stovall earned a bachelor's degree from William Carey University and a Master's Degree from the University of Southern Mississippi in Counseling Psychology. He started his professional career as a therapist and forensic interviewer at the Southwest Mississippi Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) in McComb, Mississippi. While there, he conducted nearly 600 interviews in four years and served as an expert witness in Circuit Court cases. He is a two-time recipient of the Robert M. Segal Multi-Disciplinary Team Award and was honored in 2024 as a William Winter Scholar.

Stovall and his wife Teresa are the proud parents of three children.

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Seven MSA students cop awards



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Seven Mississippi School of the Arts students returned with trophies and cash prizes from the 32nd Annual Mississippi Delta Tennessee Williams Festival in Clarksdale, Mississippi. They were:

- Sarah Smith and Kendra Quarterman, first and third place in Monlogues,
- Frances Broome and Gabby Kyzar, third place in Scenes,
- Bobby Alsworth, finalist in Stella Call,
- Skye Ogilvie, Best Costume Judges Award,
- Berkley Ceaser, Best Nonverbal Acting Judges Award.

The Mississippi Delta Tennessee Williams Festival was founded by Coahoma Community College in 1992, under the leadership of Dr. Vivian Presley, president of CCC from 1992 to 2013, with a \$10,000 grant award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Tennessee Williams, America's great playwright and Pulitzer Prize winning-author of poetry, novels, and screenplays, born in Columbus, Mississippi, spent his childhood in Clarksdale, and his works were greatly influenced by the area and its people. The annual Mississippi Delta Tennessee Williams Festival was inaugurated as a celebration of his genius and the region's cultural heritage that he immortalized in dramas, including *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Summer and Smoke*, *Eccentricities of a Nightingale*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Orpheus Descending*, *Battle of Angels*, *Baby Doll*, *This Property Is Condemned* and many others.

Tom "Tennessee" Williams spent a great deal of his impressionable childhood in Clarksdale, where his maternal grandfather, the Reverend Walter Dakin, was rector of St. George's Episcopal Church for 16 years (1917-1933). Tom, his sister Rose and their mother, Edwina Dakin Williams, lived with his grandparents in the church rectory while Tom's father traveled as a salesman.

In 2003, the church rectory was designated a Mississippi Literary Landmark by the Friends of Mississippi Libraries and Friends of Libraries U.S.A.

Many of his works refer to actual places in Coahoma County and some of his most famous characters – Blanche, Brick, Baby Doll, Stella, and Amanda Wingfield were inspired by real Clarksdale residents.

The Cutrer Mansion, built by Blanche Clark Cutrer (only daughter of Clarksdale's founder John Clark) and John W. Cutrer, was a site he visited often with his grandfather on parish calls. The festival was headquartered for the first time in the Cutrer Mansion in 2005, and the aura and ambience of this historic setting contributes significantly to the event's success.

Although Tennessee later lived in St. Louis, New Orleans, New York, and Key West, his Mississippi Delta childhood was a strong influence on his writings. In 1995, the United States Postal Service selected the festival to host the unveiling of the Tennessee Williams postage stamp, and the festival continues to be a significant cultural event.

