



Mississippi Book Festival returns with fall date

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Medgar Evers posthumously receives Presidential Medal of Freedom

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Medgar Wiley Evers has posthumously received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Evers, a World War II veteran and civil rights leader, was assassinated on June 12, 1963, in the driveway of his home in Jackson.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the highest U.S. civilian honor awarded to individuals who have made "an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors." Awardees are selected by the President. President Harry S. Truman selected the first Medal of Freedom recipient in 1946.

After returning home from World War II, Evers held several leadership roles in civil rights groups. He recruited volunteers, led demonstrations and organized voter-registration drives. In recognition of his role in the Civil Rights Movement, he was posthumously awarded the NAACP Spingarn Medal for outstanding achievement, and he is featured in the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

"This is a powerful way to honor Medgar Evers' life and legacy," said U.S. Senator Roger Wicker, of Mississippi. "The fact that he is receiving this award sixty years after his death is proof that he has inspired the generations that followed. His work did not die with him in 1963. I am grateful to the President for selecting this native son of our state for this well-deserved distinction."

"Medgar Evers, who is already remembered for his pursuit of equality and justice as part of the civil rights movement, now joins a most distinguished group of Americans who are forever singled out for their life's work," said U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith, of Mississippi. "I applaud the award of this Presidential Medal of Freedom, which I hope will renew our commitment to strive for the values for which Medgar Evers gave his life."

"The Presidential Medal of Freedom is a testament to Medgar

Evers' enduring impact on not only Mississippi, but also the nation," said U.S. Representative Bennie Thompson, of Mississippi. "Over sixty years after his death, his tireless pursuit of equality for African Americans in our state continues to resonate throughout generations. As someone deeply influenced by his legacy, I am honored to witness this recognition. I extend my gratitude to President Biden for acknowledging Medgar Evers' pivotal role in our history and bestowing upon him this well-deserved honor."

"Medgar Evers has earned and deserves to be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. His devotion to civil rights will always be remembered," U.S. Representative Trent Kelly of Mississippi said.

"The life of Medgar Wiley Evers was one of determination and conviction," noted U.S. Representative Michael Guest, of Mississippi. "With his service on the battlefield of World War II and his work in the Civil Rights movement in Mississippi, Evers showed his fellow Mississippians the power of serving others. His life was tragically cut short with his assassination

in 1963, but he is still remembered today for the contributions he made to the Civil Rights movement. I'm thankful to see Evers selected to receive the Presidential Medal of Honor posthumously."

U.S. Representative Mike Ezell of Mississippi commented, "Medgar Evers' work to secure equal rights has made a lasting impact on not just our state, but our entire nation. I was glad to join the full delegation in calling for him to posthumously receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and I am proud to see him receive this recognition for his legacy and his work."

Mississippi natives who have received the Presidential Medal of Freedom include civil rights activist James Earl Chaney (2014); Representative G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery (2005); Apollo 13 astronaut Fred Haise (1970); historian Dumas Malone (1983); musical artists Leontyne Price (1964) and B.B. King (2006); writers Eudora Welty (1980) and Tennessee Williams (1980); and media mogul Oprah Winfrey (2013).



601-990-9511
Volume 2, Number 3

The Mississippi Monitor
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Plans for pedestrian bridge over Lakeland Drive continue

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The Great City Mississippi Foundation, an organization dedicated to fostering innovation, education and research in Jackson and committed to advancing the city's standing on the global stage, recently applauded the passage of the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations Act as part of a six-bill appropriations package cleared by the U.S. Congress. The bill includes \$5 million of funding toward construction of a pedestrian bridge over Lakeland Drive (U.S. Highway 25), which the Foundation says represents an important step forward toward the long-time goal of creating a multi-use trail system connecting Mississippi museums across the capital city.

The organization says the vote is a testament to long-term commitment of community leaders working together with city, state and federal leaders.

