

The Mississippi Monitor



**RECORD ENROLLMENT
AT MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE**

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Atmos Energy donates \$100,000 to further rebuild Rolling Fork

The Mississippi Monitor

Through its Fueling Safe and Thriving Communities program, Atmos Energy is helping the City of Rolling Fork's long-term rebuilding efforts for families impacted by the tornado earlier this year. Last Thursday, Aug. 24, the company announced that it was donating \$100,000 to the Community Foundation of Washington County to assist rebuilding efforts, and Atmos Energy presented 1,000 Chik-fil-A lunches to faculty, staff, students, and town residents at South Delta School. Atmos Energy employees also volunteered to clean up Russell Park, the city's main park.

"Residents of Rolling Fork have been in our thoughts and prayers since March 24. At Atmos Energy we recognize that in addition to restoring service as quickly and safely as possible, we also have the responsibility to help the community in their rebuilding efforts," said Mathew Davidson, president of the Mississippi division. "Melanie Powell and her team at the Community Foundation of Washington County are doing remarkable things, and we hope this contribution enhances the work being done."

Atmos Energy has performed nearly \$3 million worth of work restoring the natural gas system and infrastructure in Rolling Fork. All previous customers have access to gas service, and more than 50 percent of these previous customers have been reinstated.

"As we navigate the challenges throughout the rebuilding process in Rolling Fork, Atmos Energy's commitment to community service remains resolute," Central District Commissioner Brent Bailey said. "Their collaboration with local organizations, government entities and residents has fostered a sense of unity and shared purpose, creating a stronger, more resilient community for all and we are grateful to be a part of these efforts."

"I am very appreciative of this donation from Atmos Energy. They've been a positive presence in town from the very beginning of our rebuilding efforts," said Mayor Eldridge Walker. "The work being done by their employees on their infrastructure as well as in the community is a godsend."

This is the second philanthropic contribution Atmos Energy has given to benefit Rolling Fork. In the days following the tornado, Atmos made a \$50,000 contribution to the American Red Cross. This additional contribution to the Community Foundation of Washington County will address long-term recovery in the town.

"Words can't express our heartfelt thanks to Atmos Energy and their commitment to Rolling Fork," said Melanie Powell, executive director of the Community Foundation of Washington County. "These funds will go

a long way towards helping the Rolling Fork Community with their recovery."



Commissioner Bailey with Mayor Walker and Ms. Melanie Powell of Community Foundation of Washington County.

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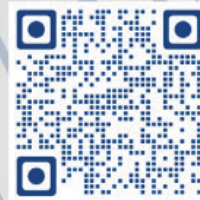
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At least three Mississippi hospitals aim to end inpatient services, convert to rural emergency status



Opened in 1935, and incorporated in 1942, Magee General Hospital faced bankruptcy in recent years, and pulled itself out of the debt, under the supervision of CEO Greg Gibbes and a Board of Directors, but currently functions with day-to-day cash on hand during the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: Sarah Warnock/MCIR

by Devna Bose, Mississippi Today

As the state's health care crisis persists, four more Mississippi hospitals have applied to become rural emergency hospitals, a federal designation meant to increase their financial viability.

The "rural emergency hospital" designation – a move State Health Officer Dr. Daniel Edney likened to a hospital closure – was rolled out at the beginning of this year. To qualify, hospitals have to end inpatient services and transfer emergency room patients to larger hospitals within 24 hours. In exchange, they get monthly stipends from the federal government and higher insurance reimbursement rates.

If approved, the hospitals – Quitman Community Hospital in Marks, Panola Medical Center in Batesville, Jefferson County Hospital in Fayette and Magee General Hospital – would be some of the first rural emergency hospitals in the country. Just a handful have been approved so far, including Alliance Healthcare System in Holly Springs, according to a database last updated on Aug. 15.

For rural hospitals with an already-small daily census, it can be a lifeline – instead of losing money on what few patients they have, the adjusted reimbursements help them break even or even profit.

However, for the communities with only one hospital, it means the end of inpatient health care and a hospital with little more than an emergency room.

In an interview with Mississippi Today in February, Edney said converting to a rural emergency hospital was basically a closure.

"It's mainly critical access hospitals that are shifting, and when that happens, you've lost the hospital," he said. "It's a critical access hospital without the hospital."

Critical access hospitals – another designation designed to improve hospital finances – are reimbursed by Medicare at a 101% rate, theoretically allowing a 1% profit. However, they must have 25 or fewer inpatient beds, be located 35 miles from another hospital, operate emergency services and transfer or discharge their patients within 96 hours.

In Mississippi, where nearly a half of rural hospitals are at risk of closure, others think the conversion is worth keeping the hospital functionally open.

