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Wesson News

SPOTLIGHT

**New chapter
for Porches**

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Volume 13, Number 1

"Good News You Can Use"

January, 2025

Work begins on history museum

Special to Wesson News

A permanent history museum that tells the story of Wesson -- a dream of locals since the town's Sesquicentennial celebration in 2014 when a temporary museum whetted appetites for an ongoing one that honored life here, may soon become a reality under the auspices of Friends of the Library (FOL) with volunteer assistance and funding provided by Home Depot.

Work is scheduled to start on January 20 to begin creating the museum space at a building adjacent the Wesson municipal park on Beech Street that a local Boy Scouts of America (BSA) troop used for its activities. The Town of Wesson turned the building over to FOL for the museum after it fell into disuse with BSA inactivity in town.

The "Keep History Alive in Wesson" Team Depot Volunteer Project will utilize ten Home Depot volunteers and five nonprofit volunteers from the community for initial remodeling of the building. Funded by \$9,500 from Home Depot Foundation in the form of e-gift cards, they will acquire and lay new flooring, install a backdoor access ramp for disabled persons and purchase a dehumidifier. In the future, other funds may be required for insured contractors to do electrical, roofing, plumbing and HVAC work, among other things.

The Brookhaven Home Depot store is the project sponsoring facility, and Elishia Howard is the sponsoring captain.

In applying for Home Depot assistance, FOL members Marilyn Britt, Librarian at Wesson Public Library, and Dr. Steven Liverman noted "the history for City of Wesson is stored in several areas that are not the best environment for safety" and that FOL is seeking to create one location that will allow for safety and continued preservation of the historical items.

It was in 2014 as part of the Wesson Sesquicentennial celebration that Dixie Thornton started encouraging locals to take the town's history out of their closets, unpack boxes and donate historical items for public display in the temporary museum she created for the occasion.

From its opening in April, 2014, until July, more than 1,000 persons, including children, groups from Wesson Attendance Center and out-of-towners who savored history, visited the temporary museum in which Thornton strived for "authenticity" in exhibits that featured clothing, artifacts and document from out of history rather than reproductions. The exhibit highlights included:

- Clothing made from the cotton and woolen fabrics produced at the textile mills which operated in Wesson from the 1860s into the 1890s and spurred development of the town
- Late 19th Century garments worn by Rilla Oliver Rae, daughter of Captain William Oliver -- one of the early mill owners
- Artifacts from the Wesson mills, including machine parts, keys to buildings, and corporate stamps
- A photo of Wesson mill employees in front of one of the factory buildings in which they worked
- Cotton bales -- raw material for the mill operations
- A 19th Century baby buggy
- School jackets that reflect the progression of Wesson schools and development of Copenh-Lincoln Community College (Co-Lin)
- A World War II military overcoat



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Site of coming history museum on Beech Street.

- The bell from the old Wesson grammar school
- Pictures and memorabilia from the pre-NASCAR racing career of Wesson resident Ikey Jerome, including his driving suit.

The temporary museum occupied two buildings on Spring Street off Highway 51 across from City Hall, one loaned by its owner, Mayor Alton Shaw, as a private citizen, to the Wesson Chamber of Commerce that housed a series of partitioned exhibits organized to tell distinct stories about different aspects of the life of Wesson -- the mills era, evolution of Co-Lin, churches and religion, commerce, etc. -- through artifacts, photos, and documents; and an adjacent structure owned by the Town of Wesson next to the public library that featured displays focusing on daily life of townspeople -- a late 19th Century kitchen and bedroom, a garden with a manual plow, home spinning wheel, quilts, the printing press that produced the Wesson Enterprise weekly newspaper in the 1950s and 1960s, among others.

"The people of Wesson demonstrated that they wanted the unique history of their town preserved and shared by removing items from storage and contributing them to a museum that displays them in a meaningful way that truly tells the story of the town," Thornton said. "The temporary museum was a tourist attraction that conserved the past in the present for people who appreciate the importance of history, promoted business development by building traffic for merchants, and boosted sales taxes that help pay for town services."

Since the temporary museum closed, officials have been searching for ways to bring a permanent one to Wesson. In creating the temporary museum, Thornton worked with Wesson residents steeped in the town's history -- Sonya Cowen, Carolyn Graham, and Mike Hux -- to identify authentic documents, photos, and artifacts and solicit them from donors and lenders. Mark Hamilton, former minister of music at Calvary Baptist Church in Silver Creek, worked closely with Thornton, picking up contributions, transporting them to the museum site, and building the museum exhibits. More than 30 persons contributed as donors and lenders.

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Lauragail becomes a Christmas person

By Bob Arnold

Until the recent holiday season, Lauragail Grubbs never considered herself a Christmas person.

"For most of the world, Christmas is a once-a-year event about getting gifts rather than about the birth of Christ and the every day meaning of saving us to live joyously loving each other," she says. "I never wanted to celebrate an event during which we forget what it is really all about."

This Christmas was a little different for Grubbs, however. In the wake of a robbery at the Wesson truck stop on Sylvarena Road in which she saw her Uncle Vince shot and killed, she experienced family, friends and even acquaintances giving her the love and support she needed as she not only recovered from the trauma, but culminated a pregnancy with the birth of her second daughter, Joey Elizabeth. As Christmas day approached, she also recalled the love and support she received during a period of post partem psychosis following the birth of her first daughter, Tateam Isley, now nine years old, the 2022 drug overdose/murder of her younger brother Hank and the death of a beloved aunt.

