

William Carey University launches “Making College Affordable”

The Mississippi Monitor

William Carey University announces “Making College Affordable” – a major restructuring of its financial aid program. Starting in fall 2023, it will mean an average increase of forty percent in scholarship amounts awarded to freshmen, transfer and international students. It also means free textbooks for undergraduate students and no tuition increase over fall 2022.

This initiative was among Dr. Ben Burnett’s first priorities in August 2022 as he assumed a new role as the university’s president.

“While Carey has always been competitive with other institutions in Mississippi, and in most cases less expensive, we felt our scholarship structure was outdated and needed to reflect the needs of our students today,” Burnett said.

“We want all students to have the option of choosing a Christian higher education. Hopefully, these changes will make that possible for many more students in the future. We don’t ever want financial hardship to prevent a student from



enrolling at Carey.”

WCU’s academic scholarships are ranked in four tiers and awarded based on factors like scores on ACT and SAT tests for freshmen, college grade point average for transfer students and whether the student lives on-campus or off-campus. Under the new structure, scholarships will range from \$5,100 to \$9,300 per year for students who live on campus, and \$2,700 to \$6,600

for commuters.

The new program also includes Church-Related Vocation scholarships for ministerial students – increasing those awards to \$9,000 for on-campus students and \$6,300 for commuters.

“One of the things I’ve learned talking to prospective students and families is that people assume William Carey’s tuition is high because it’s a private university. That’s never been the case. We

kept tuition low – but now, we’ve raised our scholarships to unprecedented amounts. Students can absolutely afford to pursue their educational dreams at William Carey,” said Dr. Brett Golsen, dean of the Cooper School of Missions and Ministry Studies.

For more information, visit wmcarey.edu/MakingCollegeAffordable, or contact the WCU Office of Admissions, Tradition campus at 228-702-1815.

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Dr. Paul Byers Announces Retirement, Dr. Kathryn Taylor Named Interim State Epidemiologist

The Mississippi Monitor

The Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) announces that State Epidemiologist Dr. Paul Byers will retire at the end of June after more than 30 years with MSDH.

“Dr. Byers will be hugely missed – not only for his institutional knowledge and expertise, but also for his constant professionalism and patience,” said MSDH State Health Officer Dr. Dan Edney. “He has an unparalleled ability to explain complicated issues with clarity and simplicity. That has been a huge asset in working with the public and our public health partners.”

Byers has served in numerous leadership positions during his tenure at MSDH, most recently as State Epidemiologist since 2016. He has

also served as Deputy State Health Officer and the medical director for several county health department clinics, the Office of Epidemiology, and the Office of Communicable Diseases.

Dr. Kathryn Taylor has been named the Interim State Epidemiologist, effective July 1, 2023.

Currently serving as Deputy State Epidemiologist since 2019, Dr. Taylor has worked at MSDH for several years, previously District V Health Officer and Medical Consultant for the Office of Communicable Diseases. Dr. Taylor has been vital in providing direction for surveillance and surveillance systems to the agency, has led and been involved in numerous outbreak and reportable diseases investigations and in the responses to other diseases of public health significance.

“Dr. Taylor has worked in tandem with me for the past several years investigating outbreaks and responding to a variety of public health emergencies, most notably COVID,” said Byers. “Her knowledge and passion for the field of epidemiology is a benefit to the State of Mississippi.”

A Jackson native, Taylor is a graduate of Mississippi College and the University of Mississippi Medical Center, where she completed her residency in family medicine.

She is a member of the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the Mississippi Academy of Family Physicians, and the Mississippi State Medical Association.

Follow MSDH by e-mail and social media at HealthyMS.com/connect.



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Mississippi success stories

By Douglas Carswell

Far too often we only hear bad things about Mississippi. Many media organizations seem to relish any chance they get to put our state down.

Mississippi is, I believe, getting a lot of big things right – and improved public policy is starting to generate some successes.

Here are four recent trends impacting our state that show we are heading in the right direction on some important policy areas.



MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR
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More Mississippi kids are now learning to read properly:

For years, Mississippi was ranked bottom of the class for education. Not anymore.

Mississippi has seen a significant improvement in literacy standards, following an insistence on the use of phonics and testing. The National Assessment of Education Progress test results show that over the past decade, Mississippi has moved from near the bottom to the middle for most exams.

Thanks to improved policing, Jackson's homicide rate appears to be falling fast:

At the end of this month, we will be halfway through 2023. So far, it seems that there has been a significant decline in the murder rate.

In 2021, Jackson had one of the highest homicide rates in America, with 160 murders – making our state capital twice as deadly in per capita terms as Atlanta. In 2022 things were not that much better, with 138 people killed.