Quentin Whitwell, an attorney from Oxford, is one of those. He was behind the effort in Holly Springs as co-owner of the hospital, as well as in Georgia where two of the country's first rural emergency hospitals were approved. He's also spearheading the change at three of the four hospitals that have applied in recent weeks: Quitman Community Hospital, Panola Medical Center and Jefferson County Hospital.

Whitwell co-owns the Quitman and Panola hospitals and is working as a consultant for Jefferson County Hospital, he said.

The fourth hospital pursuing the designation is Magee General Hospital, led by CEO Gregg Gibbes.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the federal agency pri-

marily responsible for approving these conversions along with the state Health Department, would not comment on pending applications.

While some see the new designation as a last resort for struggling hospitals at the brink of closure, Whitwell views it as a way to streamline services and create a financially successful hospital that serves the specific needs of the community.

"It's a game changer for a lot of hospitals," he said. "What we're trying to do is create a model that makes these hospitals vibrant again."

Gibbes stressed that hospital leadership at Magee are pursuing the designation as an option – a decision has not yet been made.

"The plan is to exhaust all efforts to make sure that the organization and ultimately health care is delivered in Magee and the surrounding areas," he said. "Applying for the rural emergency hospital status is so that we can have an option, should we get approved."

The hospital, which was in bankruptcy when Gibbes took over in 2019, survived the pandemic – but just barely, with the help of COVID-19 relief funds. He said the hospital is essentially breaking even, and hospital leadership wants to make sure, now that those one-time funds that kept them afloat have dried up, that the hospital remains viable for years to come.

The hospital, licensed for 44 beds, has an average daily census of 13 people, Gibbes said. He said that's why it makes sense to explore the rural emergency hospital designation.

"This is just under consideration," he said.

Whitwell, who acknowledged he's become somewhat of the "REH guy" across the country – he recently spoke at a CMS event about the benefits of the designation – is exploring turning more of his hospitals into rural emergency hospitals for a different reason.

"I believe in this model, and I want to help, but I also think that a lot of people are going to miss the mark on it," he said. "And I want to be the guy that CMS holds up ... and says, 'This is how you do it.'"

In Panola, for example, the hospital is losing money on its psychiatric unit, and he sees the new designation as a way to focus its resources on what the hospital already does well: outpatient services.

"I believe that Panola is going to be probably the most robust REH in the country," he said. "But we're definitely losing money right now in psychiatric inpatient services."

Panola Medical Center, aside from a long-term care facility, is the only hospital in Batesville, a town in north Mississippi with a population of around 7,000, according to the most recent census data.

Over the years, the hospital has shut down different portions of its psych unit – the geriatric psych section is the only part left. If they qualify as an REH, those remaining beds will have to be closed. But hospital leaders stressed that's a last resort and would only be considered when their application is finalized.

In recent months, St. Dominic closed its behavioral health services unit,

which provides inpatient mental health and geriatric psychiatric treatment and was one of the only single point-of-entry hospitals for Hinds Behavioral Health Services for people with mental health issues in the metro area. The following weeks saw consistently full beds at Jackson-area psychiatric units.

While Whitwell recognizes closing those beds will be a loss to the community, he said that it might be the only way to turn the hospital's finances around.

In the meantime, he's been pitching legislators on changing certificate of need laws to create a hospital within a hospital in order to keep those beds open.

The Quitman hospital got its letter of approval from CMS on Aug. 31. Once the state Health Department finalizes paperwork on its end, Whitwell said the hospital will begin operating as an REH, retroactively effective Aug. 1.

Aside from a 5-year period in which it was closed, Quitman Community Hospital has been a critical access hospital since January 2004, Whitwell said.

He said Jefferson County Hospital leadership anticipates final approval in the near future and expects to receive its first federal check by October at the latest.

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Quentin Whitwell

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DSU Department of Social Work to offer poverty simulation



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The Poverty Simulation, sponsored by the DSU Department of Social Work, will be offered on September 6 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. in the Jacob Center on the first floor of Ewing Hall. Students, faculty, and staff as well as interested community members may participate after registering for the free event.

Dr. Jana Donohoe, Chair and Associate Professor of Social Work said, “During the simulation participants take on the role of a real-life person who lived in poverty and pretend to be that person for the afternoon. They may be a single homeless person, a child, an adult with a disability, a single parent of several children, etc.”

The Poverty Simulation is an interactive educational experience that gives participants a glimpse of what it is like to live with a very low income from various perspectives using traditional community resources. It is designed to increase participants’ understanding of poverty and empathy for those who are burdened with extreme financial difficulties so that they can better serve people in need and access resources and services to overcome the challenges.

Donahoe said, “They work through the financial situation of their assigned role with their ‘family’ members (other participants playing similar roles) and navigate the available community resources in the room to try to survive a living for a ‘month’ on a very low income. A 4-week month is represented by four 15- minute segments in the simulation.”

