

## INSIDE:

Area Arts.....	2
Living Healthy.....	6
Sports Shorts.....	9
Chow Time.....	13
Pickleball Coming.....	15
Christmas Carnival.....	16

# Wesson News

SPOTLIGHT

Grade 'A'  
for WAC  
Page 5

Volume 12, Number 11

“Good News You Can Use”

November, 2024

## Library wall mural by Montana Beeson gifted to Town

By Jessica Beazeale

Wesson Friends of the Library (FOL) officially gifted the community with its first town wall mural at a ribbon cutting ceremony last month. It can be viewed in the Susan Alsbury Garden behind the outdoor library pavilion.

“Wesson Public Library (WPL) is doing remarkable things, and the mural is icing on the cake,” Librarian Marilyn Britt told nearly 100 persons who received the gift.

Wesson Chamber of Commerce officials cut the ribbon. Wesson Garden Club helped beautify the event location. The Wesson Attendance Center Beta Club volunteered as greeters and helpers. Representatives from Wesson businesses, Wesson Lion’s Club, American Legion Post #79 in Wesson, *Wesson News*, Town of Wesson, Jessica Breazeale Consulting and Founder’s Day queen Abbey Berch and princesses Callie Duplantis and Kalana Nhem celebrated the occasion.

The mural – a vision of WPL Librarian Britt inspired by those she saw on a drive through another town – became a project of Wesson Friends of the Library (FOL) after Britt shared her thoughts with its members. It depicts shelves of classic and modern books, some written by Mississippi authors, and The Holy Bible, with youthful readers leaning against them under a cloudy blue sky featuring the words of Garrison Keillor that “a book is a gift you can open again and again.”

“I thought Wesson needed its own mural, too,” Britt says.

FOL, which commissioned Brookhaven-based artist Montana Beeson, a Wesson native, to capture Britt’s vision and ideas of its members on the mural, hosted the ribbon cutting highlighted by guest speaker Walt Grayson, who also covered the event on his WJTV Jackson “Daily Sip” television program Friday, November 1.

Pointing to the mural at the event, Grayson, a beloved personality, television feature reporter, writer and producer, host of “Mississippi Roads,” and author of four books, talked about story telling within the context of the wall painting: “You tell a story, and people know what’s going on. Jesus did that. Other than the Sermon on the Mount, which also has a lot of stories and parables in it, all of his other sermons were parables or stories. Stories are so important. You can look at this and you see the stories that have been told – a bunch of them. I’ve got some about Wesson in my books, I think. I’ll have to go back and re-read them. If I didn’t, I meant to.”

On behalf of FOL, Britt advanced the mural project in a conversation with Beeson after she



Special to Wesson News

At mural ribbon cutting (left to right) were Cailley Duplantis, Wesson Chamber of Commerce princess; Montana Beeson, artist; Pam Chance, Janet Currie and Kita Jackson, Chamber board members; Teri Bath, Chamber president; Abby Berch, Founders’ Day queen; Marilyn Britt, Librarian at Wesson Public Library; Walt Grayson, speaker at event; Dr. Steven Liverman, Wesson Friends of Library treasurer; and Kalana Nhem, Chamber princess.

At the Friends of the Library (FOL) ribbon cutting ceremony to dedicate the first town mural, Librarian Marilyn Britt announced FOL has been awarded a Home Depot grant to create a town museum and meeting space.

The grant will fund renovation of the former Boy Scouts building at 1915 Beech Street adjacent the municipal park.

The new FOL project will take at least a month to complete.

observed her painting windows at Christy Shaw’s C&L Treasures on Route 51.

“She thought it would be wonderful for a native Wesson artist to paint the town’s first mural, and I was on board,” Beeson recalls.

Beeson describes herself as “a Jane of all trades” like her grandparents and all her ancestors – “from music, art, writing to making local honey.”

“I have two music albums on iTunes,” she says. “I have art in multiple vendor malls. I homeschool my boys, and I’m actually a nurse by profession.” With the mural project, she says “I’m finally getting started doing what I was meant to do. All my life, God has been preparing me for something special, and I’m just getting started on the outward display of that plan.”

After a few phone calls, emails, and going back to the drawing board multiple times trying to incorporate the vision of Britt and FOL members, the mural project took a couple of months to complete.

In painting the mural, Beeson says she wanted to bring more life to the garden area that the Wesson Garden Club created. “I want to encourage people -- but especially children -- to read,” she explains. “So I prayed and asked God to help me, and here we are.”

## Bowers and Wilbert named Co-Lin Alumni of Year

Special to Wesson News

Co-Lin has honored 1992 graduate Matt Bowers and 2012 graduate Jarvis Wilbert Alumnus of the Year and Young Alumnus of the Year.

Bowers, from New Orleans, played on the Wolf Pack baseball team while attending Co-Lin and went on to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Mississippi.

The president, founder and chairman of Matt Bowers Auto Group, Bowers is responsible for the development of strategic operational initiatives that promote revenue growth and profitability across the company, including strategic acquisitions. His com-



Special to Wesson News  
Matt Bowers

pany encompasses 11 award-winning franchise car dealerships doing business in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and

Tennessee that produce revenues of more than \$1 billion annually with more than 900 employees.

Bowers serves on the Board of Commissioners for the Louisiana Stadium and Exposition District commissioned to manage the states’ assets in Metro New Orleans, which include the Caesars Superdome, Smoothie King Center, TPC of Louisiana, and others.