As of writing this, we have had 41 homicides in the city so far this year – still tragically high. But the number is significantly lower than at this stage last year, or the year before. In fact, if – and it is a big if – the trend we saw in the first five months of 2023 continues, we could be on course to have the lowest homicide rate in the city since 2017. It seems that changes in the way that we police our state capital are working. Well done to all those that are helping make that happen!

Unemployment in our state has never been lower:

Unemployment in Mississippi is lower today than ever, with fewer than 42,000 people out of work. A decade ago, there were well over 100,000 Mississippians out of work.

There are a myriad of reasons why unemployment is lower. Some might emphasize how lower income tax encourages more people to earn an income. Others might point to labor market deregulation, which makes it easier for people to get occupational licenses. Whatever the reasons, this is great news for our state.

Our state's personal tax burden is falling:

According to the Tax Foundation, Mississippi now has one of the lower per-person tax burdens in America. There are only 15 states across the country where people pay less personal tax than we do. Our state's top marginal rate of tax is down to 5 percent as of January this year. Compare that to California's 13 percent or New York's 11 percent.

To me, it seems that many opinion formers in our state seem embarrassed about Mississippi. Others seem to want to signal their supposed superiority with relentless condescension. As someone that has chosen to make my home in Mississippi, I believe we need to stop feeling defensive about our state.

Mississippi is a great place to live. And with record low unemployment, rising literacy rates, falling taxes and signs that we might at last be getting a grip on crime in Jackson, it is getting even better. The Mississippi Center for Public Policy exists to make sure that happens.

Douglas Carswell is the President & CEO of the Mississippi Center for Public Policy.

Huber Engineered Woods locating manufacturing operations in Shuqualak

The Mississippi Monitor

Huber Engineered Woods, a leading specialty building products manufacturer, is locating a state-of-the-art oriented strand board manufacturing plant in Shuqualak in Noxubee County. The project is a \$418 million corporate investment and will create 158 jobs.

Huber Engineered Woods plans to locate on a 551-acre site where the company will produce specialty engineered wood panels.

The Mississippi Development Authority is providing assistance for infrastructure needs. MDA also certified the company for the Advantage Jobs Rebate Program, which is designated for eligible businesses that create new jobs exceeding the average annual wage of the state or county in which the company locates or expands. AccelerateMS is providing assistance for workforce training, and Noxubee County and Tennessee Valley Authority also are assisting with the project.

Huber Engineered Woods is one of the largest private land managers in the U.S. and employs more than 1,000 people across the country. Construction on the new facility is expected to begin in the near future. The new facility is part of Huber Engineered Woods' ongoing commitment to innovation and sustainability and is its largest capital investment to date.

"This massive investment by Huber Engineered Woods is a significant win for Mississippi and is another example of our state's strong economy. We are proud to welcome another top manufacturer to Mississippi and are excited about the economic benefits this investment will bring. We look forward to working with Huber Engineered Woods as they build and grow in our state."

- Gov. Tate Reeves-

"Mississippi's rich natural resources in agriculture, forestry and wood products have always been a catalyst for economic growth. We are thrilled to see Huber Engineered Woods invest in our state, bringing new job opportunities and boosting our economy. MDA is proud to support this venture and looks forward to its success."

-MDA Deputy Executive Director Laura Hipp-

"Noxubee County is proud to support and work with Huber Engineered Woods in their new location near Shuqualak. We are thankful for their confidence in our workforce and look forward to a long-term partnership that supports their profitability, as well as our communities, citizens and schools."

- Eddie Coleman, President, Noxubee County Board of Supervisors-



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Prison education programs are primed to take off in Mississippi. Here's what one class looks like.

by Molly Minta, *Mississippi Today*

In the back of the Alcorn County Correctional Facility, a regional prison in the top-right corner of Mississippi, is an ice-cold trailer.

It's new. And it's where Bill Stone — a retired Northeast Mississippi Community College instructor who, for the past three years, has taught a public speaking class at this prison — was headed early Wednesday afternoon.

To get there, he must go through a pat-down. A guard inspects his materials — folders, notebooks and seven copies of the textbook “Practically Speaking.” Then Stone must walk through the prison's long, loud hallway, past his old classroom; past the canteen, the case managers' offices and the guard; and past the living pods. Some of his students come to the glass or they shout hello, adding to the din. Finally, after a few steps on a sidewalk walled-off with a chain-link fence, Stone is inside the trailer.

Sometimes, Stone thinks it's not unlike walking the halls of a high school.

On Wednesday, he had Michelle Baragona, NEMCC's vice president of instruction, in tow. She'd driven 20 minutes from NEMCC's main campus in Booneville. Since fall 2017, she has overseen NEMCC's prison education programs, which are part of a growing movement in Mississippi and across the country. Boosted in part by research that has shown that prison education reduces recidivism, more colleges and universities are offering classes in prison.