"I'm grateful to Senators Cindy Hyde-Smith and Roger Wicker for leading the effort in the Senate and recognizing the importance of visionary projects that enhance access to our state's top assets," said Taylor Nicholas, executive director of the Great City Foundation. "This project will ultimately connect the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame and Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum to the Two Mississippi Museums downtown. It's an important step toward a functional multi-use trail system that will provide a significant economic impact for our state's capital city."

The bridge is also an essential piece of the LeFleur's Bluff Masterplan. Over \$10 million of capital improvements have already been made and enjoyed by more than 750,000 visitors, including \$5.5 million of private investment into

capital projects. Additional private and state resources have been secured to execute additional improvements for outdoor recreation, education and tourism impacts to connect to the Lakeland bridge project.

"This is an important piece in ensuring destination tourism for our Mississippi museum assets," said Susan Garrard, president/CEO of the Mississippi Children's Museum and board chair of the Great City Foundation. "Connecting communities and enhancing pedestrian access to all museums creates new opportunities for exponential growth."

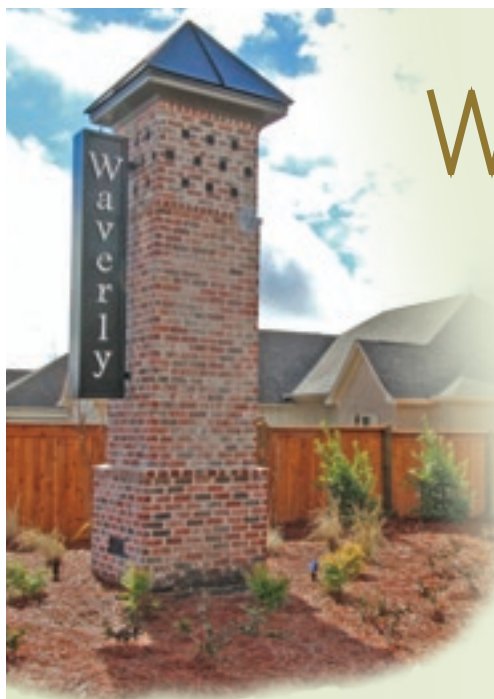
In 2021, LeFleur Museum District Museums produced nearly \$10 million of overall value-added impact for Hinds County, supporting 179 jobs and over \$6.5 million in labor income.

The Museum Trail is a multi-use trail and partial rail-to-trail project that has been constructed from downtown Jackson to LeFleur's Bluff State Park. The planned bridge will safely extend and connect this system, enabling safe pedestrian passage across the busiest intersection in the state of Mississippi.

Future hopes for the trail include extending connectivity south and west through downtown Jackson beyond Jackson State University and north to eventually connect to trails in Ridgeland and Flowood.

Community and state leaders will continue working toward making the bridge a reality, including requesting matching funds from the state legislature. In addition, the plans need final approval from the Mississippi Department of Transportation before construction can begin.

"A large part of Great City's mission is to support a more vibrant Jackson through outdoor opportunities for recreation and more connected communities," said Nicholas. "We look forward to continuing to work with community leaders to help make this vision become reality."

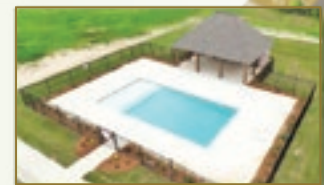


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Mississippi Book Festival returns with fall date



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Mississippi Book Festival, an event that turns the Mississippi Capitol's stately rooms and nearby Galloway Church turn into venues for distinguished panelists, the streets in-between transform into a bustling marketplace for booksellers, and the grounds and Capitol Rotunda become a hub of lively exchange.

The free festival has spent a decade contributing to Mississippi's literary legacy, transforming the Capitol into a literary hub that unites authors and readers for one day each year. Over the past ten years, the festival has featured 1,000 authors, hosted nearly 50,000 day-of attendees, and reached more than 44,000 students. Previously held in August, this year's festival will take place a month later, on September 14.