He enjoys spending time with his wife and two teenage sons, going to sports events, and relaxing on his ranch in Oxford.

Wilbert, from Hattiesburg, also played on

the Wolf Pack baseball team under Coach Keith Case. After Co-Lin, he received a Bachelor of Science in business admin-

istration and a Master of Business Administration at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM).

A senior territory manager with Eli Lilly and Company, Wilbert advocates for patients with chronic illnesses. The company honored him as its territory manager of the year and platinum performer for the Gulf Coast area in 2023.

Wilbert gives back to his community through Lily’s Global Day of Service. He has also worked in food kitchens serving underprivileged people in the Delta and assisted with the con-



Special to Wesson News  
Jarvis Wilbert

struction of an orphanage in Gulfport. He coordinated a 5K in Hattiesburg to promote suicide prevention.

USM recognized Wilbert as its Young Alumni of the Year in 2021, and *Mississippi Business Journal* named him to its “Top 40 under 40” in 2023.

“To receive any accolade, I credit the people that helped me get there,” he said. “While I may not be the wealthiest person from a financial standpoint, I’m wealthy in the fact that people notice my humbleness. They notice that I’m a hard worker. They notice I will go above and beyond to help the next person get to where they need to be.”

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# Mississippi's 10 music greats

Special to Wesson News

Mississippi, known as the birthplace of blues music, has produced a remarkable array of talented and influential musicians. From soulful crooners to powerful gospel singers, the Magnolia State has been home to some of the most iconic voices in American music history. From the gritty, raw emotion of the blues to the uplifting melodies of gospel music, they have captured the hearts of audiences around the world:

**Lance Bass**, born in Laurel, Mississippi, is renowned as one-fifth of the iconic boy band NSYNC, which dominated the late 90s and early 2000s music scene. His silky smooth voice, boyish charm, and charismatic stage presence propelled NSYNC to global stardom, earning them legions of devoted fans worldwide. Bass, with his distinct vocal range and infectious energy, contributed significantly to the group's chart-topping hits such as "Bye Bye Bye" and "It's Gonna Be Me."

**Charlie Pride**, hailing from Sledge, Mississippi, stands tall as one of the most revered and groundbreaking figures in country music history. Pride's rich baritone voice and heartfelt delivery captivated audiences worldwide, churning out hits like "Kiss an Angel Good Mornin'," "Is Anybody Goin' to San Antone," and "Mountain of Love," earning him numerous awards and accolades, including multiple Grammy Awards and inductions into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

**Sam Cooke**, a towering figure in the realm of soul music, remains an eternal icon among Mississippi's most celebrated vocalists. Born in Clarksdale in 1931, Cooke's velvety voice and profound songwriting prowess carved an indelible mark on the music industry, fusing gospel with rhythm and blues. His breakout single "You Send Me" catapulted him to stardom in 1957, marking the beginning of a meteoric rise, with an array of timeless hits, including "Cupid," "Chain Gang," and the civil rights anthem "A Change Is Gonna Come." Cooke's life was cut short in 1964, but his impact endures and continues to resonate across the globe.

**Conway Twitty**, a legendary figure in country music, emerged as one of Mississippi's most cherished and influential singers. Born Harold Lloyd Jenkins in Friars Point in 1933, Twitty's journey from Mississippi cotton fields to Nashville stardom is a quintessential American success story. With his distinctive baritone voice and heartfelt lyrics, he captivated with hits like "Hello Darlin'," "It's Only Make Believe," and "Tight Fittin' Jeans." His unparalleled ability to convey raw emotion through song made him a beloved figure among fans worldwide. Although Twitty passed away in 1993, his legacy endures through his timeless music.

**Bobbie Gentry** stands as one of Mississippi's most enigmatic and captivating musical talents, renowned for her soulful voice, evocative storytelling, and pioneering blend of country, pop, and folk music. Born Roberta Lee Streeter in Chickasaw County in 1944, Gentry burst onto the music scene in 1967 with her iconic smash hit "Ode to Billie Joe," a haunting narrative ballad that captivated listeners worldwide with its mysterious storyline and her rich, sultry vocals. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, Gentry continued to dazzle audiences with her distinctive blend of country and pop, delivering a string of hits including "Fancy," "Okolona River Bottom Band," and "Mississippi Delta." Her unparalleled songwriting prowess and mesmerizing stage presence solidified her status as one of the era's most revered performers.

**Tammy Wynette**, affectionately known as the "First Lady of Country Music," stands as one of Mississippi's most beloved and influential singers. Born Virginia Wynette Pugh in Itawamba County in 1942, Wynette's journeyed from rural Mississippi to Nashville stardom with a distinctive Southern twang and emotionally resonant lyrics that captured the hearts of millions in timeless classics like "Stand by Your Man," "D-I-V-O-R-C-E," and "Golden Ring" drawing from her tumultuous personal experiences. Her powerful voice and unapologetic vulnerability made her an icon among fans worldwide, earning her numerous



Wesson News

accolades, including multiple Grammy Awards and induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame. Her collaborations with fellow country legends like George Jones and Billy Sherrill further solidified her status as a trailblazer within the genre.