DSU faculty, staff, and students may attend the Poverty Simulation on a voluntary basis. No credit or penalties are given for participating.

For more information, contact Dr. Jana Donahoe at jdonahoe@deltastate.edu or 662-846-4795.

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Influencer is cooking up an exciting future



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

An online cook who has racked up millions of views for his no-nonsense recipes, has admitted that just two years ago he couldn't boil an egg.

Mississippi insurance adjuster Matthew Bounds decided to teach himself to cook during lockdown because he could no longer dine out three or four times a week.

Matthew also felt guilty that his husband made most of the meals and so started to practice in his kitchen.

And now a few years on Matthew aka Your Barefoot Neighbor (sic) has not only got more than 747k followers on TikTok but has also had his now famous Chicken Cobbler recipe feature on tv show, Good Morning America.

The unexpected success has also seen Matthew produce his first cookery book. Come Fix You A Plate, which features many of his best loved Southern style recipes.

"My first plan was to create a DIY channel because I was also doing stuff outdoors," said Matthew.

"Which was fine when the weather was hot but then I thought I might just try and so some stuff in the kitchen – and that really took off."

When one of his recipes went viral – with 10 million views on Tik Tok and a staggering 25 million on Instagram– Matthew realised that his cooking was something that he could take really seriously.

And that was when he discovered Found, a company which helps recipe creators turn their social media content into cash.

Found creates books for influencers at no cost to them out of which they receive a percentage of everyone sold, with their only commitment being to promote the book via their channels.

"My book hasn't been out that long, but it's done really well," said Matthew.

"So much so that I'm now starting to think about book two!

"It's a great way to get your recipes published and there's no risk, it's just up to me to push the books to my followers."

Matthew's recipes are easy to follow, with lots of quick and simple – but tasty – dishes which are perfect for families or people who haven't got much time.

"I have had a bit of flack from some people saying that I use packet mixes sometimes and that's not what a chef would do," he said.

"But I'm not a chef, I'm cooking like most people do – using the stuff they have round the house."

Luckily the majority of the response to Matthew is overwhelmingly positive, with people loving his dishes which are often only made with a handful of ingredients.

"You don't want to be cooking something that means you have to go to five different stores to buy the ingredients," he said.

"My recipes are all about using mostly things that everyone has in their kitchens and often can be cooked in one pot."

Suzanne Scales Rutherford named executive director of Volunteer Mississippi

Special to the Mississippi Monitor

Volunteer Mississippi, the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service, is pleased to announce the promotion of Suzanne Scales Rutherford to executive director.

In her new role, Rutherford will provide vision and direction for Volunteer Mississippi staff while overseeing the day-to-day operations of Volunteer Mississippi. She will also serve as the liaison between Volunteer Mississippi and its partners, including AmeriCorps, community organizations, and elected officials.

Rutherford, a Millsaps College and Louisiana State University graduate, has served Volunteer Mississippi in various roles since 2007, most recently as AmeriCorps grants officer and interim co-executive director. Rutherford's extensive history with the agency and knowledge of AmeriCorps programs will greatly benefit volunteerism, national service, and Mississippi as a whole.

With over 16 years of experience in national service, Rutherford is no stranger to the world of AmeriCorps and volunteerism. After graduating from Millsaps College, Rutherford returned to her alma mater to serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA member and director of volunteer and community services.

A Mississippi native, Rutherford grew up around Lauderdale County, graduating from West Lauderdale High School. Rutherford married the love of her life, Robert, in 2009, and together, they have two beautiful children, George (8) and Margaret (4).

Rutherford is active in her community and a supporter of Saint Richard Catholic School and the Cathedral of Saint Peter the Apostle, both of Jackson. She serves as aboard member for Una Voce of Mississippi and loves all things classic, including Masterpiece Theatre and Tolkien.

She is excited to continue her tenure with Volunteer Mississippi in the role of executive director, and she is grateful for her past with the agency.

"Volunteer Mississippi has been my home for the last sixteen years," Rutherford said, "and in that time I have had the incredible opportunity to work with some of the finest people around. Our staff is genuinely dedicated to helping Mississippi flourish, and they do so with such grace and humility. The work that Volunteer Mississippi does allows so many communities to thrive, and I am grateful for the opportunity to play even a small part in that."

Volunteer Mississippi has helped ignite the spark of service in many Mississippians, and as the agency moves towards its thirtieth anniversary, Rutherford has made it a goal to recognize and promote the spirit of service that exists in Mississippi.

"The hard work of volunteers and National Service members have provided solutions to some of Mississippi's greatest challenges," Rutherford said. "In most cases, the impact of those helping hands is largely unrealized. Since Mississippians oftentimes see hospitality and generosity just as a way of life, there is an untapped undercurrent of generosity that Volunteer Mississippi intends to celebrate."