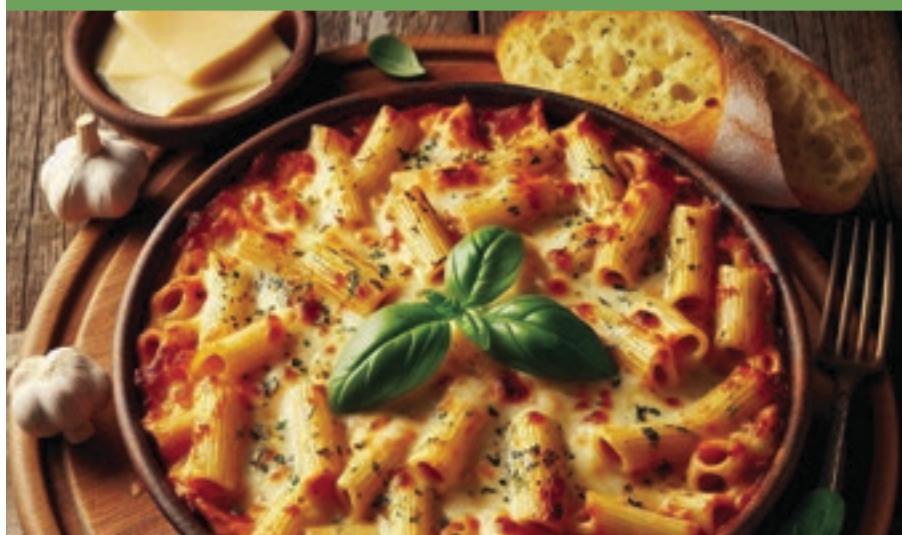
Each year, the festival focuses attention on one play and invites renowned Williams scholars, theatre professionals including actors, directors, playwrights, and artists to present lectures, readings, and dramatizations. Actors and drama groups present one-act plays on front porches of homes in the historic neighborhood, where receptions also take place. The festival also sponsors a highly competitive acting contest at Coahoma Community College for high school students, who vie for trophies and more than \$3,000 in cash prizes for their school drama departments. The contest is judged by out-of-town theatre professionals, who also direct acting workshops. Winners recreate their performances at a Saturday festival finale where they are critiqued, applauded and entertained with supper and a dance to music by a Mississippi Delta blues band.

Try a make-ahead dinner for busy holiday season

Special to Wesson News

Make-ahead and freezer meals can be a lifesaver during the holiday season. This recipe is almost fool-proof, and it can be scaled up or down, if you'd like to have leftovers to freeze for later. It's also a good one to make the night (or a couple of nights) before and have ready to pop into the oven when you get home from work. If freezing a batch, be sure to let it thaw thoroughly in the fridge for a day before baking. Toss some garlic bread (or even some not-as-fresh hamburger or hot dog buns spread with butter and garlic powder) into the oven for the last few minutes of baking, and use a bag of salad mix as a quick side, and dinner will be ready in no time!

Baked Ziti



INGREDIENTS

- 16 oz. ziti pasta
- 1 package (4) Italian sausage links, casing removed
- 2 lbs. ground beef
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 Tbsp. minced garlic
- 2 Tbsp. dried Italian seasoning
- 1 large jar spaghetti sauce
- 1 small container ricotta cheese
- 2/3 cup Parmesan cheese
- 2 Tbsp. garlic salt
- 2 cups finely shredded mozzarella cheese

PREPARATION

1. Boil ziti until just slightly past al dente stage, then drain.
2. Toss ziti with 1/3 of the spaghetti sauce (while noodles are still hot) and set aside.
3. Brown sausage and ground beef with onion and garlic in large skillet, until cooked through and tender. Break/chop meat into small pieces while cooking.
4. If there is more than 1-2 tablespoons of grease in the skillet, drain the meat, then return it to the skillet.
5. Add Italian seasoning and remaining spaghetti sauce to meat mixture skillet and mix.
6. Mix ricotta with garlic salt and Parmesan cheese, then stir in 1/2 cup of the mozzarella cheese.
6. Put a thin layer of the meat mixture in the bottom of a 10" x 15" (3 qt) casserole dish.
7. Layer the ziti noodles on top of the meat in the dish.
8. Top the ziti noodles with half of the remaining meat mixture.
9. Dollop the ricotta mixture over the top of the ziti, spreading it out gently to cover as much of the ziti as possible.
10. Top the ricotta mixture with remaining meat sauce, then cover the entire top with mozzarella.
11. Bake, covered with foil, at 325 degrees for 30 minutes, or until heated through. Let stand for 5 minutes before serving.