**Faith Hill**, a Mississippi-born powerhouse, ascended from humble beginnings to become one of the most iconic figures in country music. Born Audrey Faith Perry in Ridgeland in 1967, Hill's journey to stardom is marked by exceptional vocal talent, and innate ability to connect with audiences on a profound level. Her debut album, "Take Me as I Am," spawned multiple chart-topping singles, including "Wild One" and "Piece of My Heart." Hits like "This Kiss," "Breathe," and "There You'll Be" that showcased her versatility as an artist and solidified her status as one of the most influential voices in contemporary country music. Her marriage to fellow country superstar Tim McGraw has become legendary in its own right, with the couple often collaborating on stage and in the studio to create magic together.

**Jimmie Rodgers**, often hailed as the "Father of Country Music," stands as a towering figure in Mississippi's musical heritage and a seminal influence on the country music genre as a whole. Born in Meridian in 1897, Rodgers' pioneering blend of blues, folk, and yodeling techniques revolutionized

the sound of country music and paved the way for generations of artists to come. Early recordings, including the timeless classics "Blue Yodel No. 1 (T for Texas)" and "Blue Yodel No. 2 (My Lovin' Gal Lucille)," and a string of hits in the 1930s, including "Waiting for a Train," "In the Jailhouse Now," and "Mule Skinner Blues" earned him widespread acclaim and adoration from fans and fellow musicians alike. Despite his untimely death from tuberculosis in 1933 at the age of just 35, Rodgers' influence on country music endures to this day.

**B.B. King**, born Riley B. King in Itta Bena, Mississippi, in 1925, stands as one of the most iconic and influential figures in the history of the blues. His profound impact on music, culture, and the world at large earned him the title "The King of Blues." King's musical journey began in the Mississippi Delta, where he honed his craft as a guitarist and vocalist, drawing inspiration from the rich tapestry of blues, gospel, and jazz that surrounded him. In the 1950s and 1960s, King's career soared to new heights with a string of hits including "Every Day I Have the Blues," "The Thrill Is Gone," and "Sweet Little Angel." His electrifying live performances, marked by his signature Gibson guitar "Lucille" and impassioned vocals, captivated audiences around the world.

**Elvis Presley**, the undisputed King of Rock and Roll, was born on January 8, 1935, in Tupelo, Mississippi. Elvis would rise to become one of the most iconic and influential figures in the history of popular music with revolutionary fusion of blues, gospel, country, and rhythm and blues. His electrifying performances, gyrating hips, and charismatic stage presence captivated audiences and earned him legions of devoted fans and the title "The King." In the mid-1950s, Elvis exploded onto the music scene with a string of hits including "Heartbreak Hotel," "Hound Dog," and "Love Me Tender."



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## Library launches Mississippi writers focus

Special to Wesson News

Wesson Public Library (WPL) this month initiated an ongoing focus on Mississippi writers with a display spotlighting John Grady Burns' books on floral design.

"Mississippi has a plethora of fiction and non-fiction writers versed in a variety of topics and masters of diverse genre," says WPL Librarian Marilyn Britt. "In the months ahead, Wesson Public Library will bring them to the readers in our community through special displays that highlight their work."

During a season characterized by color and imaginative design inspired by nature, John Grady Burns is an appropriate writer to inaugurate the Mississippi authors focus program, Britt observed.

A native of Natchez, Burns credits the "Garden Club Ladies" of his town as the example he has fol-



Books by John Grady Burns spotlighted at Wesson Public Library.

lowed in writing his books. "Not only do they appreciate and preserve beauty, but they promote it," he says.

After earning his degree in Retail Floral Management at Mississippi State University, he accepted an invitation to help create floral designs for the White House, Blair House and ambassadors and foreign and domestic dignitaries. In the mid-1980s, he moved to Atlanta to pursue a career in retail and special events. In 1982, he embarked on a 16-year career teaching art and floral design at Kennesaw State University and continues teaching at Hall's Atlanta Floral Design School while managing a floral design business. He also lectures and leads demonstrations and flower programs throughout the country, works with cutting edge designers nationally and internationally and volunteers his time and artistry in support of the Southeastern Flower Show.



**Property & Casualty Insurance Companies**  
**Abstract of the Annual Statement**  
As of December 31, 2023

**Versant Casualty Insurance Company**  
P. O. Box 84410  
Baton Rouge, LA 70884

Total Assets .....	\$112,009,467
Total Liabilities .....	\$82,211,116
Capital Stock .....	\$2,500,000
Surplus Funds .....	\$27,298,351
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$29,798,351
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$112,009,467

**Mississippi Insurance Department**  
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**Mike Chaney**  
Commissioner of Insurance

**Property & Casualty Insurance Companies**  
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As of December 31, 2023

**Vigilant Insurance Company**  
436 Walnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Total Assets .....	\$503,053,448
Total Liabilities .....	\$122,205,690
Capital Stock .....	\$4,500,000
Surplus Funds .....	\$376,347,758
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$380,847,758
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$503,053,448

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**Property & Casualty Insurance Companies**  
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As of December 31, 2023

**Warner Insurance Company**  
200 E. Randolph St., Suite 3300  
Chicago, IL 60601

Total Assets .....	\$18,590,843
Total Liabilities .....	\$290,018
Capital Stock .....	\$3,000,000
Surplus Funds .....	\$15,300,825
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$18,300,825
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$18,590,843

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As of December 31, 2023

**Wausau Underwriters Insurance Company**  
175 Berkeley Street M09G  
Boston, MA 02116

Total Assets .....	\$122,617,803
Total Liabilities .....	\$45,068,736
Capital Stock .....	\$4,500,000
Surplus Funds .....	\$73,049,067
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$77,549,067
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$122,617,803