Chairman of Volunteer Mississippi's Board of Commissioners, Suzanne Bean, is equally enthusiastic about the future of the agency under the direction of Rutherford.

"The Commissioners and I are excited about the appointment of Suzanne Scales Rutherford as executive director of Volunteer Mississippi," Bean said. "Suzanne has been with the agency for 16 years, and she certainly understands the importance of the work of Volunteer Mississippi to our state. We look forward to her leadership and to the progress of Volunteer Mississippi."

Volunteer Mississippi's mission will continue to grow and thrive with Rutherford as director, and she clarified her vision for the future of the agency.

"Our goals to promote, increase, and recognize volunteers AND diversify AmeriCorps resources in the state will provide even more opportunities for Mississippians to help their neighbors," Rutherford said, "We look forward to seeing their hard work help Mississippi become better prepared for emergencies, build stronger employment pathways, improve educational engagement, protect natural resources, provide healthier futures, and more."

The mission of Volunteer Mississippi is to engage and support Mississippians of all ages and backgrounds in service to their communities. Volunteer Mississippi works to connect volunteers with opportunities to serve around the state of Mississippi. The agency houses AmeriCorps Mississippi and partners with Mississippi service organizations to promote volunteerism to all Mississippi residents. To learn more about Volunteer Mississippi or get involved, visit volunteermisssissippi.org.

Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson recaps success of 2023 Mississippi State Fair



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The 2023 Mississippi State Fair concluded Sunday, October 15. Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson released the following statement on the success of the 164th State Fair.

"The 164th Mississippi State Fair is in the books, and I am proud to report the 2023 State Fair was a success. The 11-day fair is the state's largest agriculture event with an economic impact of nearly \$50 million annually. Fairgoers from across the state enjoyed new attractions such as the Mississippi State Fair Idol competition and Taste of Dixie National Rodeo along with many traditional favorites like the Biscuit Booth, livestock shows, and of course, the fair food.

Fair attendance and revenue were up this year, despite a couple days of much-needed rain that had less attendance. Considering we have one less fair day than prior to 2022, we are very pleased with the increased attendance that was driven in part by higher concert attendance. We drew large lunch crowds during the weekdays. We estimate the total fair attendance, which accounts for non-paid admissions, to be nearly 526,000.

We accomplished our goal of hosting a safe State Fair. For the second year, we implemented the new stringent security model that included policies such as a youth curfew to ensure a peaceful, family-friendly, fun and secure Mississippi State Fair for fairgoers. There were no major incidents to report. Any issues that arose were handled by law enforcement quickly. We could not have accomplished this without the support of multiple state, county, and municipal law enforcement agencies. I want to personally thank all of our law enforcement partners: Mississippi Highway Patrol, Mississippi State Capitol Police, Department of Homeland Security, State Fire Marshal's Office, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, Mississippi Agriculture and Livestock Theft Bureau, Hinds County Sheriff's Office, Jackson Police Department, Pearl Police Department, Florence Police Department and private security officers.

I also want to thank the Director of the Mississippi State Fairgrounds Michael Lasseter and the staff at the Fairgrounds for their dedicated effort to make this the best Mississippi State Fair. I hope to see everyone October 3-13, 2024, for the 165th Mississippi State Fair."

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MDAC names executive director of the Mississippi Agriculture & Forestry Museum

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Today, Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson named Theresa Love as executive director of the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum. In this position, Love, a 26-year staff member of the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) and former acting director of the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum, will oversee all daily operations and events at the museum.

"I am proud to name Theresa Love as executive director of the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum," said Commissioner Gipson. "She has faithfully served the agency for 26 years now, and her experience and proven abilities will help further our vision to educate individuals on Mississippi's rich agricultural history for generations to come."

Love has accumulated 26 years of experience working for MDAC, with a significant portion of her career dedicated to the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum. Throughout her tenure at the museum, she has fulfilled various roles within education and volunteer services, as well as holding the deputy director, and more recently, acting director, positions. Love possesses an educational background with a bachelor's degree in counseling. Her values are centered around family, community, history and education. A prime objective that she strives to achieve for the Ag Museum is to create a compelling experience for visitors that brings these core values to life.

"I am grateful for this valuable opportunity," said Love. "The museum has an exceptional team, and I strive to nurture the remarkable legacy of this establishment to educate and captivate guests about the rich agricultural history of Mississippi. With an abundance of available resources at our fingertips, my intention is to make the utmost use of them to foster an enthusiastic interest among our younger generation, urging them to explore and pursue careers in the field of agriculture."