"I have discovered the year-round joy and love of Christmas, and wanted to begin introducing it to my two daughters during the most recent Christmas season," says Grubbs.

Born Laura Gail at Hazlehurst on April 10, 1995 (she now goes by her combined first and middle names as Lauragail), Grubbs grew up in the Wesson area with her parents, Hank ("Bubba"), a truck driver, and Christy, who worked with pre-school children; an older sister, Ashley, and her younger brother, Hank. She attended the Precious Moments pre-school center and Wesson Attendance Center from kindergarten through high school.

"As a child, I was a bit of a misfit and tom boy," she recalls. "I played with reptiles and brought stray animals home. I played the trumpet in the school band in the sixth and seventh grades until I accidentally broke it. In the seventh through eleventh grades, I played soccer on the school team."

Local patrons of the old Porches restaurant may remember Lauragail as a waitress with her sister, mom and aunt. She worked there from ages 14 to 19 years old. From 2008 to 2013, she waitressed at Line 58 in Hazlehurst. She also worked at a Hazlehurst thrift store and has assisted Dentville-based CMT crews engaged in restoration and repairs of homes, porches, plumbing and roofing. For the past five years, she has worked off and on at Uncle Ray's eatery and store across from the entrance to Lake Lincoln State Park, where she started as a bait girl, retrieving worms, minnows, crickets and other lures for fishermen; and now is assistant manager with responsibilities for property maintenance, the cash register, helping customers find convenience store items, cooking and serving meals.

In 2015 after the birth of her first child, post-partem psychosis started a dark period in Grubbs' life.

"I knew the way I felt about my daughter wasn't okay, and I walked away from rearing her into a rebellious life style of partying and bad decisions," she recounts. "I used speed and smoked weed. With the deaths of my brother and aunt, I tried to be close to them by being near death – not trying to die, but not trying to stay alive, either."

But those times also brought good people into Grubbs' life as well as some bad ones. She is particularly grateful, she says, to her older sister who has reared Tateam Isley, and points to supportive friends and other family members, and new people she has met along the way who have helped -- like Brother Eddie Mayer at Spring Hills Baptist Church, where she taught Sunday School to a class of toddlers and children up to seven years old.

Grubbs recalls, after the killing of her Uncle Vince in the summer, her uncle's stepson, Aren Case, also offered her some simple advice: "Don't let his death be a waste." She remembered it before Christmas last month at the old camper where she lives in the It section of Martinsville when she reflected on being a Christmas gift for her children, as others have been for her over the years: "I want to be someone my kids can be proud of – always kind with a smile, never saying things out of anger, telling people you love them, trying to make things right, forgiving."



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So Lauragail has become a Christmas person as the challenges of life have confronted her.

What are your hobbies?

My pets. Three dogs, a snake, gecko, bass and turtles. I enjoy small adventures. Going to the creek and picking up stray animals along the way.

What do you read?

I am into science and nature, but I'm a show-me hands-on girl, who doesn't always understand what I read.

How about movies or theater?

I like police and crime television shows – Chicago Fire and Chicago PD about first responders -- and the cartoons kids watch – Bubble Guppies and Krat Brothers.

Do you have a special interest in music?

I sing in the shower and to my kids, and played a trumpet until I broke it.

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

I would open savings accounts for my kids, leave my old camper for a better place to live, start a shelter for unloved animals and help other people at rock bottom in bad situations.

How would you change the world?

I would teach people that it's the little things in life that count, and try to help the world recapture more innocent days before technology.



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Infrastructure, book & college-bound

By Bob Arnold

Record infrastructure investments. With \$220 million in U.S. Department of Transportation grants from funds directed from the Mississippi Congressional delegation and the 2024 \$620 million Mississippi Legislature's appropriation, the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) invested a record \$1.2 billion in infrastructure projects. "MDOT's achievements in 2024 are a testament to the cooperation and dedication of our internal team as well as a reflection of the strides we've made in strengthening our partnerships at the state and federal levels," said Brad White, MDOT Executive Director. "Infrastructure funding and maintenance is one of the bedrocks of a flourishing society, and we are thankful to be entrusted with resources that keep Mississippi moving."

Words of prisoners. A nonprofit organization with a goal of teaching state inmates writing skills has released a book of art and writing by men incarcerated in Unit 29, the destination for those considered the worst of the worst at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman. The Mississippi Prison Writes Initiative, a nonprofit organization whose goal is to teach state inmates writing skills, released Unit 29: Writing from Parchman Prison, "to record human suffering as it unfolds," according to Louis Bourgeois, the organization's executive director. "Extreme situations result in extreme reactions," he says. "But I'll let the reader decide if the book is successful in rendering the accuracy of what goes on there, right under society's nose." The essays do not gloss over what landed the writers in the most infamous unit of the state's most infamous prison. Unit 29 houses about 700 people and the average age of the men there is 38. The new book includes the work of over 30 incarcerated writers over a three-year period. Bourgeois said most of the writers had never written anything before, but they created what he called "a masterpiece of prison realism" about undergoing the harrowing experience of staying alive in a Mississippi prison such as the infamous Parchman.