Now, as the federal government is preparing to make federal financial aid once again available to incarcerated people starting July 1, these programs are primed to explode in partnership with the Mississippi Department of Corrections. Key stakeholders are on board: In interviews, Burl Cain, the MDOC commissioner, has correctly linked the availability of jobs for formerly incarcerated people, which prison education can help them get, to reduced recidivism.

In the quiet, air-conditioned trailer, Stone was hoping his students could, just for an hour, find some reprieve from prison. Or at least, from their often sweltering hot living pods, which on Wednesday were burning up in the 84-degree heat. All 295 students at this facility can take classes, as long as they have a GED.

“This is much better than the old room,” Stone said. “By a long, long shot.”

He started arranging the desks into three rows.

Around 12:20 p.m., guards brought the students from each living zone until all the desks were filled. They waited quietly for class to start. Some were antsy, tapping their feet or twirling their pencils. One student from the work zone was running behind.

Five minutes later, class started. Stone introduced the assignment. Each student was to talk about three things that interested them. If they talked for more than one minute, they'd get an A.

“At the end, we all clap for them,” he told the class. “Even if they pass out.”

Stone was confident they wouldn't, but in his 28 years of teaching public speaking, it had happened to two students — it's always a possibility. So he'd tapped one student to start them off.

“Terrence, I asked you to go first,” Stone said. “Are you ready?”

“Ready as I'm gonna be,” he replied.



Eric Shelton/*Mississippi Today*

Bill Stone, a retired NEMCC speech instructor, lectures the prison class about the role of anxiety in public speaking.

There used to be hundreds of college classes just like Stone's in prisons across the country. Up until the mid-1990s, these programs were considered a key part of doing time — an “opportunity for ‘reformation,’” according to Higher Education in Prison Research. But in 1994, the Crime Bill took away the primary source of funding, which was the Pell Grant, a federal financial aid program for low-income students, by barring incarcerated people from receiving it.

The classes all but disappeared. Now, they're making a comeback. In Mississippi, colleges and universities across the state are working with MDOC, sheriffs and wardens to set up what are, for many prisons, the first accredited college classes that have been offered in decades. NEMCC had been supporting its programs with private funding, but the Pell Grant will be a game-changer.

This will benefit the whole community, Baragona said. Not only does prison education reduce crime, she said, but families of incarcerated people often move to Alcorn County. They want their loved ones to be able to support the family when they get out.

“We're not teaching the people who are in there for life,” Baragona said. “These are people who are fixin' to rejoin society.”

Since 2017, 77 students have taken NEMCC classes at Alcorn County Correctional. The participation rates reflect the institutions' demographics, Baragona said. Black students made up 57% of participants, and 43% were white — a ratio that was mirrored in Stone's class, where 7 students were Black and 4 were white.

More than half have taken three or more classes. Two students have taken five classes.

“I don't want anybody thinking that this is a patsy,” Stone said. “I want these students to write as well, to speak as well as any Northeast student who has come through my traditional classes.”

He poised his finger over the iPad timer as Terrence Glover stepped up to the podium.

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MDOT offers free resources to help residents prepare for hurricanes

The Mississippi Monitor

The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) offers several free resources to help Mississippi residents prepare for a hurricane before a tropical system threatens.

The MDOT Traffic mobile app, a hurricane evacuation kit checklist and the 2023 MDOT Hurricane Evacuation Guide in English, Spanish and Vietnamese are all available to assist residents with evacuation plans.

“Well before a hurricane reaches the Gulf, it’s important to have an evacuation plan in place,” said Commissioner Tom King, Southern Transportation District. “MDOT offers free resources to help you make informed decisions ahead of a storm. I encourage every Mississippian to take advantage of these resources to prepare yourself and your family for this hurricane season.”

The MDOT Hurricane Evacuation Guide features evacuation routes, contraflow information, Mississippi Public Broadcasting radio coverage areas and important contacts for the Mississippi Highway Patrol, American Red Cross, Mississippi Emergency Management Agency as well as bordering state DOTs and highway patrols. Vital information on shelters, pet care, lodging and travel resources is also included.

The hurricane evacuation checklist provides a list of recommended items to include in evacuation kits such as flashlights, a first aid kit, non-perishable food to last 14



days and more.

MDOT encourages all residents to download the MDOT Traffic mobile app, which provides real-time traffic conditions throughout the state and sends emergency alerts directly to users.

To download the Hurricane Evacuation Guide and the full hurricane evacuation kit checklist and for more hurricane safety tips, visit GoMDOT.com/hurricanes.

Follow @MississippiDOT on Facebook and Twitter along with the hashtag #HurricanePrep this hurricane season.