As her first major event as executive director, Love will oversee the museum's upcoming 40th Birthday Celebration on Saturday, September 9, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Prior to the day's activities, the public is invited to attend a ribbon cutting ceremony with Commissioner Gipson at 9:30 a.m. to kick off this event. This event recognizes the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum's 40 prosperous years of educating the public on Mississippi's agricultural heritage. The museum has partnered with several organizations who will assist in providing 40 unique experiences across the grounds that visitors can enjoy.

In addition to all the usual exhibits, festivities will feature:

- The Dixieland Old Engine and Agricultural Club's collection of antique engines and other agricultural tools will be on display throughout the day.
- Small Town, Mississippi, will host continuous demonstrations at the Print Shop, Doctor's Garden, Masonic Lodge, Blacksmith Shop, Nature Trail, Schoolhouse and Multipurpose Building throughout the day.
- The Sawmill will be operated by museum staff for a special demonstration at 1:00 p.m. inside Small Town, Mississippi.
- The Central Mississippi Beekeepers Association will give 'beekeeper talks' inside the Heritage Center throughout the day.
- Museum staff will provide 'collection talks' on various ag-related topics inside the Heritage Center throughout the day.
- Live musical performances will take place at the Heritage Center from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.



Ag Commissioner Andy Gipson names Theresa Love as executive director of the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum. Pictured L-R: Commissioner Gipson and Theresa Love.

- A Mississippi 4-H Agent will be educating visitors on Mississippi's 4-H program inside the 4-H Museum Learning Center all day.
- Several educational presentations will be held in the Sparkman Auditorium throughout the day. Presenters include the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, Mississippi Forestry Commission, Chimneyville Weavers and Spinners Guild, Jackson Audubon Society and others.
- Mississippi Public Broadcasting's Kids Club will provide activities, including character interactions and more, inside the Ethnic Heritage Center all day. Face painting will also be available in the same building.
- Wagon rides will be available throughout the day with a Living History Presenter to provide commentary as visitors traverse the museum grounds.
- Living History Presenters will be dressed in period clothing and interacting with museum visitors as they perform various demonstrations that illustrate 'farmsteading' in years past at McDavid Cabin and the Fortenberry-Parkman Farmstead throughout the day.

The Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum, located at 1150 Lakeland Drive in Jackson, is open Monday through Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more information on the different experiences scheduled for the 40th Birthday Celebration, contact Rachel Bone at rachel@mdac.ms.gov, visit www.msagmuseum.org, call 601-432-4500 or follow the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum on Facebook.

Barry and Carl: A friendship borne in the aftermath of 9/11

By Alexa Haik

Retired New York City Firefighter Carl Schramm and Mississippi State Fire Academy Deputy Director of Instructional Services Barry Burnside to share their story of the beginnings of a long-term friendship - memories from twenty-two years ago. Below is the culmination of two interviews conducted on separate days in August of 2023.

Carl Schramm: *Shortly after 9/11 (I was there probably a few weeks after the actual attack.) the people in Clinton, Mississippi, had contacted New York City and they were looking for, if a firefighter could come out there because there was a young girl AudreyAnne Estess, I believe her name was. She had started collecting monies for some little ribbons like a star with little ribbons hanging off of it to raise money for the firefighters in New York to have masks to protect themselves. They asked if somebody would come out because they wanted to have a ceremony so she could present it to them. Well, I guess a few phone calls later it came to our fire station one of the guys had worked with had done a lot of training and teaching around the country they got in touch with him and he comes in one day "anybody interested in coming down to Mississippi?" I said "Sure, I'll go."*

Barry Burnside: *Let me tell you what happened. There was a young child, AudreyAnne Estess, she came up with a program to make ribbons and to raise money for the firefighters if my memory serves me right. I guess she was making a lot of money. I was not the fire chief in Clinton but I was the training officer at that time and the mayor came to me and she said, "Hey, look, we have reached out to New York to the FDNY and we have somebody that is going to come to Clinton and accept the money that AudreyAnne had raised." The mayor said "we are flying him in and when we do, can you pick him up at the airport? So, I picked him up - Carl and [his wife] Mary Ann Schramm. Mary Ann was a volunteer firefighter and Carl with FDNY. At that point my wife [Kerri Burnside] was a teacher in Raymond and they had raised some money. So, we immediately took them to Raymond Elementary School. Then we took them to the MISS 103 radio station and they did an interview there. Then we took him to Applebee's and introduced him to grits. We just ran him all over town.*

Schramm: *"So, my wife and I went. When we got there, we met the Chief of the Fire Department Darrel McQuirter at the airport along with his first assistant. They picked us up, and brought us to the hotel where we were staying. The next day one of the captains in the Clinton Fire Department, Barry Burnside, who volunteered to help take us around, him and his wife came and picked us up. Through the next couple of days, I spoke to a couple of elementary schools. Applebee's was holding a fundraiser breakfast, and I went to that. I spoke at a couple of churches. The fire department [also] had a big barbeque at the firehouse one night, in honor of us, so I was there and eventually they had a ceremony [at Mississippi College].*