College-bound in Mississippi. Mississippi high school students who take dual-credit courses go to college at the nation's highest rate, according to a recent report. It's generally true that students who take college classes while in high school attend college at higher rates than their peers, but in Mississippi the number is 93 percent vs. 81 percent nationally. In the last 10 years, participation in these programs has virtually exploded among Mississippi high school students. In 2014, about 5,900 students took dual-credit courses in Mississippi, according to the Mississippi Community College Board. Now, it's more than 18,000.

Historical marker for Meredith. A new historical marker has been unveiled in the hometown of civil rights icon James Meredith to honor him for his courage in enrolling as

the first Black student at the University of Mississippi in 1962. Meredith, now 91, wore a red Ole Miss baseball hat as he watched the ceremony in, a town of 6,800 that is also the birthplace of media mogul Oprah Winfrey. About 85 people attended, and many snapped selfies with Meredith and his wife, Judy Alsobrooks Meredith. "Most important day of my life," Meredith said. Meredith, who resists being called a civil rights leader, now lives in Jackson. He was born in Kosciusko and grew up on a nearby farm. He graduated from high school in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1951, and served for nine years in the Air Force before returning to Mississippi. A white mob erupted in violence when Meredith registered at Ole Miss, and U.S. marshals protected him on and off the Oxford campus. The university has honored him several times in the decades since then. Today, about 10% of students at the university are Black. "He's a man whose courage profoundly altered the course of history," Kosciusko Mayor Tim Kyle said.

Medal of Freedom recipient. In one of his last official acts as President, Joe Biden awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to 19 recipients, including a posthumous award to civil rights icon Fannie Lou Hamer, who died in 1977. The Delta native is the 11th Mississippian to receive the honor since 1964. The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the nation's highest civilian honor, presented to individuals who have made exemplary contributions to the prosperity, values or security of the United States, world peace or other significant societal, public or private endeavors. Hamer, a Mississippi sharecropper with a sixth-grade education, worked tirelessly to help thousands of Black residents in Mississippi register and vote. Hamer was also a humanitarian providing clothing, housing and jobs for the poorest residents of the Mississippi Delta – Black and white. She brought the first Head Start program to the state and she launched a Freedom Farm and Pig Bank so impoverished residents could have both fresh vegetables and meat in their diet. Hamer died in 1977 at age 59 of breast cancer, hypertension and the after effects of a jailhouse beating for her voting rights activities.

Health Department funding. New programs to train early-career doctors and help Mississippians enroll in health insurance are at the top of the state Department of Health's budget wish list this year. The agency tasked with overseeing public health in the state is asking for \$4.8 million in additional state funding, a four percent increase over last year's budget appropriation. The department wants to start three new medical residency programs in south central Mississippi, Meridian and the Delta to focus on internal and family medicine, obstetric care and rural training. A \$1 million dollar appropriation requested by the department will fund a patient navigation program to help people access health services in their communities and apply for health insurance coverage.

NEWS NUGGETS



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Copiah chicken flock found to be diseased



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The Mississippi Board of Animal Health (MBAH) has been notified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Veterinary Services Laboratory that poultry from a commercial broiler chicken flock in Copiah County has tested positive for highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza.

USDA does not release the exact location of the flock. It is the first outbreak in Copiah County since February 2023. Samples from the flock were tested at the Mississippi Veterinary Research & Diagnostic Laboratory, part of the National Animal Health Laboratory Network, and confirmed at the APHIS National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, Iowa.

This finding is the second case of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in commercial poultry in Mississippi since the spring of 2023. Since November, HPAI has been detected in migratory waterfowl in multiple areas of Mississippi. The poultry industry was notified and put on high alert to increase biosecurity and surveillance for HPAI.

The State Veterinarian has quarantined the affected premises, and birds on the property have been depopulated to prevent the spread of the disease. Birds from the flock have not entered the food system. The MBAH is working closely with federal animal health officials in Mississippi on a joint incident response. The MBAH is actively working with the poultry industry to

increase monitoring of flocks state-wide.

USDA APHIS reports 210,000 birds are affected by the outbreak which remains active.

Hobby poultry owners are encouraged to practice good biosecurity and be aware of the signs of avian influenza and report illness and/or death in birds in the MBAH Online Reporting Form. Information will be routed to a state or federal veterinarian in Mississippi for assessment. Dead birds should be double-bagged and refrigerated for possible testing. Precautions should be taken when handling sick or dead birds including proper handwashing, using gloves, wearing masks, and sanitation of surfaces that come into contact with sick or dead birds to prevent the spread of avian influenza to people.

Avian influenza in birds can cause sudden death; lack of energy or appetite; decreased egg production; soft-shelled or misshapen eggs; swelling or purple discoloration of head, eyelids, comb, hocks; nasal discharge; coughing; sneezing; incoordination; and diarrhea.

Avian influenza does not present a food safety risk. Poultry and eggs are safe to eat when handled and cooked properly. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the public health risk associated with avian influenza in birds remains low. The proper handling and cooking of all poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165 °F is recommended as a general food safety precaution.

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Improving heart health in state

By Guest Columnist Stephanie Duguid

Mississippi faces many challenges when it comes to health, especially heart health. As one of over 100 Mississippi Health Ambassadors, I work hard to share vital information to help fix health problems and make life better for all Mississippians.

We are thankful for Dr. Thad Waites, who is active in the Mississippi Association of Community Colleges (MACC) and whose helpful knowledge and ideas have taught us

much about heart health and how to improve care in Mississippi.