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As of December 31, 2023

**WCF Select Insurance Company**  
100 West Towne Ridge Parkway  
Sandy, UT 84070

Total Assets .....	\$28,480,376
Total Liabilities .....	\$33,366
Capital Stock .....	\$3,500,000
Surplus Funds .....	\$24,947,010
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$28,447,010
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$28,480,376

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As of December 31, 2023

**Victoria Fire & Casualty Company**  
One West Nationwide Blvd. 1-14-301  
Columbus, OH 43215

Total Assets .....	\$44,416,408
Total Liabilities .....	\$675,495
Capital Stock .....	\$4,208,327
Surplus Funds .....	\$39,532,586
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$43,740,913
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$44,416,408

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**Abstract of the Annual Statement**  
As of December 31, 2023

**Viking Insurance Company of Wisconsin**  
1800 North Point Drive  
Stevens Point, WI 54481

Total Assets .....	\$598,864,372
Total Liabilities .....	\$393,692,028
Capital Stock .....	\$3,000,000
Surplus Funds .....	\$202,172,344
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$205,172,344
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$598,864,372

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As of December 31, 2023

**Watford Insurance Company**  
445 South Street, Suite 220  
Morristown, NJ 07962-1988

Total Assets .....	\$44,479,702
Total Liabilities .....	\$19,910,340
Capital Stock .....	\$4,500,000
Surplus Funds .....	\$20,069,362
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$24,569,362
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$44,479,702

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**Property & Casualty Insurance Companies**  
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As of December 31, 2023

**Waypoint Mutual**  
1100 Walnut Street, Suite 3000  
Kansas City, MO 64106

Total Assets .....	\$168,075,673
Total Liabilities .....	\$106,273,425
Capital Stock .....	\$
Surplus Funds .....	\$61,802,248
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$61,802,248
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$168,075,673

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**Property & Casualty Insurance Companies**  
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As of December 31, 2023

**Wellfleet Insurance Company**  
5814 Reed Road  
Fort Wayne, IN 46835

Total Assets .....	\$282,548,748
Total Liabilities .....	\$220,785,717
Capital Stock .....	\$3,000,000
Surplus Funds .....	\$58,763,031
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$61,763,031
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$282,548,748

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**Property & Casualty Insurance Companies**  
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As of December 31, 2023

**Victoria Select Insurance Company**  
One West Nationwide Blvd. 1-14-301  
Columbus, OH 43215-2220

Total Assets .....	\$6,487,514
Total Liabilities .....	\$50,777
Capital Stock .....	\$1,000,000
Surplus Funds .....	\$5,436,737
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$6,436,737
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$6,487,514

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As of December 31, 2023

**Virginia Surety Company, Inc.**  
175 West Jackson Blvd.  
Chicago, IL 60604

Total Assets .....	\$1,842,658,934
Total Liabilities .....	\$1,482,411,898
Capital Stock .....	\$5,000,000
Surplus Funds .....	\$355,247,036
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$360,247,036
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$1,842,658,934

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Commissioner of Insurance

**Property & Casualty Insurance Companies**  
**Abstract of the Annual Statement**  
As of December 31, 2023

**Wausau Business Insurance Company**  
175 Berkeley Street M09G  
Boston, MA 02116

Total Assets .....	\$35,872,578
Total Liabilities .....	\$3,226,750
Capital Stock .....	\$10,900,000
Surplus Funds .....	\$21,745,828
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$32,645,828
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$35,872,578

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Commissioner of Insurance

**Property & Casualty Insurance Companies**  
**Abstract of the Annual Statement**  
As of December 31, 2023

**WCF National Insurance Company**  
P. O. Box 571918  
Salt Lake City, UT 84157-1918

Total Assets .....	\$240,118,734
Total Liabilities .....	\$11,143,628
Capital Stock .....	\$3,300,000
Surplus Funds .....	\$225,675,106
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$228,975,106
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$240,118,734

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Commissioner of Insurance

**Property & Casualty Insurance Companies**  
**Abstract of the Annual Statement**  
As of December 31, 2023

**Wellfleet New York Insurance Company**  
5814 Reed Road  
Fort Wayne, IN 46835

Total Assets .....	\$178,293,820
Total Liabilities .....	\$147,473,512
Capital Stock .....	\$3,001,981
Surplus Funds .....	\$27,818,327
Total Capital & Surplus .....	\$30,820,308
Total Liabilities, Surplus & Other Funds .....	\$178,293,820

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**Mike Chaney**  
Commissioner of Insurance

# Wesson Attendance Center gets A accountability grade

Special to Wesson News

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) awarded Wesson Attendance Center (WAC) an A accountability grade for the 2023-2024 school year, along with West Lincoln and Enterprise Elementary and Middle schools and High School, which were graded similarly, as the highest graded schools in Lincoln and Copiah Counties.

Statewide student assessment data make up a large part of accountability grades. In 2023-24, the overall percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced reached an all-time high in mathematics, English Language Arts (ELA) and science.

In 2016, when 62 percent of schools and districts received C or higher grades, MDE set a goal that all of them would be rated C, and 85.7% of schools and 93.9% of districts earned an A, B or C during the past school term – the largest ever share.

“I am incredibly proud of our students, teachers and school leaders for their academic achievements in the 2023-24 school year,” said Dr. Lance Evans, state superintendent of education. “This year’s school and district grades are a testament to the quality and success of Mississippi public schools. I am confident we will continue to build upon this success to make sure every Mississippi public school graduate is prepared for a successful future.”