Burnside: *When we first met. I was really reluctant to meet somebody from FDNY. I was really intimidated by it, if you want to know the truth. I was like, man, a lot of us, we feel like firefighter heroes are the FDNY or the bigger cities and we look up to them. Cause you just see them a lot in the news and in movies, you kind of look up to them. [Turns out] they are just as down to earth as we are. After a few minutes [together] we [discovered] we had the same interests. I train here in Mississippi but we are all kind of the same, everything we do is kind of standardized so we talk the same language. he was on a Hazmat squad and I had Hazmat here, so we were very familiar with that. So, we shared different stories, and it just kind of clicked. My wife*



Carl Schramm from FDNY Hazmat One, with Clinton Fire Department Captain Barry Burnside in 2001.

loved them, [she] bonded with Mary Ann.

Schramm: *My wife and I have gone to visit them a couple of times. They have been to New York. And, because Kerri was a fourth-grade teacher at the local elementary school, every year on 9/11 I would skype with her class and discuss what happened on 9/11. I have always stayed in contact with Barry and Kerri.*

When we met them, Kerri was pregnant with her first daughter (now they have three children).

I had a denim jacket, a Carhartt Jacket, and on the back, it said FDNY Hazmat1, that was my company. What I did was I had another one made up with Barry's name on it and I sent it to him. And they took pictures of their daughter when she was born, she was wrapped up in the coat.

Burnside: *Carl and Mary Ann would come back and just stay a couple of nights and visit with us. As matter of a fact, they even met us at Disney World. My family had a trip several years ago to go to Disney, we were driving down, and Carl and Mary Anne flew from New York. They sent us a picture of him - he had his Clinton Fire Department t-shirt on and he was in Orlando - I didn't know that they were coming. You know we've got that type of friendship. We spent the week together. My daughters love him.*

Schramm: *It is one of the things in the fire department that is universal - we kind of all tease each other. You always joke around and, [for instance my wife and I] wound up on the cover of the newspaper. We get to the airport and there is one of the machines that sells newspapers and there is my picture, and so I was kind of teasing Barry "So, Barry do you want me to autograph one for ya?" Then we went back a few years later and we were there again on 9/11 and again I wind up on the cover of the newspaper because someone did a story. Again, I keep teasing Barry - He's like, "I have been here my whole life you have been here twice and you have been on the cover of the newspaper."*

But [jokes aside], there is a certain bond - it's kind of hard to explain to people that haven't gone through it - in the fire service. We refer to each other all of the time as brother.

Burnside: *I think the Lord made our paths cross for a reason. I will say this, I was kind of reluctant at first but once I met him and we started picking with each other [there was a bond]. Firefighters are good about that, we can meet them from all over the nation - you run into a firefighter somewhere you see them and you go "I think that guy is a firefighter," I can kind of tell, you know? We go to the National Fire Academy a lot and so you will see guys from all over the country. You never have met them, but you know that they are firefighters. There is that comradery already that is there, and so, we have that bond. Carl and I just have a really good chemistry.*



Mississippi State Fire Academy Deputy Director of Instructional Services Barry Burnside



Pictured is Schramm in his nursing uniform. "I retired from the fire department on March 3, 2003. A little over a year or so after almost two years after the incident I went back to college I became a registered nurse I now work at the VA Hospital out here where I live. Taking care of the veterans."

Real Estate Tips:

Tips for winter home maintenance:



- Have your heating unit cleaned and serviced.
- Chimney and fireplace should be inspected.
- Keep debris off of roof and gutters cleaned.
- Exterior pipes and faucets should be insulated and covered.
- Seal gaps around windows and doors to save on energy costs.
- Identify tree hazards that could pose a risk to your home or safety during severe weather and have them cut back or down.
- Reverse ceiling fans for warmth.
- Check batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

Tips to ready your home for sale:

Have an agent assess your property:

As a seasoned professional, a walk-through of a client's home before counseling and listing the property is essential. Compiling a checklist of repairs or updates for a seller to consider is an important step and can help contribute to a more seamless and effective process in getting your home sold.

Declutter and Depersonalize your space:

Remove photos and other personal items to allow for a more inviting space in which potential buyers can envision their own style.

Promote curb appeal:

Invest in landscaping and the overall maintenance of your home's exterior to boost its allure and salability.



CHRISTINE WHITTON BROKER ASSOCIATE

As the trusted real estate advisor for clients over the last 13 years, Christine understands that buying, selling, and/or investing is one of the most important and complex financial decisions most of us will ever make. She has a seasoned perspective on the process and has built a thorough knowledge of the real estate market.