Our health is affected by many things, like how much money people have, how far they live from doctors, their education, and access to care. In Mississippi, these problems often overlap, making it harder for people to stay healthy. Many areas in our state are far from hospitals, which means people might not get the fast, good care they need during emergencies like heart attacks.

Another problem is health literacy -- knowing how to recognize signs of heart trouble and how to get

help. Many people don't have this knowledge, so we must teach our communities how to stay

healthier and act quickly when there's a problem.

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Mississippi has made progress by creating systems to help with major heart emergencies, such as heart attacks, strokes, and injuries. These systems connect hospitals and doctors to ensure people get life-saving care faster. One great example is the STEMI care plan, which helps hospitals work together in a network to

save lives. Even people in remote areas can get better care by focusing on areas within 60 miles of main hospitals.

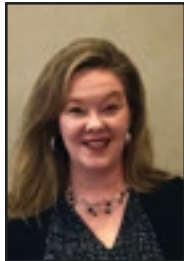
We've also seen excellent results with new treatments for heart problems with devices like Mitra-Clip and WATCHMAN. These new tools make surgeries less invasive, help people recover faster, and prevent serious problems like strokes.

To improve heart health in Mississippi, we need to make advanced care easier to access and fix the causes of poor health. Telemedicine and mobile health clinics can help people in rural areas get the necessary care.

At the same time, we must focus on preventing heart disease by encouraging healthy habits like eating better and staying active. Programs that involve the community will help make these changes last.

Making heart health better in Mississippi takes teamwork. Doctors, teachers, leaders, and community members all have a role to play. Together, we can make Mississippi a healthier place where everyone has a chance to live a heart-healthy life. Let's work quickly and carefully to solve the problems as we move forward. The people of Mississippi deserve our best efforts to improve their health and well-being.

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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Cardiologist Dr. Thad Waites educates Mississippi Health Ambassadors about systems of care for STEMI and current advances in procedures in cardiology.



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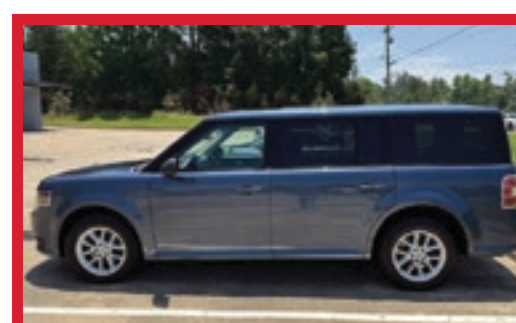


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Burger challenge



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 Daryl Dickerson from Bogue Chitto (right) was among the first patrons to accept the challenge presented by Uncle Ray's eatery across from the Lake Lincoln State Park entrance to eat two double half pound burgers and a side order of homemade fries in a 40-minute setting. Charles R. Fortson (left), owner of the eatery and its chief cook, is partnering with Dave Pace at Brookhaven Monument in issuing the challenge. Pace will pick up the tab for hungry patrons who are up to the challenge. Dickerson came close, but could eat only one and one half burgers. The challenge will continue until someone performs the culinary feat. Call 601-643-0175 to sign up to meet the challenge.

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Another chapter in Porches story



Wesson News

Special to Wesson News

The old Victorian house on Highway 51 in Wesson, where Porches restaurant served Southern cooking with a special twist to food lovers from throughout the world for more than 25 years is coming back to life in a new chapter of the landmark eaterie's history.

Chris McSweyn, who has kept the old Porches restaurant menu alive at Co-Lin where he is Executive Chef for Aladdin Campus Dining and also continues his own food service business as Porches Catering, is supporting an initiative of his two daughters, Carrie and Katie, that will expand what he has been doing under the Porches banner at the college back to the old house on Highway 51.

Carrie and Katie are refurbishing the site of the old restaurant to make it suitable for renting out as a special events venue.

"As we welcome a new year, we're brimming with excitement and anticipation for the fresh starts that await us," says McSweyn. "Although our news may not be what everyone was hoping for, it's undoubtedly thrilling."

McSweyn expects his daughters to have the old house ready as a party venue for rent starting in April, with Porches Catering providing the food and service for weddings, wedding receptions, bridal showers, birthday bashes, corporate events, and other celebrations.

"We'll also host special dining in the Porches tradition at the old house," says McSweyn. The plans call for cooking classes, live dinner theatre, holiday festivities, tasting parties, among other innovative possibilities, which, he says, "are truly endless."

"I'm incredibly proud of my daughters for bringing this cherished house back to life with their innovative spirit," says McSwyn. "Having grown up in the restaurant, they've always had a passion for creating unforgettable experiences, and I have no doubt they'll excel in this new venture."

For more than 25 years, McSweyn was the primary chef at Porches Restaurant, helping to start it with his parents when he was a culinary arts student at Co-Lin. "I needed to intern at a restaurant," he recounts. "I got a job, but not enough working hours at the Inez Hotel restaurant in Brookhaven. So dad suggested I start my own restaurant in my parents' home to meet the course requirements, and Co-Lin agreed."

McSweyn and his mom and dad brought their love of cooking and Chris's Co-Lin studies to what they anticipated would be a four-month project, but a food columnist from the Jackson Clarion-Ledger heard about their small luncheon restaurant in Wesson called "Porches," which served small plates and daily specials featuring southern cooking with an imaginative flare. He visited the eaterie, liked what he tasted there, and wrote a column about the experience. "Business boomed," McSweyn recounts. "We were generating 40 to 50 customers for our daily lunches, and traffic tripled. My parents and I said to each other: "Let's make it go.""