With overwhelming support from supporters, partners, and funders, festival organizers picked a fall date to improve the visitor experience and to work better for publishers and authors, as well as school, college and university partners.

According to Executive Director Ellen Daniels, "We've been considering a fall date for several years, but the heat last August helped us focus on the change."

The 2023 festival welcomed more than 6,700 people to hear close to 170 participating authors take part in 47 official panels.

"The Book Festival does a wonderful job celebrating Mississip-



MISSISSIPPI
BOOK
FESTIVAL

pi's love of books and writers," said Daniels. "Our great writers are household names, and many of their stories are our stories."

Among others, this year's festival authors will include Kate DiCamillo with *The Puppets of Spelhorst* and Angie Thomas with *Nic Blake and the Remarkables*, their latest books for young readers.

Erik Larson will return to Jackson with his forthcoming book, *The Demon of Unrest*, while Sebastian Junger will present his most personal work, *In My Time of Dying: How I Came Face to Face with the Idea of an Afterlife*. Aimee Nezhukumatathil will return with her soon-to-be-published *Bite by Bite: Nourishments and Jamborees*.

Poet and novelist Kaveh Akbar will join the festival for the first time with his bestselling debut novel, *Martyr!*. Rachel Khong will feature her newest novel, the generational family saga *Real Americans*, and Mississippi Book Festival alum Ron Rash will present his latest novel, *The Caretaker*.

Historian and scholar Grace Elizabeth Hale will join the lineup with her most challenging research assignment yet, *In the Pines*, and Maurice Carlos Ruffin will return to the festival with his new historical novel, *The American Daughters*.

"There truly is no other event like the Mississippi Book Festival," said Jane Alexander, president and CEO of the Community Foundation for Mississippi. "Seeing thousands of all kinds of people of all ages flock to the Capitol Green thrills me every time. The ripple effects of the festival will be felt and seen for years, all over our state. But the impact on Jackson and the positive light it brings to our capital city is the real gift."

"This event is massively important to not only our city but our entire state, and to see how it's grown and expanded through the years has been incredible," said Daniels. "From hosting literary legends to fostering educational opportunities, the festival would never have been able to leave such a lasting impact without your support, and that is not lost on us."

The September 14 festival, which will include author panel discussions, live music, book signings, food, and family and children's activities, will take place at Mississippi State Capitol and Galloway United Methodist Church.

For more information, visit MSBookFestival.com.

Tips to manage weather-related anxiety during hurricane season

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

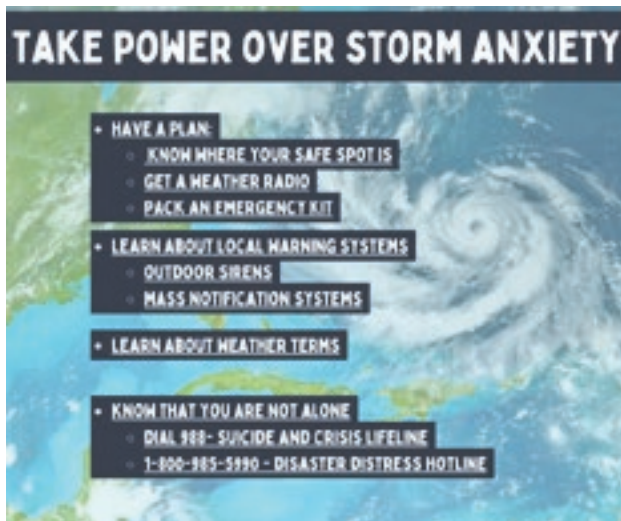
With the 2024 hurricane season continuing through November 30, the Mississippi Department of Mental Health (DMH) recognizes the potential stress and anxiety this time can bring to individuals and families in the state. To assist in alleviating these concerns, DMH and the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) are providing guidance on how to prepare for hurricanes while also managing mental health effectively.