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ADD ON PRETZEL DIP	BEVERAGES	MAKE IT A COMBO!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">• Cheddar Cheese <li style="width: 50%;">• Jalapeno Cheese <li style="width: 50%;">• Caramel <li style="width: 50%;">• Pizza Sauce <li style="width: 50%;">• Cream Cheese <li style="width: 50%;">• Sweet Glaze <li style="width: 50%;">• Honey Mustard <li style="width: 50%;">• Strawberry Cream Cheese 	<p>FOUNTAIN DRINK</p> <p>FRESH LEMONADE</p> <p>FROZEN DRINKS</p>	 <p>DIPPIN DOTS</p> <p>SMALL LARGE</p>
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601-990-9511
Volume 1, Number 2

The Mississippi Monitor
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Would universal school choice be unconstitutional in Mississippi?

By Guest Columnist Douglas Caswell

Mississippi could soon be surrounded on three sides by states that have school choice. Arkansas has already passed legislation establishing universal education freedom. Alabama and Louisiana may not be far behind.

Might we see something similar in Mississippi?

Speaking on SuperTalk the other day, Lieutenant Governor, Delbert Hosemann, sounded wonderfully upbeat about school choice. He said that he expected there to be “multiple school choice bills” presented during the 2024 state legislative session.

However, Mr Hosemann then suggested that any such reform may need to be restricted in its scope. Why? Because he said, under Mississippi’s constitution “you can’t put government money into private schools”.

The Lieutenant Governor raises an important point. As the case for universal school choice becomes increasingly difficult to ignore, we need to examine what Mississippi’s constitution actually says. Does our state constitution really preclude Mississippi from implementing Arkansas-type reform?

Section 208 of the Mississippi Constitution states that:

“No religious or other sect or sects shall ever control any part of the school or other educational funds of this state; nor shall any funds be appropriated toward the support of any sectarian school, or to any school that at the time of receiving such appropriation is not conducted as a free school.”

It could not be clearer, opponents of school choice will say. No public money can be appropriated for private schools.

Except, of course, with Arkansas-type school choice, public money is not appropriated for private schools. It is appropriated to families, who receive 90 percent of the prior year’s net public school aid budget paid into their child’s Education Freedom Account. This they can then spend on a school of their choice, public, private or home school.

Claiming that under such a scheme money is being appropriated to private schools would be like claiming that part of your wages are being appropriated to Target, simply because you chose to spend some of your salary there.

Fortunately, it turns out that the argument that Mississippi’s constitution prevents universal school choice is not a slam dunk after all.

In his interview on SuperTalk, the Lieutenant Governor was also quite right to refer to a case currently before the courts concerning the use of pandemic relief funds paid to private schools.

During Covid, large sums of federal money were provided to states like Mississippi to distribute to eligible recipients for disaster relief and to spur economic recovery. The Mississippi legislature, in turn, authorized a state agency to distribute about \$10 million of those federal funds to private schools for infrastructure improvements.

This prompted a legal challenge brought by the activist group Parents for Public Schools, who argued that Section 208 made such payments unconstitutional. A Hinds County chancellor agreed. The Mississippi Supreme Court is now reviewing the case on appeal.

What if the Supreme Court rules that it was unconstitutional to give \$10 million of pandemic relief funds to private schools? Would that mean Arkansas-type school choice is now considered unconstitutional in our state, as Mr. Hosemann seemed to imply?

Not at all. In fact, MCPP’s legal arm, the Mississippi Justice Institute, recently addressed that very question in the pandemic relief litigation. Teaming up with our friends at the Institute for Justice, we filed a “friend of the court” brief with the Mississippi Supreme Court to ensure the point was clear.

Here is what we told the Court.

Even if the Court ruled that the provision of \$10 million in federal relief funds to private schools was unconstitutional, that de-



cision would not prevent Mississippi from enacting school choice programs, including those available to families using non-public schools.

Why not? Because the Mississippi Constitution only prohibits the appropriation of state education dollars for institutional aid to non-public schools. It does not prevent the state from providing individual aid to students who choose to use those funds for tuition at non-public schools. Indeed, to avoid future confusion on that point, we asked the Court to explicitly say so in its ruling.

Moreover, as our legal brief points out, it is not just the text of the Constitution on our side. Precedent from the Mississippi Supreme Court supports our view

as well. Over 80 years ago, the Court decided *Chance v. Mississippi State Textbook Rating & Purchasing Board*, 200 So. 706 (Miss., 1941). In that case, the Court upheld a law that appropriated funds to purchase textbooks and distribute them to students, including those in non-public schools. Why? Because the program was designed to benefit the students, not the schools.