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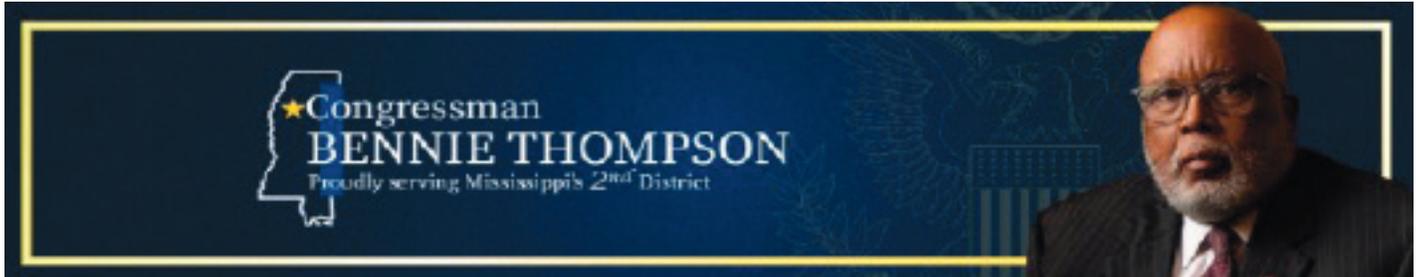
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Congressman Thompson ANNOUNCES \$250,000 awarded to the South Delta Planning and Development, INC.



The Mississippi Monitor

United States Representative Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) announced The United States Department of Commerce has awarded an Economic Development Administration grant in the amount of \$250,000 to the South Delta Planning and Development District, Inc.

This EDA investment supports the South Delta Planning and Development District, Inc. with hiring a Disaster Recovery Capacity Support Coordinator to support long-term economic recovery

and resiliency activities relating to impacts from severe storms in Greenville, Mississippi. The project will provide assistance to city and county governments to assist with the rebuilding of communities throughout the region. Once completed, the project will help build a reliable access to vital resources to support regional resiliency after future natural disasters and provide long-term sustainable economic growth.

For more information, contact Thomas L. Goodwin, Executive Director at (662) 378-3831.



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State's First STEM Charter School is Enrolling Students

The Mississippi Monitor

SR1 College Preparatory and STEM Academy (CPSA), the first College Preparatory and STEM charter school in Mississippi, is excited to announce enrollment for the next school year is now open. Spots are available for 75 Kindergarten and 75 First grade students from the Canton School District and surrounding school districts, including Jackson, Yazoo, and Madison County.

As a committed institution dedicated to a standard of excellence, SR1 CPSA offers a cutting-edge curriculum that focuses on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education. The academy aims to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the 21st-century workforce.

While SR1 CPSA is in the process of constructing a state-of-the-art permanent building with a strong emphasis on STEM education, temporary facilities have been arranged to ensure students continue to receive a high-quality education. These facilities are designed to pro-

vide students with immersive indoor and outdoor learning experiences, fostering creativity, critical thinking, and exploration.

“We are thrilled to open enrollment for our inaugural classes at SR1 College Preparatory and STEM Academy,” said Kristen Williams, SR1 CPSA Principal. “Our vision is to empower students with the skills and confidence needed to excel academically and become future leaders in STEM fields. We are committed to providing a nurturing and innovative learning environment for our students.”

SR1 CPSA encourages parents and guardians in the Canton School District and surrounding areas to explore this unique educational opportunity for their children. The academy’s curriculum is tailored to challenge and inspire students, while its dedicated faculty and staff are passionate about cultivating a love for learning.

To learn more about SR1 College Preparatory and STEM Academy and to enroll your child, please visit www.srlcpsa.org or contact 601-206-4544.



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No purchase necessary. Limit one entry per educator. Open to all active educators for the 2022/2023 academic year. Must be currently employed in a public school district in the state of Mississippi. Winner will be selected by random drawing on July 31, 2023. Winner will be selected by a random drawing on July 31, 2023. Winner must present school photo ID next to your name. By entering an entry, you give us the right to publish your name and photo on various marketing materials.

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Retired businessman turned folk artist

The Mississippi Monitor

Oscar William Kitchens, or Pappy as he called himself, started painting in his 60s after owning a construction company, selling it and retiring. His daughter Bobby Jean had married William Dunlap, a prominent artist who taught art at a college in North Carolina where they lived. Kitchens talent for painting became evident in Dunlap's studio, where he experimented. During the 1970s, he painted, traveled and promoted his works.

With no formal training, Kitchens was a folk artist whose use of color and visually striking elements in his paintings demonstrated a natural talent.

In recent years, he has become known through the University Press of Mississippi, which published a book featuring a series of 60 paintings that he started when he was 68 years old and completed between 1973 and 1976 – *Pappy Kitchens and the Saga of*



Kitchen's folk art..