Legion Auxiliary helps VA home



Wesson News

Pictured (left to right) are Cathy Stroud of Wesson (Auxiliary), Margaret Glass of Brookhaven (Exchange Club president), Nyanna Mapp of Collins (VA activities director), Sara Lassiter of Ruth (Auxiliary), and Kim Whittington of Wesson (Auxiliary).

Special to Wesson News

Wesson American Legion Auxiliary unit #79 teamed up with the Brookhaven Exchange Club to donate and present a popcorn machine to the Veteran's Affairs (VA) Home at Collins.

On visits to the VA home, auxiliary members had asked residents what they need or want, and they consistently asked for a popcorn maker.

"I'm glad we were able to provide something that requested," Auxiliary member Cathy Stroud said "It makes my heart happy."

An Auxiliary team delivered the donation last month. "There are lots of other groups that have needs," Auxiliary president Kim Whittington observed. "We are trying to meet those needs as best as we can, one at a time. Ask us how to get involved."

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Linda Mehri enjoys simple living

By Bob Arnold

Locals these days know Wesson native Linda Mehri as a story-teller. A retired teacher and seminary-trained church leader, today she reads to children at Wesson Public Library special programs to help spur their interest in books.

Raised as a farm girl, Mehri left Wesson in the late 1970s for what she thought would be a fairy tale marriage with a young wealthy Middle Eastern man she met at Co-Lin, but returned to the simplicity of Wesson living with two daughters after it became clear world travel, multiple homes and life in fabled cities was anything but a fairy tale.

Mehri may tell stories to children today, but fairy tales aren't her genre. And she prefers Wesson's simple life.

Mehri grew up on a dairy farm in the Sylvarena area as part of a family with five siblings – three brothers and two sisters. She recalls milking cows, riding quarter horses and participating in rodeos. Through the third grade, she attended the Wesson old school before transferring to Wesson Elementary School at the current Wesson Attendance Center. She graduated from the high school at Co-Lin, where she started college before earning a BS in Education with studies in English, Science and Social Studies at Mississippi College and graduate degrees from the University of Mississippi and the University of Southern Mississippi. In 1976, she received an MA in Theology, Psychology and Counseling from New Orleans Theological School.

Before attending Mississippi College, she served for four months as pioneer missionary on the Eaglebath native American tribal reservation in South Dakota. In 1973, after graduating from Mississippi College, Mehri taught English at then Parish High School in Hazlehurst and Slidell (Louisiana) Junior High School. As a seminary student from 1974-1977, she worked at Wesson Baptist Church.

In 1979, after teaching stints at Crystal Spring Junior High School and Madison, Mississippi, she married a Middle Eastern man on political asylum who she met at Co-Lin. He showered her with material wealth, and they traveled throughout Europe and other parts of the world, lived in Paris and

Rome and spent summers and Calgary, but, after 20 years, Mehri realized the marriage wasn't working.

"Cornbread marrying caviar, the farm marrying the palace just didn't work," she explains.

In 2000, Mehri left her husband with her two daughters – Lindsey, a nurse, now 40, and Ginny, an academic guidance counselor at Mississippi State University, now 35 – and settled in Wesson again in 2002 after a two-year Muslim divorce process.

Back in Wesson, Mehri returned to teaching and serving churches. She taught English at Crystal Springs and science and social studies to third graders at Wesson Attendance Center, where she retired in 2020. From 2004 to 2023, she served Beauregard United Methodist Church as Associate Pastor and was a Hospice Pastor for the United Methodist Church in Copiah County following Hurricane Katrina.



Special to Wesson News

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

What are your hobbies?

I am a reader. I sketch and play guitar. When I didn't suffer from arthritis, I enjoyed riding horses.

What do you read?

I like Christian writers Max Lacedo and Nicholas Sparks, mysteries – particularly those by Agatha Christie, and biographies.

How about movies or theater?

I enjoy ballet. *Gone with the Wind* is my favorite movie.