Porches became known nationally, consistently ranked by travel and tourist guides among Mississippi's top ten restaurants, and drawing customers from throughout the South, including New Orleans and Baton Rouge, and as far away as Florida.

COVID-19 forced Porches to start serving its meals on a takeout only basis, and McSweyn decided to shut it down so his parents could finally enjoy the retirement they had anticipated in the old Wesson house they bought in the 1990s.

At Co-Lin, McSweyn has continued to cook the dishes he perfected at Porches, and now his daughters are beginning a new chapter in the Porches story in a familiar place.



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Carrie McSweyn and Katie Bane

22 tornadoes cause havoc

Special to Wesson News

The National Weather Service confirmed that 22 tornadoes swept through Mississippi as part of a storm system that spanned multiple states on the weekend after Christmas and before New Years day.

A the same time, a report from the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency showed damage in at least 18 counties.

So far, two deaths and at least 10 injuries related to the twisters were confirmed, according to Gov. Tate Reeves. A tree reportedly fell on a home in Natchez and another death was reported in Lowndes County.

By New Years day, power had been restored to thousands had lost it during the storm.

In Copiah County, EF-1 tornado touched down just west of Interstate 55 near Martinsburg, causing mostly minor tree damage over its 2.74 mile track except along Cline Road, where it intensified and uprooted trees. Another EF-1 tornado touched down at Crystal Springs and uprooted and snapped numerous trees along a 13.06 mile path, with one falling onto and damaging a home.

An EF-3 tornado with peak winds of 135 mph caused heavy damage in Franklin County along 28.29 mile path that took it into Lincoln County where it also wrecked havoc. In Franklin County, it left 14 homes, two businesses and one farm damaged and in Lincoln County, it collapsed an electrical transmission line tower and continued to damage trees, power lines and homes before dissipating just north of Pleasant Ridge Road.

EF-1 tornadoes also touched down at East Lincoln and Loyd Star in Lincoln County and in Simpson County. They mostly uprooted and snapped trees, and an East Lincoln home and shed sustained minor roof damage.



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December tornadoes left thousands without power.

Across the state, Wayne County was hardest hit by the tornadoes with 33 homes, one business and one farm damaged. Other counties with significant tornado damage were Clay (28 homes), Adams (20 homes, one death), Rankin (17 homes, three apartments and one business) and Clarke (15 homes, one business).

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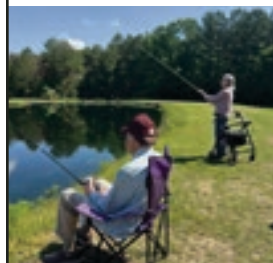
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Co-Lin's Davis retires from coaching

By Bob Arnold

After 21 years leading the Co-Lin Wolf Pack, head football coach Glenn Davis has retired. Davis had the longest consecutive tenure of any current coach in the Mississippi Association of Community Colleges Conference (MACCC).

"While we reflect on Coach Davis's time with us, we not only celebrate the success he achieved on the field, but also the integrity and dedication he brought to our entire program," said Co-Lin President Dr. Dewayne Middleton. "His legacy will be remembered not just in victories, but in the countless lives he touched, the characters he shaped and the standards of excellence he set for his players. We are deeply grateful for his years of service, and we wish him all the best in this well-earned next chapter."

Davis finishes his coaching career with a 114-81 record as the head coach at Co-Lin. Under his leadership, the Wolves won the Mississippi Association of Community and Junior Colleges Conference (MACJC) state title in 2012 and finished MACJC State Runner-Up four times -- 2006, 2010, 2015, and 2023. The 2023 season saw the Wolves finish as South Division Co-Champions and Conference Runners Up and claim the 2023 C.H.A.M.P.S. Heart of Texas Bowl Championship. Davis also led the team to a win at the Golden Isle Bowl in 2006.

Davis is the all-time winningest head football coach in Co-Lin history and was selected as MACJC Coach of the Year in 2006, 2014, and 2018, and MACCC South Coach of the Year in 2023. He had more than 250 student-athletes sign and play at four-year universities and had starters in the SEC, Big 12, ACC, and other national conferences. Davis has had numerous players drafted by the National Football League (NFL), including first-round draft picks Montez Sweat and Nick Fairley and second-round draft picks Randy Thomas and Tony Bryant.

He served at Co-Lin as an offensive coordinator

from 1995-96, helping lead the Wolves to a 15-5 overall record.

"Coach Davis's tenure is one to be highly commended and his impact on young lives is immeasurable," said Co-Lin Athletic Director Bryan Nobile. "He played a key role in the life of our football program for many years and was committed to his players success both off and the field. The consistency of our team year in and year out made us one of the most competitive in state college sports."

From 1997-2003, Davis served as running backs coach at Mississippi State University under former head coach Jackie Sherrill. Under Davis' tutelage, the Bulldogs led the Southeastern Conference in rushing in 2000, averaging 193.8 yards per game, and ranked third in 1998, averaging 172 yards per game. He mentored Dizenzo Miller to Mississippi State's sixth-ever 1,000-yard season in 2000 (1,005 yards) and James Johnson to the fourth and fifth 1,000-yard campaigns in 1997 (1,069 yards) and 1998 (1,383 yards). Throughout his career, he has recruited and coached over 25 Dandy Dozens.