Mississippi’s accountability grades help teachers, school leaders, parents and communities know how well their local

schools and districts are serving their students. The components of the state’s accountability system are based on state and federal law and State Board policy. They include:

- Student proficiency and growth rates in ELA and Mathematics in grades 3-8
- Growth of the lowest performing 25% of students in ELA and Mathematics
- Science proficiency in grades 5 and 8
- English Learner progress toward becoming proficient in the English language
- Performance on the ACT and high school Algebra I, English II, Biology and U.S. History assessment
- Student participation and performance in advanced coursework such as Advanced Placement, career and technical education programs and dual credit/dual enrollment courses
- Four-year graduation rate

MDE scores performances in these categories, awarding A grades to districts receiving 668 or more points, elementary and middle schools with 442 or more points and high schools earning 754 or more points

In the Copiah-Lincoln County area, MDE awarded Lincoln County School District and Copiah County School District an A and B respectively. Hazlehurst School District and Brookhaven School

Districts received Cs.

B-graded schools in the area were Alexander Junior High School, Bogue Chitto, Crystal Springs Elementary and High School, Hazlehurst Elementary and Loyd Star. Brookhaven Elementary and High School and Mamie Martin Elementary received Cs and Crystal Springs Middle, Hazlehurst Middle and High School and Lipsey School received Ds.

Wesson Attendance Center earned its A grade with student proficiency rates in math, English, U.S. History and science of 69.7 percent, 55.8 percent, 73.5 percent and 75.5 percent, respectively, and a 90.8 percent graduation rate.

Mississippi is recognized as a national leader in education because, over the past decade, students have made faster progress than nearly every other state. Several factors contributed to the steady rise in student achievement, including the implementation of higher academic standards and statewide support to teachers to help students reach higher standards. Other factors include the effective implementation of laws and policies that developed or strengthened early childhood education, literacy instruction, school and district accountability, and advanced learning opportunities for high school students.

Since 2013, Mississippi’s national Quality Counts ranking for K-12 achievement improved from 50th to 35th, and the state’s overall education grade improved from F to C- (the nation’s grade is C). In

2024, the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s KIDS COUNT® Data Book ranked Mississippi 30th in the nation for education, the state’s highest-ever ranking.

School and district achievements in 2023-24 extended to all districts under state leadership because of poor academic performance or a state of emergency. All four state-led districts have steadily improved under state leadership:

- Holmes County Consolidated School District: Improved to a B grade this year, after maintaining a C for two consecutive years. The district was rated F when it was taken over in 2021.
- Noxubee County School District: Maintained its C grade from 2023, improving upon its D rating in 2022. The district earned an F every year from 2016 to 2021.
- Achievement School District (ASD): The Humphreys County portion of the ASD improved its grade to a C, improving upon its D grade in 2023 and F in 2022. The Yazoo City portion of the ASD improved to a C from an F in 2023.

“The progress of our state-led districts proves what is possible when educators raise expectations, focus intensely on high-quality instruction and provide strong leadership,” Evans said. “Students are achieving at higher levels because they are being challenged and supported to succeed.”



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# Lung cancer screening saves lives

By Guest Columnist Stephanie Duguid

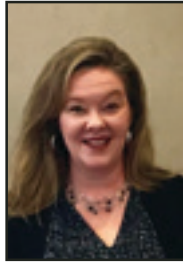
Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States, and it kills more people than colon, breast, and prostate cancers combined. Despite the severity of this disease, early detection can significantly improve survival rates.

Thanks to advancements in medical technology, lung cancer screenings are now more accessible and effective. However, many people who are eligible for screening may not realize its importance or know how to get started, according to Jonathan Hontzas, DNP, NP-C, TTS, Director of the ACT Center for Tobacco Treatment, Education, and Research Center, Lung Cancer Screening Services at the Cancer Center and Research Institute.

Lung cancer screening matters, and it can save lives, because the disease often goes undiagnosed until it's in an advanced stage, which limits treatment options and reduces survival chances. The five-year survival rate for lung cancer patients is only 18.6%, but, when the disease is caught early, at a localized stage, the survival rate jumps to 61%. Unfortunately, only 26% of lung cancer cases are diagnosed at this early stage. That's where lung cancer screening comes in—it helps detect cancer in its early, more treatable stages.

Low dose computed tomography (LDCT) scans are a key tool for early detection. These scans use significantly less radiation than traditional CT scans and have been proven to reduce lung cancer deaths by 20% compared to standard chest X-rays. Recent studies, such as the National Lung Screening Trial, have shown the benefit of LDCT, especially for high-risk groups such as long-term smokers.

Lung cancer screening is recommended for adults between the



ages of 50 and 80 who have a history of heavy smoking. This typically includes those who have smoked at least one pack a day for 20 years or more and are either still smoking or have quit within the past 15 years. If you fall into this category, it's important to speak with your healthcare provider about lung cancer screening. Medicare and most private insurance companies cover the cost of screening for those who meet these criteria.

Your healthcare provider will guide you through a shared decision-making process, discussing the risks and benefits of screening, your smoking history, and other health factors. They will also provide counseling on smoking cessation and emphasize the importance of annual screening for those at risk. Staying adherent to these yearly screenings is crucial in catching potential lung cancer early.