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Red Eye the Rooster. The 15-inch square paintings in three sets of 20 panels is a beast fable that tells a homespun Pilgrim's Progress story about Red Eye from a founding to his funeral. Red Eye's quasi-human behavior gets him into trouble as he encounters violence, avarice, lust, greed and most of the other seven deadly sins. He maneuvers through the varied conflicts, but finally succumbs to his fatal flaw.

Kitchens produced other works, including a folk art version of the Last Supper. Many of them hang in museums and galleries around the U.S. Dunlap introduced Kitchens' paintings to Jane Livingston in the

1970s when she was chief curator of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

Kitchens died in 1986 following the death of his wife Ruth in 1982, and they are buried at Lakewood Memorial Park near Clinton, Mississippi, with their daughter Bobby Jean.




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The Town Of Leland, Mississippi Is One Of The Most Unique Places You'll Ever Visit

The Mississippi Monitor

Finding a unique Mississippi town can be an exciting adventure, and Leland is undoubtedly one of those hidden gems. Tucked away in the Mississippi Delta, Leland offers a perfect blend of rich history, vibrant arts, and Southern charm. This quaint town has something for everyone: intriguing attractions, picturesque



A visit to Leland isn't complete without exploring the Jim Henson Delta Boyhood Exhibit.



The museum honors Muppets creator Jim Henson, who grew up in Leland. It features life-sized Muppets and interactive displays. Exhibits showcase Henson's life and career, offering enjoyment for visitors.

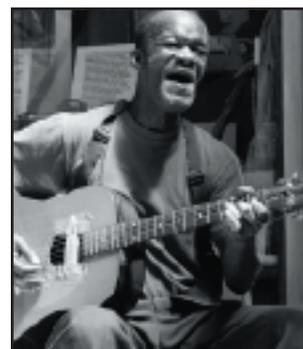


streets, and an array of local events. Don't just take our word for it; come and experience the magic of Leland for yourself!

Leland, Mississippi, a unique town, boasts a rich history and a vibrant arts scene. Nestled in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, it's a place where visitors can immerse themselves in Southern hospitality and culture.



Another must-see attraction is the Highway 61 Blues Museum. It is dedicated to preserving the history and heritage of Delta blues music.



You'll find memorabilia, artifacts, and exhibits showcasing the legendary musicians who shaped this iconic genre.



Stroll through downtown Leland, where you'll find local eateries like Cicero's restaurant offering Southern cuisine.

cont. from page 5

Prison education programs are primed to take off in Mississippi. Here's what one class looks like.

"Hello Terrence," the students said in unison.

Glover talked about how he hates foreign languages (difficult to learn) and loves fishing. Then, 138 seconds later, his speech was over. It was time for the next student. Stone asked for a volunteer. No one moved.

"Anybody that just wants to get it over with right now?" Stone asked.

Carlos White rocked out of his chair. Though he had seemed shy at his desk, he was at ease at the podium. The first thing he was interested in, White said, was TikTok, because it offered access to "a multitude of people from a single device" — that is, to the outside world. He also liked cooking, because it reminded him of his grandmother's collard greens. His final interest was mentoring. That's what he wants to do when he gets out.

"So much of the youth go down the wrong road like I did," he said.

White spoke for 139 seconds, Stone noted. A new record.

The students seemed less anxious and more comfortable sharing. For many, the topic of prison was unavoidable. Another, Vincent Breazeale, talked about the value of education, working and family — three interests, he said, that would "probably be different outside these walls."

What everyone was really talking about were their dreams, and what they hoped to do when they finally left. One said he'd like to get a dog. Another couldn't wait to work on cars again. A third student said wanted to start a business manufacturing cologne.

One of the last students to go, Antonio Harris, said that after 19 years of incarceration, he was looking forward to being an entrepreneur when he's finally released (he'll become eligible next year).

"I want to be able to work and still kind of like, enjoy life at the same time," Harris said. "It generates great revenue also."

By the end, the temperature in the class felt warmer. Stone congratulated the students. This was the first class he's ever had, he said, where every student talked for more than a minute. He wanted to know how it felt.

"Like riding a bike," Glover said.

A student named Bruce Parker passed out root-beer-float-flavored candies. He'd used \$1.16 of his \$20-a-week allowance to pay for a bag.

After a lecture from Stone, it was time for the students to talk to the "navigator." That is Tina Wilburn. It's her third day. She's NEMCC's eyes and ears in the prison, and it's her job to advocate for the students. Gripping a prison-issued walkie talkie and a notebook, she wanted to know how they were going to do their homework.

"Are you able to study in the pod where you're at?" she asked. She'd heard the library was too small.

All the students shook their heads. Dozens of incarcerated people live in each pod and sleep bunk-to-bunk. There's a lot of distractions.

"It's extremely difficult," White said.