Davis is a 1982 graduate of Delta State University, where he was a three-year letterman as a defensive back and outside linebacker for the Statesmen. His other coaching stints include offensive coordinator at South Natchez High School (1982-85), graduate assistant at Mississippi State University (1986-87), defensive backs and wide receivers coach at the University of North Alabama (1988-91), and quarterbacks, running backs, and wide receivers coach at Holmes Community College (1992-94). While at Holmes, Davis recruited and coached NFL Hall of Famer Walter Jones.

Davis was inducted into the Co-Lin Sports Hall of Fame by the Athletic Alumni Association in 2020. Davis and his wife, Minta, have two children, Ann Shelby (Josh) and Micah (Ashley) and five grandchildren, Brooke, Cannan, and Hayes Davis and Jackson and Lily Kay Smith.



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Mississippi Legislature prepares for session

Special to Wesson News

Taxes, education, Medicaid, the public retirement system and legislative/judicial redistricting are occupying lawmakers who convened January 7 for the Mississippi Legislature's 2025 session.

Taxes. Despite the 2022 compromise that created the largest tax exemption in the country among states that tax income and a four percent flat tax, Governor Tate Reeves, House Speaker Jason White, and House Ways and Means Chairman Trey Lamar will likely push to eliminate the income tax again. While Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hoseman seeks to eliminate or reduce the sales tax on groceries – an issue complicated by the reliance of municipalities on a percentage of the tax. Elimination of the income tax also presents a host of questions related to adequate revenue streams for government. Changing the broader sales tax structure and adding a 1.5 percent local sales tax, however, could address the government funding issues. With any tax reform package, lawmakers will probably want to look at a gas tax increase or elimination of the current sales tax exemption on gasoline towards generating another 21 cents per gallon on a \$3 per gallon gas price.

Education. Lawmakers will consider tweaking the new educational funding model they created last year, including examination of whether the property tax cap should be increased to permit local districts to raise property taxes to meet the obligations of the new formula. Expanded school choice, appropriation of additional funds for the successful education scholarship accounts that help families pay for special needs students in private schools, amending the open enrollment law to allow student transfers to new schools without the veto power the old schools now have and expanding charter schools and scholarship accounts beyond special need students for families access them are also likely to get serious consideration, while universal school choice faces an uphill battle.

Medicaid. Expect both Speaker Jason White and Lt. Gov. Delbert Hoseman to make another charge at Medicaid expansion in 2025 after coming up short in the 2024 session, with Governor Tate Reeves opposing the effort or vetoing a bill that passes the Legislature. Late last year, talks broke down between the chambers over a work requirement. A Trump White that supports a work requirement provides some hope that Mississippi lawmakers might agree on it, but Trump policy on reducing Medicaid costs that would add hundreds of millions in cost to the state annually would give lawmakers pause on approving any Medicaid



Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hoseman.

Special to Wesson News

expansion bill.

PERS. The state's public retirement system (PERS) is deeply underwater with \$25 billion dollars in unfunded liabilities, and the Legislature has affixed only band-aids to the problem, with some supplemental funding and some changes to process. Lawmakers, in fact, must increase funding and/or change the system for new enrollees to stop the bleeding. PERS has proposed a new category of beneficiaries (Tier 5), but modeling of that proposal proves insufficient to put the program back on sustainable footing. Lawmakers are likely once again to kick this issue a little further down the road.

Redistricting. A federal court ruling is forcing the Legislature to redraw a few districts this session to ensure Black voting power in those areas is not being diluted. This process could lead to Democrat pickup of two Senate seats currently held by Republicans in the Hattiesburg and DeSoto County areas. The Legislature must also complete restricting of judicial districts this year, impacting not only judges, but also district attorneys' offices.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Excerpted from Magnolia Tribute report.



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Photograph collection preserves different times

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If the old saying, “a picture is worth a thousand words” is true, then the Luther Hamilton Photograph Collection is worth a million words. The collection includes nearly 1,000 photographs of mainly Copiah County documents, its people and activities from the late 1900s to the mid-1940s. The images are varied, some are rare and each one tells a story,

Photographs of vegetable picking, packing and shipping, for example, preserve a time in which few of those living can say they have experienced. Some of the family names will sound familiar - Augustus Lotterhos and

Bryant Wesley Mathis (known as “The Cabbage King”) - are a few. Building no longer extant serve as reminders of what once was.

Luther Myles Hamilton, Sr. (“LM”) was born in Wesson on March 5, 1869, to Benjamin and Amanda C. Terry. He married Lizzie Davidson, and they had four children – Hazel Hamilton Odom, Merle H. Ramsey, Edythe Hamilton Todd and L.M. Hamilton, Jr.

L.M. was a photographer for many years before his death in 1944. He owned and operated a portrait stu-

dio out of a tent in Crystal Springs equipped with a portable darkroom. His house was where ABB’s (formerly Kuhlman Electric) entrance is at the intersection of Lee Avenue and East Railroad.

Luther, Jr. (1912-1994) collected the studio’s and family’s photographs, intending to publish a photographic history of Crystal Springs. They were not published, but, instead, a lot of them were donated to the Mississippi Department of Archives and history, where they have been digitalized as the Luther Hamilton Collection.