Do you have a special interest in music?

It took me a while to get into it, but I enjoy country. I like Italian and English singers, particularly Andrea Bocelli.

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

I would pay off my debts, and give to the church and other charities.

How would you change the world?

People must realize that it isn't material things and wealth that are important, but rather faith, family and friends.

Kamassa begins camps for disabled

Special to Wesson News

Thirty-one children and youth and five adults participated in the initial camping program this summer (June 30 through July 5) at Mississippi's Toughest Kids (MTK) Foundation's Camp Kamassa in Copiah County.

At the Wesson American Legion Post #79 October meeting, Mary Kitchens, who founded the Camp and MTK, reported on the summer program and ongoing construction at the unique facility, which serves children and adults living with chronic illness, physical and mental challenges, and other special needs.

MTK's Camp Kamassa is Mississippi's only year-round accessible camp for disabled persons, specifically designed to meet their needs. Weekly summer camps for school-aged children and adults have specific focuses and are staffed with medical professionals who provide care to the participants. Different groups living with or affected by various diagnoses and challenges are served at weekend events. A state-of-the-art sloped entry swimming pool is a

fun highlight for campers, due to its easy access for wheelchairs.

Kamassa is the Choctaw word that means "toughness" -- to persevere under difficulty and not give up, Kitchens said, adding that the word perfectly describes MTK's campers. Fundraising for MTK began in 2007, and construction of the camp started in 2018; and it has become a reality with assistance of U.S. Department of Defense's Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) team reservists, who work on needed infrastructure projects in communities nationwide.

For information regarding special events and fundraisers throughout the year, call or visit online at www.campkamassa.com or email mtk@mtkfound.com. The community can support Camp Kamassa by purchasing items from its wish list, donating to MTK Foundation, funding one of its "naming items," buying an MTK car tag, cookbook, children's book or t-shirt; shopping at the MTK online store, or giving through Kroger Community Rewards (organization number VG910).



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Basketball coaches expect improved teams



Men's basketball team.

Special to Wesson News



Women's basketball team.

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Coaches of both the Co-Lin men and women basketball teams are expecting them to improve in 2024-25 play.

In 2023-24, the men finished 16-11 overall record and 8-6 in the Mississippi Association of Community College Conference (MACCC) action. While the Wolves qualified for the Region 23 Tournament, their season ended with a first-round loss, 70-65, to Baton Rouge. The Lady Wolves, meanwhile, finished 13-13 overall and 5-9 in MACCC play and just missed the Region 23 tournament in their first year under head coach Dr. Britta Stephens.

In the new season, men's coach David Sanders says his group is still growing and adjusting to new challenges. Stephens says she is excited about this upcoming year and what this year's squad brings to the court.

"Right now, we are a little up and down as a team," explains Sanders. "I think we have a really good team with a great group of freshmen, along with some sophomores that we are expecting to step up and play in big minutes for us."

The Wolves' roster features 15 players, with six returning sophomores, including Antonio Oatis (Hattiesburg), Jayden Jackson (Camden), Courterius Scott (Jackson), Corey Brown (Roxie), Dakotah Hillard (Hazlehurst), and Fred Gray, Jr., (Belzoni).

"I think the biggest thing for us will be getting guard Courterius Scott back from an injury," says Sanders. "This is a good group of guys, and I think they are great students. Basketball-wise, this group didn't get to play a whole lot of minutes last season at times, outside of Courterius, Jayden, and Dakotah, which will give us some experience for this season."

The nine incoming freshmen for the Wolves are Brick Nkugwa (Kampala, Uganda), Prince Ojukwu (Etobicoke, Ontario), Demarion Terry (Edwards), Javian Watkins (Jackson), Deven Bates (Jackson), Chris Stephens, Jr., (Byram), Dawson Know (Brookhaven), Zach Thompson (Hattiesburg), and Keisean Shields (Atoka, OK).