Despite everyone's excitement that day, these students are up against tough odds. They're unlikely to finish. Last semester, 10 students enrolled, and only two graduated. According to data from NEMCC, the completion rates were higher before COVID, when more career-readiness classes were offered.

Some of the reasons for this have to do with the very nature of prisons, said Ruth Delaney, a program director at the Vera Institute of Justice, a national organization that has been help-

ing prisons set up college classes. For instance, it's common for incarcerated people to be suddenly transferred for reasons that supersede the class, like a sentencing order that prohibits them from staying in the same prison as a co-defendant.

"A prison is a total institution," Delaney said. "The minute you cross that threshold, all of your relationships start to feel different."

If a fight broke out in a students' living pod, they could be transferred, even if they weren't participating, she added. That's more likely to happen during the summer months, when violence in prison rises with the temperature outside. And while some research has shown prisons that have classes become safer over time, the students at Alcorn County Correctional said they had yet to see that happen.

But other reasons can be managed. A huge issue Stone has noticed is dental hygiene. When his incarcerated students have cavities, they're sent to the Mississippi State Prison in Parchman to get teeth pulled. For weeks after, their mouths are too swollen for them to talk in class.

Then there are some students who get demoralized if they do poorly, even on a quiz that doesn't matter for their final grade.

"It'll just knock them for a loop, and I'm not used to that," Stone said. "That's a definite prison-type thing. A regular college student would go, 'well, crap.' They'd just keep on going. For a prison student to make a 40 or a 50, their whole self esteem is locked up in that."

What makes the difference, Stone added, is support.

All of the students told Wilburn they would be able to finish their homework. Some of them offered tips: The best time to study is around 3 a.m. That's when the prison is quietest.

The door to the trailer opened. It was a guard. He walked into the middle of the room with his hands on his hips. Everybody turned to look at him.

"I believe they said class is over now," he said.

So it was.

NEMCC has big dreams for the program. Baragona wants to offer more career-technical programs — classes that are more likely to directly lead to jobs when students are no longer incarcerated. But she's worried about the logistics of bringing equipment into the prison.

Another issue is giving students computers, which is crucial for learning how to do research. This isn't possible because they're not allowed free use of the internet. Stone makes up for that by bringing print-outs of research to class.

Baragona also wants there to be more instructors. Right now, Stone is one of two. Even though society is slowly leaving the tough-on-crime era behind, she still has to "sweet talk" instructors into participating in the program. She was able to convince Stone because, in the early 1980s, he used to minister to a congregant in prison.

And Baragona still hasn't figured out an efficient way of providing accommodations for students who have disabilities like dyslexia. When the Pell Grant becomes available, she'll need to set up a system for them to talk to NEMCC's financial aid office. She's hoping Wilburn can help with that.

Before class, Baragona asked Stone to tell her if he needed more equipment. A white board would be nice, he mused. Then he thought of something even better.

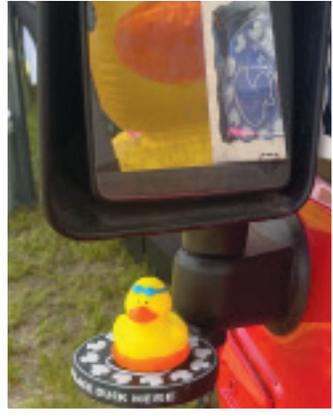
"A bigger TV would be glorious," he said. "If someone had an extra 69-inch TV that would be just glorious."

But right now, the new trailer is enough.

JEEPIN THE COAST

Duck, duck, Jeep

All photos by Marilou D. Horton



By Marilou D. Horton

It would have been challenging to walk around Long Beach during Jeepin the Coast 2023 without spotting rubber ducks of all colors, shapes and sizes on dashboards, rooftops and even hoods of recreational vehicles. According to Jeepers, the tradition of "gifting" the trinkets was started by an unknown individual during the COVID-19 pandemic and has rapidly spread across the county.

Dwayne, a vendor at the Jeep expo in Long Beach, explained why the ducks are synonymous with Jeepers today.

"The story goes that some girl was feeling lonely during

COVID, went to the store, and bought a rubber duck while there," said Dwayne. "Later, when she was leaving the store, the girl saw a Jeep she liked, so she placed the duck on the hood of the vehicle. Her purpose was to make the driver happy and to show her appreciation for the Jeep, and it just kind of spread from there."

Long Beach resident Harold Wagner offered a similar explanation for the popularity of the ducks by Jeep owners.

"The duck thing started about three or four years ago, and somebody took a rubber duck and laid it on a Jeep just to say she liked the vehicle," said Wagner. "It's called 'Ducking A Jeep' today. It just spread across the nation. As you can see, there are ducks on top of the Jeeps, and the dashboards are full of them."

Wagner added that his dash had been loaded with the small colorful duckies over eight times. He now has over two hundred ducks.