Due to the selfless efforts of the Hamilton family, the world now has access to almost a thousand photographs that take us to a time when there were no televisions, no computers and no cellphones - days when Flag Day (1901) and the first tomato day celebrations were events for everyone to attend. Farming was a way of life, and downtowns and depots were the centers of attraction.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Reprinted from A Shared History: Copiah County, Mississippi 1823-1823, including articles written by Paul C. Cartwright, Tricia Nelson and Gene Horton compiled and edited by Paul C. Cartwright.

Walmart Supercenter grants enhance arts programs



Co-Lin Director of Bands Chad Austin accepted \$1,500 grant for the Blue Wave Show Band from Walmart Supercenter of Brookhaven during its grand re-opening.

Special to Wesson News

Co-Lin is has received two grants from Walmart Supercenter of Brookhaven and Walmart Distribution Center to contributions to enhance its art and music programs, enriching student learning and growth.

During its grand reopening in November, Walmart Supercenter of Brookhaven presented a \$1,500 grant to the Co-Lin Blue Wave Show Band. Director of Bands Chad Austin accepted the check during a ceremony.

The funds will be used to acquire new equipment, supporting the continued effort to enhance the fine arts department at Co-Lin.

Walmart Distribution Center awarded a \$1,000 grant to support a unique art education initiative aimed at teaching students how to use art as a communication tool. This program will empower students to convey messages and stories through visual language.

For more information on how to support college initiatives or donate, contact the Co-Lin Foundation at 601.643.8332.

Ag value hits \$9 billion

Special to Wesson News

Mississippi’s agriculture industry remains vibrant with an overall production value estimated at \$9 billion, despite a drop in row crop prices.

Poultry is again the number one sector of the agricultural industry with a value of \$3.8 billion, up 10.5 percent from 2023. A rebound in broiler production in 2024 contributed to the commodity’s stronger showing over last year.



Wesson News

Forestry holds second place with a \$1.5 billion value, holding steady from 2023. Soybeans ranked third with a value of \$1.3 billion. Although soybean yield is expected to tie last year’s record at 56 bushels per acre, the crop saw a 22 percent drop in value from last year. Livestock, which includes beef cattle, dairy cattle and hogs, ranked fourth overall behind soybeans, with a value of \$578 million, a 14 percent increase from 2023.

With more rain for non-irrigated acres, soybean yield could possibly have hit a new record. Irrigation helps protect yield during drought years but advancing science and crop management are also important factors.

Cotton is the second most valuable row crop with an estimated value of \$496 million, a gain of 34 percent from 2023, which is attributed to an increase in acreage. Cotton producers planted 520,000 acres -- up almost 30 percent from 2023. Yield is estimated at 1,118 pounds of lint per acre, an 8.3 percent increase. Corn is valued at \$374 million, a decline of 50%, as a result of decreased acreage and lower prices. Producers harvested about 580,000 acres this year, down from 790,000 acres in 2023. Although yield was better this year, prices are down over \$1 compared to last year. Each year corn and cotton trade acres so that is why one commodity is higher and the other lower year over year.

The value of catfish declined 18 percent from last year, landing that commodity in seventh place with a value of \$214 million. Mississippi still leads the nation in catfish production with 29,000 acres. That is twice as many acres as Arkansas and Alabama, which round out the nation’s top three catfish producing states. Multiple challenges, including marketing difficulties, high operating costs and decreased prices, have led to slight decreases in Mississippi’s catfish acreage in the last several years.

Among other commodities in the state, hay is valued at \$171 million, up 13 percent and rice production value is \$168 million, a gain of 20 percent due to a rise in acreage. Sweet potatoes are valued at \$82 million, a 10 percent decline from 2023. Peanut producers harvested 25,500 acres, 30 percent more than last year. Wheat value plunged 41 percent to \$19 million.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Excerpted from Mississippi State University Extension Service report.

Broccoli/bacon cheese soup



By Guest Food Columnist Charles Raymond Fortson

With the cold winter months ahead, soups will be an important part of our meals. Uncle Rays has an array of soups on its menu. Our broccoli/bacon cheese soup is a favorite for snacks, light meals and an appetizer with your favorite meat dishes.

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.



Ingredients:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 finely chopped medium size onion | 1 ¼ lbs. of fresh chopped fresh broccoli florets |
| 1 cup of cooked chopped drained bacon | 3 cups of shredded cheddar cheese |
| 2/3 cup of butter | ½ block of cream cheese (room temperature) |
| 2/3 cup of all-purpose flour | ½ tsp. of dry mustard |
| 3 cups of chicken broth | ½ tsp. of garlic powder |
| 3 cups of Half & Half heavy whipping cream | ½ tsp. of smoked paprika |
| 2 cups of chopped carrots | 1 tbsp. of kosher salt |
| | ½ tsp. of black pepper |

Directions:

1. Use a medium size stock pot.
2. Start cooking on medium heat.
3. Melt butter
4. Add onions.
5. Cook 2-4 minutes.
6. Add flour and whisk mixture.
7. Pour in chicken broth & whisk thoroughly.
8. Add whipping cream and continue to whisk thoroughly.
9. Cook for 2 minutes while continuing to whisk mixture.
10. Add paprika, garlic powder, dried mustard, salt & pepper.
11. Reduce heat to low, whisking seasoning into mixture thoroughly.
12. Add broccoli and carrots.
13. Simmer on low heat for 15 minutes or wait until carrots are fork-tender.
14. Blend in cheddar cheese and cream cheese, whisking thoroughly until cheese has melted.
15. Add bacon.
16. Adjust texture of soup as desired. More cheese to thicken or more chicken broth & cream to thin it.
17. For desired taste, add more salt & pepper.