"Prince has already picked up a couple of Division I offers, and he is going to be a player that will push for starters minutes," says Sanders. "Brick is going to be a big X-factor for us, when we can get him rolling. He is struggling a little bit in the preseason; but, he is a great athlete and really tough, so we have to find ways to get him on the floor."

"With freshmen, it's all about managing those ups and downs and getting them to be steady throughout the game, no matter what. These guys want to make every play; and, when they don't, we must be able to pick them up and keep them focused, despite a mistake. I see a lot of these guys having a really great season on the court, and they are good students, too."

Coach Sanders said one big factor that will lead the Wolves back to another conference championship season is leadership.

"Leadership is going to be the biggest thing for this team," he says. "Looking back at our championship season, what sticks out to me is that we had a group of guys that really trusted each other and had ultimate leadership with those veteran players."

Sanders also said that he believes this team can be successful in the postseason if they can do one simple thing.

"We have to match the other teams' intensity," says Sanders. "I think that's

SPORTS
SHORTS



one thing that I see that has separated the teams that win in the postseason from the others - coming out and wanting it more, while having a group of guys focusing on that one-game-at-a-time mindset."

This season's Lady Wolves' squad features 12 players, with only two returners from last season, those being guards Kiersten Haynes (Clinton) and Angel "Cookie" Wilkinson (Brookhaven). While the ten new faces feature nine incoming freshmen, including Maddison Mitchell (Baton Rouge, LA), Eymani Key (Lafayette, LA), Zariah Hatten (Taylorsville), Jamyria Robinson (St. Martin), Tyra Johnson (Morton), Kaylee Johnson (Booneville), Kamaiah Pruitt (Pass Christian), Amari Barnes (Tylertown), and Kylinn Bell (Choctaw), along with transfer sophomore Chrystance Walters (Pearl), who comes to Co-Lin after spending one season at Coahoma.

"We are a totally new team this season," says Stephens. "It is nice to have those two returners with us. Them having the experience of playing a full season is huge for us, because they understand what it takes to compete at this level."

"I think, at the point position, we will have a constant rotation that features Maddison Mitchell and Kylinn Bell.

Kaylee Johnson and Amari Barnes are two that have played very well this pre-season, and we can feature them at the wing or as an undersized post position, with their versatility. Tyra Johnson might be the quietest person on our team, but, during our scrimmage at Southwest, it was like a light bulb went off; and, when she turns it on, she has a chance to be really good."

"Chrystance Walters is a post that is a big 6'2" player. She has worked extremely hard on her fitness and conditioning, and we have already seen how that is paying off for us in her ability to finish around the rim. Zariah Hatten, Jay Robinson, and Kam Pruitt are three of our undersized

post players that I am expecting big things out of this season. Those three are going to be matchup nightmares for our opponents, because of their ability to put the ball on the floor from that post position. Eymani Key is an athletic scoring wing, and she has a chance to be really special when everything is clicking for her."

Stephens says fans should expect to see a lot of similarities from last year's team, but there will be some differences, as well.

"This year's team will play a very similar style of basketball to what we played last year," she says. "Where this team is different is in their versatility. We have so many players that can play a wide range of positions, which I love about this team. I think, defensively, we will be able to play a variety of styles and will be able to change throughout the game as we need to. I think this year's team plays hard, and one thing I think this team does better is shooting the ball."

Another difference this year: Stephens and her team expect to see post-season play.

"We want to be in a position to try and host this season, and that is why we're focusing on learning and growing during the games before conference play starts," Stephens says. "We want to be playing our best basketball throughout the conference play portion of the schedule once we get back from our break, while continuing to grow and learn; and then we want to be able to get into the region tournament and make a run at it."

17 compete for Most Beautiful



Special to Wesson News

From left, third alternate Riley Thornton of Brookhaven, first alternate Brianna Brown of Hazlehurst, Co-Lin's Most Beautiful Reagan Newman of Wesson, second alternate Rebekah Girault of Crystal Springs, and fourth alternate Skyler Sojourner of Georgetown.