"So, we let the dash fill up and then remove them," said Wagner. "I put them in a bag behind the seat, and it [the dashboard] quickly fills up again."

Wagner said the trend is observed nationwide, and he has been "ducked" in the Carolinas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee. "At just about any event, we pick up a few ducks somewhere," he concluded.



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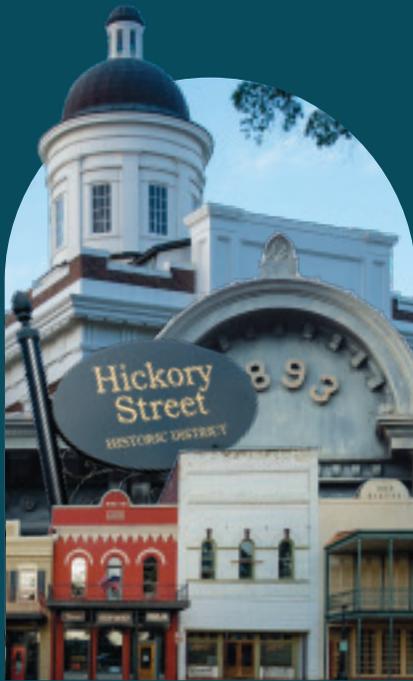
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Mississippi Manufacturers Association Announces Launch of CONNEX™ Mississippi

The Mississippi Monitor

The Mississippi Manufacturers Association (MMA) and the MMA Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) are pleased to announce the launch of CONNEX™ Mississippi, which is an online software platform designed to strengthen the state’s local and domestic manufacturing supply chain. Through the platform, Mississippi manufacturers will be able to better connect with each other, find local suppliers, discover new business opportunities, and manage their supply chains.

“We are thrilled to introduce the CONNEX™ Marketplace to our state’s manufacturers,” said MMA President & CEO John McKay. “Not only will this help manufacturers in our state source materials and services from one another, but it will also allow them to offer their goods and services to manufacturers across the country.”

The CONNEX™ Mississippi platform will allow larger manufacturers to post a Request for Information (RFI) and Request for Quote (RFQ) in the platform’s Business to Business (B2B) Exchange Center and identify Mississippi suppliers who can meet their needs. Small to medium Mississippi manufacturers can also increase their discoverability by large primes and Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) based on their capabilities, equipment, processes, materials, certifications, and more, which can lead to manufacturing opportunities in new markets.

In order to join CONNEX™ Mississippi, manufacturers must be approved to join (verified as a manufacturer). Once approved, the program is free. This free access is provided through sponsorship of the platform by the MMA-MEP.

“We are always looking for ways to help Mississippi manufacturers achieve their goals, and CONNEX™ Mississippi is another example of our commitment to provide them with access to resources that ensure a productive, efficient, and resilient manufacturing community,” said MMA-MEP Executive Director Sandy Crist. “CONNEX™ Mississippi will be a tremendous resource for our manufacturers.”

Registration for Mississippi manufacturers and suppliers is underway and those who register by August 14th will receive a free year of national access using the promo code MSFREE-YEAR. For registration and additional platform information, visit mma-web.org/connexms.

“We are excited to be part of the CONNEX™ Mississippi implementation,” said President and CEO of CONNEX™ Marketplace Alan Davis. “This dynamic platform will help connect and lift Mississippi’s manufacturing ecosystem, align local, state, and national manufacturing goals, increase collaboration across all state manufacturing organizations, and better connect large and small manufacturers across the state with new business opportunities.”

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Happy Birthday Pearl, the city officially turns fifty!

The Mississippi Monitor

June 29, 2023 marks fifty years since Pearl became an official city. The city is nestled along four transportation arteries in Mississippi: Interstate 55 and Interstate 20, U.S. Highways 80 and 49, and has close access to national and international destinations from the Jackson-Evers International Airport.

Pearl has been designated a member of the Mississippi Main Street Association and has been called a superior place to live, work and play.

Living in Pearl makes each resident part of a 27,000-member family. There is a wide range of housing available for every income level. The Pearl Public School District is prestigiously "A" rated by the Mississippi Department of Education. The city is consistently rated among the safest cities in the state. The city staff provides first-class service at every level from Police and Fire, to Public Works, Parks and Recreation to Senior Services and Community Development. Pearl is also blessed to have its own TV and radio broadcast stations in Pearl Municipal Broadcasting (PMB) TV and 104.3 FM "The Pirate."