Getting screened for lung cancer can make a life-saving difference. Screening programs like the one supported by the Mississippi Lung Cancer Roundtable (MSLCRT) aim to increase awareness and access to lung cancer screening, especially in areas with high lung cancer rates. By improving outreach and education, more people are being encouraged to take proactive steps for their health.

Lung cancer screening offers a vital opportunity for early detection and treatment, especially for individuals at high risk. By taking part in regular screening, you're giving yourself the best chance for survival if lung cancer is present. If you or a loved one is a long-term smoker or has recently quit, now is the time to talk to your doctor about getting screened. Early detection saves lives.

For more information, you can contact the ACT Center for Tobacco Treatment, Education, and Research by visiting [www.act2quit.org](http://www.act2quit.org). For screenings call 601-984 - LUNG.

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

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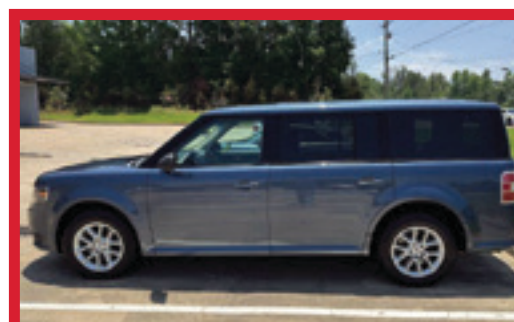


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# Funds needed for wreath-laying events



Special to Wesson News

The American Legion and Socks for Heroes (SFH), the Wesson-based veterans support charity, are again asking individual citizens, businesses and not-for-profit organizations around town to support area wreath-laying ceremonies to honor deceased veterans next month at the cemeteries where they have been laid to rest and associated venues.

The organizations which will lead the ceremonies are asking for donations to buy the wreaths at a cost of \$17 each. Drane Prime Unit #79 of the the American Legion at 1014 Main Street, Wesson, MS 39191, and Socks of Heroes at 1032 Cotton Street, Wesson, MS, are accepting the donations.

Wesson-based SFH organizes Christmas season wreath-laying on veterans' graves throughout the area, including those at Wesson Cemetery, among 2,100 nationwide, where ceremonies sponsored by Wreaths Across America honor men and women who sacrificed their lives in the armed forces.

WAA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded to continue and expand the annual wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery begun by Maine businessman Morrill Worcester in 1992.

"Our mission is to remember the fallen, honor those who serve and to teach our children the value of freedom," SFH's Cathy Stroud says. "We take time out to recognize the people that made the ultimate sacrifice."

WAA started in 1992 when Worcester Wreath in Maine found itself with a surplus of wreaths nearing the end of the holiday season. Remembering a moving boyhood experience at Arlington National Cemetery, owner Morrill Worcester seized on it as an opportunity to honor the country's veterans. With the aid of Maine Senator Olympia Snowe, he arranged for the wreaths to be placed at Arlington in one of the older sections of the cemetery that had been receiving fewer visitors with each passing year. Other individuals and organizations stepped up to help, including a local trucking company that transported the wreaths to Virginia, volunteers from local American Legion and VFW Posts and members of the Maine State Society of Washington, D.C. who helped make wreaths and organized laying them.

The event continued quietly each year until 2005, when a photo of grave-stones at Arlington, adorned with wreaths and covered in snow, circulated around the internet. The event drew national attention and expanded to thousands of other locations where the Arlington ceremonies were emulated. Nearly two million veteran wreaths are placed on headstones at participating cemeteries around the country.

The Arlington wreath-laying is still held annually, on the second or third Saturday of December. WAA's annual pilgrimage from Harrington, Maine, to Arlington National Cemetery has become known as the world's largest veterans' parade, stopping at schools, monuments, veterans' homes and communities all along the way to remind people how important it is to remember, honor and teach about the contributions of those who served their country in war time.

For information, contact Wesson American Legion's Kim W at 601-942-3319 or SOH's Stroud at 601-695-4140.

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# Six inducted into sports Hall of Fame

Special to Wesson News

The Co-Lin Athletic Alumni Association has inducted six members into the college's Sports Hall of Fame.

They are the late **Calvin Butler** of Hazlehurst, **Kiara Etienne** of Houston, Texas, **Andrew McGee** of Stillwater, OK, **Xavier Qualls** of Lutz, Florida, **Marianna Reeves** of Camden, South Carolina, and **Johnny Steptoe** of Amite, Louisiana.

Butler, a 1947 graduate of Co-Lin, played on the Wolf Pack football team. He enrolled at the college after serving in World War II in the U.S. Navy.

After Co-Lin, Butler played football at Mississippi Southern College, where he was recruited for the professional football draft by the Baltimore Colts. After college, he worked as a high school coach and a sales engineer. He was a deacon and Sunday school president at his church, and he served as a poll worker and the president of the advisory council at Copiah Academy.

"This honor shows Calvin Butler has left a legacy of hard work, determination, and a love of athletic excellence," his daughter Aimee Butler Burns said. Butler was married to Susan Spitchley, and they had three daughters, seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He died September 21, 1985 after a battle with cancer.

**Etienne**, a 2011 graduate of Co-Lin, played on the Wolf Pack basketball team. She was named to the second-team NJCAA All-American in 2011, the NJCAA National All-Tournament Team, NJCAA All-Region 23 and MACCC All-State First team. She led the team in scoring with 14.6 points per game. She made nearly 80 percent of her free throws and finished as the team's top three-point shooter. Her team finished 27-4 overall and 11-1 in league play. They won the MACCC South Division Championship, the MACJC State Championship and the NJCAA Region 23 Championship. They also made a NJCAA National Tournament appearance.