Special to Wesson News

Co-Lin's annual Trillium Beauty Pageant saw 17 young women competing for the title of Co-Lin's Most Beautiful, with Reagan Newman of Wesson crowned Most Beautiful, first alternate Brianna Brown of Hazlehurst, second alternate Rebekah Girault of Crystal Springs, third alternate Riley Thornton of Brookhaven, and fourth alternate Skyler Sojourner of Georgetown.

Newman is the daughter of Cliff and Tammy Newman of Wesson. She is a sophomore at Co-Lin majoring in architecture. She serves as Vice President of Phi Theta Kappa, communications leader for the Baptist Student Union, and is a Co-Lin Colette. She is a member of Mu Alpha Theta and serves as a Trailblazer. Newman was recently elected as Miss Copiah-Lincoln Community College. She graduated from Brookhaven Academy, where she was inducted into the Hall of Fame and was selected as Miss Brookhaven Academy.

Brown is the daughter of Derek and Tracy Brown of Hazlehurst. She is a freshman majoring in respiratory therapy. She serves as Vice President of the Student Government Association and is a member of the Trailblazers, Alpha Omega Science Club, and CARES Club. She is on the Blue Wave Show Band Color Guard and is actively involved with the Baptist Student Union. She is a graduate of Brookhaven High School.

Girault is the daughter of Johnny and Susie Girault of Hazlehurst and Jarrett and Nita Moore of Crystal Springs. She is a freshman at Co-Lin majoring in business and is a member of the Co-Lin Cheerleading squad. She is a graduate of Copiah Academy.

Thornton is the daughter of Chris and Autumn Thornton of Brookhaven. She is a freshman at Co-Lin majoring in nursing. She is a Co-Lin Cheerleader and a Trailblazer. Thornton is a member of the Alpha Omega Science Club and is active in the Baptist Student Union. She is a graduate of Loyd Star Attendance Center.

Sojourner is the daughter of Ben and Shellie Sojourner of Georgetown. She is a freshman majoring in nursing. She is a member of the Co-Lin Colettes dance team, the Alpha Omega Science Club, the Trailblazers, and is an active member of the Baptist Student Union. She is a graduate of Copiah Academy.

Other contestants selected in the Top 10 were Ellie Barrentine of Crystal Springs, Abigail Blue of Wesson, Makiah Jones of Hazlehurst, Gracie Williams of Bogue Chitto, and Natalie Womack of Brookhaven.

Band/Colette alumni honor pair

Special to Wesson News

The Co-Lin Blue Wave Band and Colette Alumni Chapter presented Allison Dann its Stanley Stewart Outstanding Young Alumni Award and inducted Buddy Gibbons into its Hall of Fame.

Dann, a 2012 graduate of Co-Lin, played trumpet in the Blue Wave Show Band. After Co-Lin, she earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the Mississippi University for Women and a Master of Business Administration with an emphasis in human resources. She is currently enrolled in



Wesson News

Allison Dann

Mississippi State University's community college leadership program.

Dann currently serves as the coordinator of housing and student life at Co-Lin, is a Cub Scout den leader for Family Pack 124, assists with the Overbrook Songwriters Festival and helps with several fundraisers at Magnolia Blues BBQ.

Gibbons, a 1990 graduate of Co-Lin, was a member of the Blue Wave Show Band, the Sojourners rock ensemble and choir. After Co-Lin, he received a Bachelor of Science in social science from the University of Alabama.

With more than 250,000 placements on network television, Gibbons is a highly respected and sought-after musician.

His work has garnered endorsement deals with a variety of musical instrument, professional audio and consumer products manufacturers, and his social media presence includes NextBigSound.com as a "viral" content provider.