Far from precluding school choice, Mississippi’s constitutional law is favourable to it.

There are plenty of legitimate (if misguided) arguments against having universal school choice in Mississippi. Claiming that the Mississippi Constitution prevents it is not one of them.

In every single one of the half dozen US states that have now adopted school choice, there was a legal challenge to try to prevent it from happening. There will no doubt be legal challenges to school choice when – not if – it eventually happens here. The fact that such cases will be brought against universal school choice is not a case against passing legislation to allow it.

Douglas Caswell is the President & CEO of the Mississippi Center for Public Policy. The Mississippi Justice Institute is the MCPP’s legal division.





MC LOGS RECORD ENROLLMENT FOR FALL 2023 SEMESTER

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Mississippi College has announced record enrollment on the Clinton campus this fall. A total of 1,025 new freshman and transfer students have been admitted to Mississippi College. This brings the campus enrollment totals to 2,677 undergraduate students and 715 graduate students.

According to Michael Wright, dean of enrollment management at MC, that number represents the largest class of first-year students in the Christian University's 198-year history.

"It's the first time we've ever eclipsed 1,000 new incoming undergraduate students," Wright said. "The Speed Scholarship has been vitally important to making this class the stellar class that it is. It had an overwhelmingly positive response in the market when it was announced."

The Leland Speed Scholarship provides full tuition for all admitted high school or undergraduate transfer students who are residents of Mississippi and agree to live on campus. All federal, state, and institutional grants and scholarships earned by Speed Scholars can also be applied to their remaining balances.

The generous scholarship legacy provided by the estate of the University's longtime trustee and one of MC's most beloved benefactors is unique - no other institution of higher learning in the state offers full-tuition scholarships for all

qualified students from Mississippi.

While visiting another university during her junior year in high school, Darby Renfro mentioned to her mother that she was going to end up at Mississippi College.

"I didn't know at the time how it was going to happen," the new freshman from Grenada said, "but I knew the Lord was leading me to MC, and He had a plan for me here."

A friend sent her an article about the Speed Scholarship, which turned out to be the avenue for her entrance into the Christian university.

"The scholarship greatly impacted me. Without it, I probably would not be here today," Renfro said.

A talented high school athlete, Sidney Stegall committed to join the MC Cross Country and Track Program last year. The incoming freshman from Columbus had not heard of the Speed Scholarship until he attended Preview Day at MC.

"The Speed Scholarship, along with my athletic aid, has covered all of my costs at Mississippi College," Stegall said. "I am exceedingly grateful for the faithfulness of God through the generosity of Mr. Leland Speed."

As powerful of a recruiting tool as the Speed Scholarship is - particularly for those living in Mississippi - students flock to Mississippi College for many other reasons, too. The university boasts a friendly environment in the small-town setting of Clinton; small class sizes and a 16-to-1 stu-



dent-faculty ratio and competitive athletic programs in the Division II Gulf South Conference. In addition to offering more than eighty undergraduate majors to choose from, plus more than fifty graduate areas of study, two doctoral programs, a law school, a physician assistant program, and the state's only art education program, MC is also ranked among the finest colleges in the nation for academics, Christian education and value.

"The most attractive thing to prospective students is and always has been our Christian distinction," Wright said. "When students prioritize academic excellence and commitment to the cause of Christ, they want to be here. The desire for Christian higher education has always existed in the market. The Speed Scholarship just lowered the financial barrier to Mississippi residents being able to access it."

Measures have been taken throughout the campus community to accommodate the unprecedented numbers at Mississippi College, but Wright said the excitement in welcoming the new students has far outweighed any perceived inconveniences.

"It's electric around here," he said. "All of the buzz I've heard has been positive. The renovated residence halls are housing some very happy students. Students and professors are beginning to build lifelong relationships. The new and improved Caf has fed some approving food lovers. The clubs and tribes have seen record numbers of sign-ups for their recruitment process."

"All of this is key to Phase Two of the Speed Scholarship. Our best spokespeople are happy students, and so far, we've got some very positive marketing happening."

"I have met many Speed Scholars, and most of them are extremely grateful for the opportunity they have been provided," Stegall said. "The Speed Scholarship further reinforced the call from God that MC was where I was called to be in school."

Whether the number of new students at MC continues to increase, Wright said the quality of the educational programs offered at Mississippi College will always draw students.

"Mr. Speed understood the value of Christian higher ed-

ucation. He also understood the importance of Christian higher education. The Speed Scholarship removes the biggest barriers that Mississippi residents have to access premium Christian higher education," said Wright.

"The Christian distinction has always been desired in the market. Mr. Speed has made it affordable, and higher education will never be the same now."



Mississippi College President Blake Thompson is pictured with the largest incoming class of students in Mississippi College's history.



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