After Co-Lin, Etienne played basketball at Prairie View A&M University. She currently works as a pipe fitter.

"Being inducted into the Hall of Fame means so much to me," Etienne said. "Never in a million years, would I have thought a girl from a small town would accomplish such a thing. I'm glad to see all my hard work and dedication to the game of basketball paid off."

**McGee**, a 2008 graduate of Co-Lin, played on the Wolf Pack football team. While at Co-Lin, he was named First Team All-American and to the All-State team. He was also named Mr. Co-Lin.

After Co-Lin, McGee played football at Oklahoma State University. He was named to the First Team All Big 12. He currently is employed as the director of education at Leadercast. He is actively involved in his church and regularly volunteers at the YMCA and juvenile centers.

"My time at Co-Lin was one of the most important times in my life," he said. "It shaped who I am today. Being inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame solidifies my time there and acknowledges my accomplishments during my time there."

McGee and his wife have a 4 year old son.

**Qualls**, a 2006 graduate of Co-Lin played on the Wolf Pack baseball team. While at Co-Lin, he was named to the NJCAA All-American team.

After Co-Lin, Qualls played baseball at Southeastern Louisiana University (SELU). He was named to the 2000s All Decade Team at SELU. He currently works as a national sales executive with Molson Coors Beverage Company. He is a Lutz Little League baseball coach and a member of Disabilities United resource group.

"Being inducted into the Co-Lin Sports Hall of Fame is an incredible honor," he said. "I'm extremely humbled to be among a fraternity that connects me to a long and impressive list of athletes and just overall human beings. I'm proud to be in such great company and inspired to give back to the community that has given me so much."

He and his wife Tara have two children, Taya, 8, and Cassius, 5.

**Reeves**, a 1996 graduate of Co-Lin, played on the Wolf Pack softball and basketball teams. Selected for her outstanding softball achievements, she was named a First st team All-American by the NJCAA, with a batting average of .617 and a slugging percentage of 1.062. She was also named to the All Region team during her two years at the college and Co-Lin softball MVP in 1996. Her team won the 1996 state tournament, finished in the top three of the Region XXIII finals and placed seventh in the nation at the national tournament. She was also recognized as

a MACJC All-Star in basketball in 1996. Her basketball team finished the 1995-96 season in a tie for the regular season South Division and runner-up in the Region XXIII championship.

After Co-Lin, Reeves played basketball for one season at the University of West Alabama. She graduated from the University of South Carolina with a Bachelor of Science in physical education. She currently is an elementary PE teacher and a member of the South Carolina Foster Parent Association.

"It means the world to me to be inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame at Co-Lin," she said. "The two years I spent playing two sports that I love were filled with so many wonderful experiences and memories with people that I cherish every single day."

She is married to Debbie Smith Reeves, and they have four children: JJ, 11, Bryce, 10, Xae, 9, and Finley 8.

**Steptoe**, a 1987 graduate of Co-Lin, played on the Wolf Pack basketball team. While at Co-Lin, he was named the number one player in the country. After Co-Lin, Steptoe attended the Southern University in Baton Rouge.

"It means a lot to be selected," he said. "I really enjoyed myself when I went there, and choosing Co-Lin was one of the best moves I've made."

Steptoe has three sons and one daughter.



## WAC Cross Country brings home district Championship



Wesson News

Wesson Attendance Center Cross Country boys and girls teams brought home District Championship titles, with their hard work and dedication paying off.

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# Wesson Halloween



Photos special to Wesson News

Little princesses and goblins were on Wesson streets on Halloween night for the first community-wide Trunk-or-Treat followed by a bock party for Co-Lin students. Co-Lin Student Services, Enrollment Services, maintenance teams, and student clubs and organizations coordinated the events. Baptist Student Union held its annual Holy Ghost Weenie Roast during the event.



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## ILR class paints fall scenes

*Special to Wesson News*

Would-be painters celebrated the new fall season and got in touch with their creative sides guided by artist and teacher Dawn Marks in an Institute for Learning in Retirement (ILR) workshop last month.

Marks gave them the paints and planks from cypress timbers with the border lines of a fall scene with a barn, pumpkins and fall flowers, which they filled in with seasonal colors proud to create works they took home to hang on the walls.

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

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

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

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

Mark's husband dives into Lake Maurepas, adjacent Lake Pontchartrain at New Orleans, to retrieve the cypress timbers -- some thousands of years old, which he fashions into planks and prepares for the painting. Marks draws the outlines of subject matter on the media for her student painters to add colors. Many of them are religious in nature, although others are whimsical, like one with a deer eating a snowman's carrot nose.

Marks and her helpers bring all the materials to the class -- the cypress planks or sometimes old tin, which she also uses as a medium; usually house paints and sometimes watercolors for the palettes of her student painters.

"We make things as easy as possible for our classes," she says.

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

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

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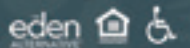
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## PECAN PIE FOR THANKSGIVING DESSERT



*By Guest Cooking Columnist Charles Fortson, Jr.*

The holiday season is pecan season, particularly in the South, where they grow wild on trees. The Southern states, including Mississippi, and the Midwest, New Mexico, Texas and Georgia are among the largest U.S. producers. Richer than other nuts, pecans are prized in the culinary world, often included in luxury nut mixes tossed with sugar and spices be-



fore being baked as a specialty snack or dessert. They are on sale in stores, and charities, such as the Brookhaven Lions Club, raise funds bringing the sweet, nutty buttery favored nuts to the public.