Gibbons recently composed music for CBS, NBC, Fox Sports, Animal Planet, Hulu and Netflix. The Los Angeles Dodgers commissioned him to create its team theme song and stadium intro music for all home games, television broadcasts and a web presence. For the past several years, he has been hosting "The Groove Diner," a high-level internet show in which he interviews some of the most successful and famous musicians and actors in Los Angeles.

Gibbons and his wife Natalie have one child, Walker.



Wesson News

Buddy Gibbons (left) with former Co-Lin band director Stanley Stewart.



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Grand opening involves wider community

Special to Wesson News

With the help of other Wesson businesses and residents, Grace-Foam Solutions spotlighted its services and, in the process, helped boost commerce throughout the town in a unique grand opening and ribbon-cutting.

For its special ceremony and celebration on Friday, December 6, the company solicited community involvement, inviting businesses, organizations and residents to not only attend the event, but call attention to their work and contributions to the town through donations that could be used as special gifts for everyone on hand.

Gift tags were made for the donations, which included, among other things, meals, baked good, gift certificates, professional consultations, products, and business services. They were hung on a Christmas tree for those in attendance to pick one that revealed a gift.

The idea was to turn a grand opening focused on one new business into a fun event that promoted other local businesses, service providers and individuals, and motivated people to buy from them or use them.

Grace Foam Solutions on Highway 51 operates at what local folk still call the “old Sunflower Grocery store” and that housed a Halloween season haunted house that brought visitors to town for several years.

The company, which distributes spray-foam insulation products of Largo, Indiana-based Central Urethane, is the business dream of Ricky Breazeale, who settled in Wesson nine years ago with his wife Jessica, a local native, and Brent Duguid, who came here with his wife Stephanie 16 years ago when she was hired for an executive position at Co-Lin and later himself became Dean of the college’s Career, Technical and Workforce Education (CTE) division.

GFS currently distributes its foam product in Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Georgia and Tennessee through contractors who install them. It has two other locations in Boonville and Hattiesburg. Breazeale started the company in September 2023, and Duguid came on board as a delivery driver in January 2024 to become part owner. Breazeale named the company to reflect his values and provide the basis for its motto, beliefs and vision, and Duguid concurred.

“Since we are children of God and covered by His Grace, we get the opportunity to share this message of Grace with customers, vendors and the entire community,” says Breazeale. “This isn’t just a business, but a ministry, too,” said Breazeale.



Special to Wesson News
L to R Owners Brent & Stephanie Duguid and Owners Ricky & Jessica Breazeale & son Walker. Brandon Burch, manager of logistics and warehouse manager at GFS, and his wife Brittany



Special to Wesson News
L to R Owners Brent & Stephanie Duguid and Owners Ricky & Jessica Breazeale & son Walker.

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Oysters, healthcare, green spaces & power

Special to Wesson News

Oysters return. The Mississippi Gulf Coast, battered by a mammoth oil spill more than a decade ago and left bereft by years of subsequent flooding, had its first oyster season since 2018. The oyster season opened at sunrise, November 13, in eight harvesting areas, and lasted 10 days. The season arrived with the approach of Thanksgiving, when residents look forward to including oysters in holiday spreads. The state has invested millions to restore oyster reefs since the 2010 BP oil spill. But flooding has, in subsequent years, decimated the beds, diluting salinity in the Mississippi Sound to the point that oysters couldn't survive. In 2019, Mississippi River water released through the Bonnet Carré Spillway in Louisiana killed almost all the oysters on Mississippi's most productive reefs, which are in the western sound.

Medicaid expansion on agenda. Mississippi's Republican legislative leaders say they plan to push for Medicaid expansion to cover working people who earn too little to afford private insurance — a position that business groups have advocated but that Republican Gov. Tate Reeves opposes. House Speaker Jason White and Lt. Gov. Delbert Hosemann spoke about their 2025 policy priorities to hundreds of business people and community leaders at Hobnob, a social gathering hosted by Mississippi Economic Council, the state chamber of commerce. Medicaid expansion is an option under the health overhaul that then-President Barack Obama signed into law in 2010. Mississippi is one of the poorest states in the U.S., and it's one of 10 states that have not expanded the program. The vast majority of funding for the expansion would come from the federal government, but the state would have to cover some costs.