When it comes to working in Pearl, there is a strong, business-friendly community with diverse

employment opportunities. From retail to dining, hotels and manufacturing, as well as higher education and state offices,

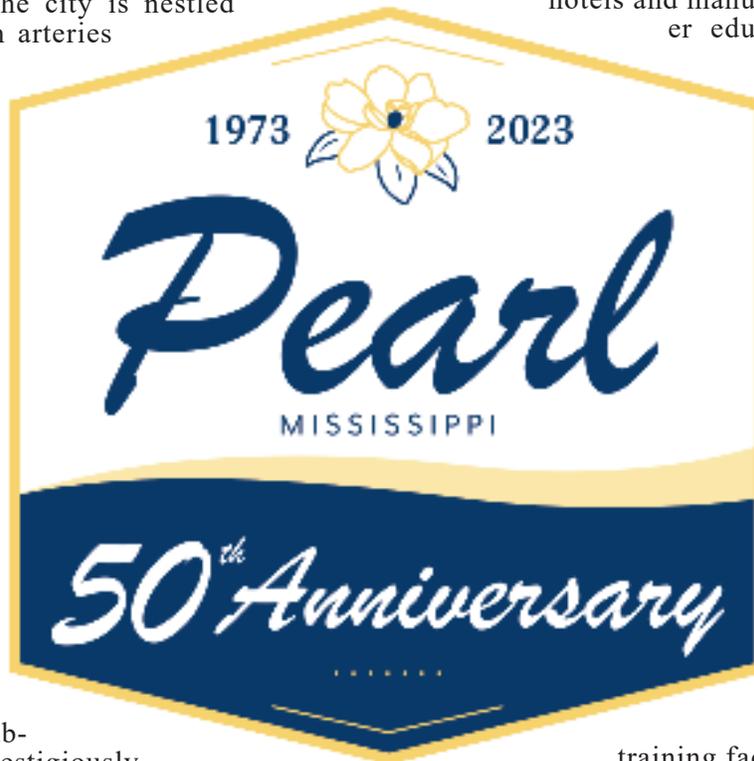
Pearl has it all. The Pearl Chamber of Commerce is recognized as a centerpiece for business promotion and economic development.

When it comes to play, there are state-of-the-art parks and recreation re-development ongoing, and shopping opportunities all over the city. The Mississippi Braves, the AA franchise of the Atlanta Braves, have called Trustmark Park and Pearl their home since 2005. Other unique entertainment options include a movie theatre, a baseball/softball

training facility, a trampoline park, a skating rink, and more.

Since being incorporated in 1973, Pearl has always worked hard for its residents, businesses, and visitors. That commitment remains strong as Pearl continues to shine as the "Jewel of the Crossroads."

Pearl Municipal Broadcasting has posted interviews with the first Mayor (Harris Harvey), first City Clerk (Shirley Rogers), and former Mayors Jimmy Foster, Mitch Childre and Brad Rogers. They may be viewed on the city's YouTube page, www.youtube.com/@cityofpearlms6274.



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National report recognizes Mississippi as one of top two states for teacher preparation in the science of reading

The Mississippi Monitor

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) recognized Mississippi and Colorado as the top two states for ensuring scientifically based reading instruction in their teacher preparation programs in the new report, *Teacher Prep Review: Strengthening Elementary Reading Instruction*. The report provides the most up-to-date information available on how teacher preparation programs prepare aspiring teachers to teach children to read.

The NCTQ report credits Mississippi for enacting strong, comprehensive policies to promote the science of reading, with focused implementation. This includes developing robust and specific teacher preparation standards and accountability, requiring a strong reading licensure test and offering supports for teacher preparation programs to make the transition to scientifically based reading preparation.

Mississippi's investments in teacher preparation and professional development for educators has helped make the state a national leader for improving student outcomes. In 2019, Mississippi 4th graders achieved the No. 1 spot in the nation for gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Mississippi maintained its historic gains in 4th grade reading on NAEP in 2022, and the state's economically disadvantaged 4th graders achieved higher scores in reading and math than their peers nationally and in the South. Since 2013, Mississippi's national ranking for 4th grade reading jumped from 50th to 21st.

"The National Council on Teacher Quality report validates Mississippi's commitment to equipping all elementary teachers to teach reading effectively," said Mike Kent, interim state superintendent of education. "Mississippi students are more proficient readers because they have effective, dedicated teachers who teach the science of reading."

While some children will learn to read naturally, over five decades of research has established the components of explicit, scientifically based reading instruction that help most students become successful readers. Research suggests that over 90% of children could learn to read if their teachers used instructional methods grounded in the science of reading.

"We're in the midst of a long overdue revolution on the science of reading, but teacher prep programs haven't fully caught up," said Dr. Heather Peske, NCTQ President. "Prospective teachers — and certainly their students — deserve far better."

NCTQ examined nearly 700 teacher preparation programs across the country, looking for evidence that coursework for future elementary teachers includes all the core components of scientifically based reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The analysis breaks down how future elementary teachers are prepared in each aspect of the science of reading through instructional hours, assigned readings, assignments and assessments, and opportunities to practice.



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