The pecan pie is an American classic, one of the quintessential sweet-savory concoctions in the culinary arts. Here's simple recipe for a delicious pie to conclude your Thanksgiving meal.

### INGREDIENTS:

- 2/3 cup of sugar**
- 3/4 cup of light corn syrup**
- 1 tblsp. of flour**
- 4 tblsp. of melt butter or margarine**
- 3--eggs**
- 1 tblsp. of vanilla**
- 3 cups of pecans**
- 1 unbaked pie shell**

### DIRECTIONS:

- 1. With a whisk or fork, mix the sugar, corn syrup, flour, melted butter, eggs, vanilla and pecans in order.**
- 2. Pour into pie shell and bake in pre-heated oven at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.**
- 3. For a delicious roasted pecan flavor, brown the butter lightly in a skillet.**

*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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# Pickleball expected to draw enthusiasts

Special to Wesson News

Pickleball – the fastest-growing sport in the U.S. – is coming to town.

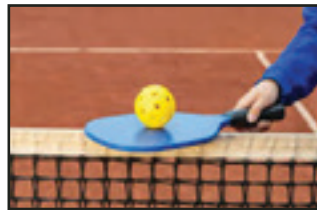
The Wesson Board of Aldermen has approved the use of Blue Cross Healthy Hometown grant funds to construct two pickleball courts at a cost of \$42,000 in the municipal park.

Mayor Alton Shaw predicted the courts will draw players from not only the town, but the wider area as well, noting that Co-Lin has reported vandalism to several of its tennis courts by pickleball enthusiasts who could find no other venues where they could enjoy their passion.

Pickleball is a racket or paddle sport in which two players (singles) or four players (doubles) use a smooth-faced paddle to hit a perforated, hollow plastic ball over a 34-inch-high net until one side is unable to return the ball or commits a rule infraction. Pickleball, invented in 1965 as a children's backyard game in the United States, on Bainbridge Island in Washington state, is played indoors and outdoors. In 2022, it was named the official state sport of Washington.

Aspects of the sport resemble tennis and table tennis, but pickleball has specific rules, paddles and court dimensions. The court is 44 feet long and 20 feet wide, and the paddle is larger than the one used in table tennis. The hard plastic

ball used in pickleball produces less bounce than tennis balls. On each side of the net is a seven-foot area known as the *non-volley zone* (or the *kitchen*) where a player may not strike the ball until it has bounced. The rules specify side out scoring, where only the server side can score a point. The limited bounce, non-volley zones, and underhanded stroke, with which all serves are made, combined with hard drive shots and overhead smash shots, give the game a dynamic pace.



Special to Wesson News

After its introduction in 1965, pickleball became a popular sport in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States and gradually grew in popularity elsewhere. By 2023, it was estimated to have over 8.9 million players in the United States. For three years in a row, 2021, 2022, and 2023, the sport was named the fastest-growing sport in the United States by the Sports and Fitness Industry Association. The growing popularity of the sport has been attributed to its short learning curve, its appeal to a wide range of ages and fitness levels, and its low startup costs.

Two professional tours were established in the United States in 2019, and, shortly thereafter, two professional leagues were established. Pickleball is also growing in popularity outside the United States, with a professional league already operating in Australia, and another being developed in India for the 2025/26 season.

# Middleton is now on financial aid board

Special to Wesson News

Co-Lin President Dr. Dewayne Middleton has been appointed to the Mississippi Post-Secondary Education Financial Assistance Board.

He will serve as the Institutional Representative for Mississippi's 15 community colleges.

The Postsecondary Board is a nine-member board with authority over all the state's student financial aid programs. The Executive Director of the Postsecondary Board is also the Director of the Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid, which administers the state's student financial aid programs including undergraduate and graduate grant and forgivable loan programs. Public, private, two-year and four-year college students may receive funds through state financial aid programs.

Middleton will serve on the board until 2028.

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## Christmas Carnival planned for sickle cell warriors

Wesson News

The Mississippi Sickle Cell Foundation (MSCF) is hosting a Christmas Carnival for sickle cell warriors and their families on Saturday, December 14.

Coordinating the event this year is Tobi Breland, nurse practitioner at Children's of MS Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders (CCCBD) and MSCF board member, and Shelley Martin, registered nurse at CCCBD.

"Last year, we were able to bring back this event, which we had been unable to hold because of the pandemic. It was so exciting to see the turnout of families who were able to enjoy a day of holiday cheer and fun, thanks to the Foundation," said Breland.

"Sickle cell is a prevalent genetic blood disorder with many possible complications," said Breland. "We plan the event to provide some

holiday fun for families who deal with the effects of it daily."

The carnival will feature lots of games, inflatables, face painting, balloon twisting, food, a cake walk and a special visit and gifts from Santa. Parents are invited to snap a photo of their youngsters with the Jolly 'Ol Elf.



Set for 10 a.m. until noon at the First Baptist Church of Jackson's Christian Life Center at 431 North State Street in Jackson, the event is free, but is limited to children with sickle cell disease and their immediate family only.

"I'm excited to see those who live with this disease come together and enjoy some holiday cheer and time together with family and those who share their same struggles," said Martin.

For more information, email [MSsickleCellFND@yahoo.com](mailto:MSsickleCellFND@yahoo.com).



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