Jackson green spaces. A group of nonprofits are teaming up to build new green spaces in the state's capital city, looking to offer environmental benefits, such as limiting both flooding as well as a phenomenon known as "heat islands." Ridgeland-based 2C Mississippi, founded in 2017 by Dominika Parry, is building green spaces along the historic Parish Street in downtown Jackson. The groups recently acquired \$1.5 million through the Inflation Reduction Act for the idea. The idea for the spaces, which will go in courtyards, includes new trees, vertical gardens, and a maintained grassy area for gatherings. 2C Mississippi is also working on building "microparks," and Voice of Calvary Ministries, another nonprofit, along with some other groups, is working to restore and build new homes in about 150 properties near the Jackson Zoo.



State eyes nuclear future. As the world looks towards alternative energy forms to balance an increased demand with the need to limit carbon emissions, Mississippi's Public Service Commission is hoping to move the state ahead of the curve with nuclear power. The PSC oversees a broad range of public utility issues, such as electric generation, power bills, water infrastructure, among many others. Public Service Commissioners are Chris Brown (Northern District), De'Keither Stamps (Central District) and Wayne Carr (Southern District). "We think nuclear's our future," Brown says. "Economic development in the future is going to go to places where you have affordable and reliable power, and one of the most affordable and reliable power sources is nuclear," Stamps adds. Nuclear power isn't considered renewable because its required fuel, such as uranium, is a finite resource, but its generation doesn't yield any carbon emissions. Compared to renewable energy like wind and solar, nuclear plants can run more consistently and use up less space. However, nuclear power comes with much higher upfront costs and more government restrictions because of safety concerns. On top of that, the United States doesn't have any permanent storage facilities for nuclear waste. In 2023, 76% of Mississippi's generated energy came from natural gas, much higher than the 43% for the country as a whole.

New healthcare options. A Navy veteran nurse practitioner has started offering mental health services in Brookhaven. Laterra Arnold has opened Focus Mental Health Solutions at 232 West Court Street. She has 13 years of nursing experience in the U.S. Navy and worked another 15 years in Jackson at Baptist and University of Mississippi Medical Center. "I have been studying the mind during my entire nursing career, and am working on a doctoral degree at the University of Alabama," Arnold reports. Her new practice will provide medical and psychiatric evaluations and therapy, and make referrals through telehealth. Focus Solution's hours are 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. by appointment, with walk-ins welcomed from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. and on Saturdays from 7 a.m. to 12 noon along with appointments. Dr. Justin T. Badon, a fellowship-trained shoulder, elbow and upper extremity orthopedic surgeon has also joined Southern Bone & Joint Specialists at Brookhaven and Hattiesburg. A member of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons and American Shoulder and Elbow Surgeons, he earned a BA in biology at Delta State University and his medical degree at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine before completing a residency at the University of Mississippi Medical Center and a fellowship program at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

Insurance exchange fight. State Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney says he is willing to sue the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services if it does not allow Mississippi to create a state-based health insurance exchange because of Republican Gov. Tate Reeves' potential opposition. Federal officials, who must approve of a state implementing its own health insurance exchange, want a letter of approval from a state's governor before they allow a state to implement the program, according to Chaney. Earlier this year, the Legislature passed a law authorizing Chaney's agency to create a Mississippi-based exchange to replace the federal exchange that currently is used by Mississippians to obtain health insurance. The bill became law without the governor's signature. States that operate their own exchanges can typically attract more companies to write health insurance policies and offer people policies at lower costs, and it would likely save the state millions of dollars in payments to the federal government.



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