Serves eight to 10 people as an appetizer.

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Wesson student PKP inductee

Special to Wesson News

Makayla Russell of Wesson, who is majoring in Integrated Marketing Communications, was among the 189 University of Mississippi students who were welcomed into the Phi Kappa Phi honor society, one of the nation's oldest and most prestigious honor societies for all academic disciplines. She was inducted in a special ceremony conducted by the university last month at the Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts on campus.

"Phi Kappa Phi is an all-discipline honor society," said Annette S. Kluck, Phi Kappa Phi chapter

president and dean of the Graduate School. "Membership is by invitation only and is highly selective. Thus, the students invited to join our chapter are the top in their class.

"Membership signifies a student who passionately pursues academic excellence. The ceremony is a wonderful opportunity for us to recognize these outstanding students."



Special to Wesson News

Makayla Russell of Wesson

Phi Kappa Phi membership is based on a student's character and academic standing. Juniors must have completed 72 credit hours and rank in the top 7.5% of their class, while seniors and graduate students must rank in the top 10% of their class.

The University of Mississippi, affectionately known as Ole Miss, is the state's flagship university. Included

in the elite group of R1: Doctoral Universities - Highest Research Activity by the Carnegie Classification, it has a long history of producing leaders in public service, academics and business. Its 16 academic divisions include a major medical school, nationally recognized schools of accountancy, law and pharmacy, and an Honors College acclaimed for a blend of academic rigor, experiential learning and opportunities for community action. Recognized among the nation's most beautiful, Ole Miss' main campus is in Oxford, which is routinely acknowledged as one of the country's best college towns.

Traveling exhibit promotes child reading

Special to Wesson News

Children's of Mississippi patients have a surprise waiting for them at the Kathy and Joe Sanderson Tower: the interactive Rocky's House exhibit from the Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM).

"This is a wonderful surprise," said Sarah Starkey of Clinton, whose son Luke found games, books and creative outlets, including a stage with costumes and a puppet theater, at the unique traveling exhibit. "This wasn't here at our earlier visit." Benton Davis and his sister Avah of Meadville and Journee Bracey of Terry were also among the first visitors last month.

Rocky's House is at the Kathy and Joe Sanderson Tower at Children's of Mississippi through Jan. 10 to encourage reading to young children as part of the partnership of the museum and Children's of Mississippi's Reach Out and Read program.

Inside the little red house, Rocky the Reader and his friends Kareem, Ella, Mei, Cody and Mateo guide guests through three primary methods of language and literacy development: playing, talking and reading. Visitors can read a book, ask questions and put their own stories into motion with puppets.

The Reach Out and Read Program is a national nonprofit organization that promotes early literacy and school readiness in pediatric primary care where books are incorporated into the pediatric well child visit. It is part of all of Children's of Mississippi's pediatric ambulatory clinics and many other pediatric clinics across the state.

"We're so excited that our patients and their families can visit Rocky's house this holiday season," said Dr. Susan Buttross, professor of pediatrics and a principal investigator for Mississippi Thrive. The partnership with the Mississippi Children's Museum and Reach Out and Read is furthering Mississippi Thrive's goals to create a robust early child development and behavioral system for Mississippi's children.

"Rocky's House fosters a love for reading in young children, which lays the foundation for curiosity, critical thinking and life-long learning," she said. "Encouraging parents to interact with their children by reading books to them enhances their vocabulary, nurtures their imagination and emotional growth and sets them on

a path toward success in every area of life. We're grateful to have this wonderful exhibit at Children's of Mississippi and the partnership with MCM."

Susan Garrard, president and CEO of the Mississippi Children's Museum, said Rocky's House also supports the mission of Talk from the Start, a museum program formed to build awareness that talking to and with children from birth is essential to learning and literacy.

"Our museum is committed to developing innovative programs that address the needs of Mississippi's children and set them on the path to success," she said. "Struggles with literacy are among the biggest challenges that our children face. This project is an unprecedented opportunity to partner with an acclaimed educational institution, The Barksdale Reading Institute, to create resources that will raise awareness and positively impact children and families in our state."

Talk from the Start is a partnership between the Mississippi Children's Museum and the Barksdale Reading Institute, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

MCM's Talk from the Start and Reach Out and Read both champion the effects of shared reading, starting in infancy. Early

childhood reading is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics to "promote social-emotional development and language and literacy skills during this critical period of early brain and child development."

The partnership of the Mississippi Children's Museum, Children's of Mississippi and Reach Out and Read has been putting books into the hands of pediatricians across the state to share with their youngest patients during well visits. Parents then take those books home to read to their children, starting a home library.

Children's of Mississippi, part of the University of Mississippi Medical Center, encompasses all the pediatric services available at UMMC and at clinical sites throughout Mississippi. At the heart of these services is the state's only hospital devoted exclusively to the care and treatment of sick and injured children. The Children's of Mississippi network brings specialized clinical care for children to communities across the state, making it easier for families to get the treatment they need closer to home.



Special to Wesson News