Preparation is Key

Have an Evacuation Plan: Develop a detailed evacuation plan, including potential routes and contact information for family members, designated shelters and relief agencies in case an evacuation is ordered for your location. Share this plan with trusted individuals outside the area, to ensure clear communication in case of evacuation.

Build an Emergency Kit: Assemble an emergency kit tailored to your family's needs, including water, non-perishable food, medications, clothing, comfort items, flashlights and chargers. Keeping this kit readily accessible can provide a sense of preparedness and calm during uncertain times.

Utilize Hurricane Tracking Maps: Stay informed about storm trajectories and speeds by using hurricane tracking maps. Understanding the movement of storms can help reduce fear and anxiety associated with their unpredictability.



Limit Exposure to

Weather Updates: While staying informed is essential, prolonged exposure to weather updates can heighten anxiety, particularly for children. Set boundaries on media consumption, and focus on practical preparation rather than dwelling on worst-case scenarios.

When a Storm is Imminent

Wear Durable Shoes: If you have to take shelter, then good sturdy shoes or boots are essential. Put them on when a storm is expected, to help you feel safe and prepared.

Charge Your Devices: Power can be unreliable during a storm, so it's good to have all devices charged ahead of time. Also, lowering the screen brightness can preserve battery life on phones and tablets.

Get in Your Safe Spot: Even before a warning is issued, getting in your safe spot with a pillow or blanket can help alleviate anxiety.

Turn on Your Local News Channel: When a storm is potentially making landfall, getting updates is important. If weather reports elevate the weather-related anxiety, then keep exposure to a

minimum, or have a family member or friend stay updated in a different part of the house.

Managing Weather-Related Stress

Prioritize Self-Care: Engage in activities that promote relaxation and well-being, such as exercise, spending time outdoors and getting adequate sunlight.

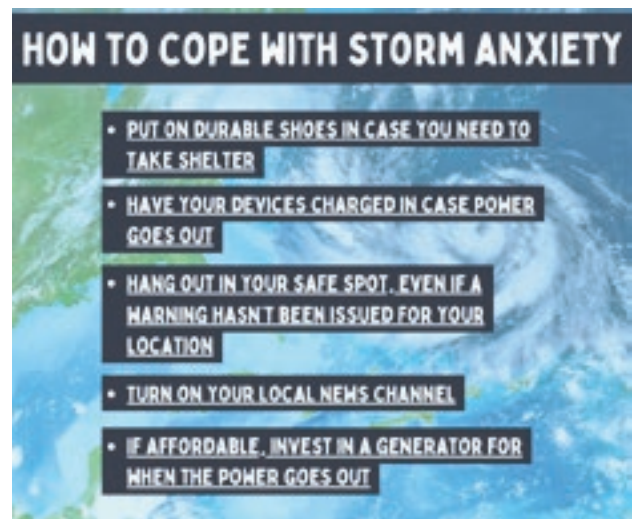
Embrace Positive Thinking: Cultivate a mindset of optimism and resilience by focusing on constructive thoughts and solutions.

Engage in Meditation: Incorporate mindfulness practices into your routine to promote mental clarity and emotional stability.

By implementing these strategies, individuals can effectively manage weather-related anxiety and bolster their resilience in the face of adversity. DMH and MEMA remain committed to supporting the well-being of all residents throughout hurricane season and beyond.

For more information on mental health resources, visit www.dmh.ms.gov, or contact DMH's Toll-Free Helpline at 1-877-210-8513. If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, call or text 988 to be connected with a trained mental health professional twenty-four hours a day.

MEMA's hurricane page is located at <https://www.msma.org/preparedness-2/hurricanes/>, and it has resources to help you plan and prepare for a hurricane to keep you and your loved ones safe.





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Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Students at The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) have been provided a unique pathway to fulfill their college dreams through a tuition scholarship partnership between the school and The University of Southern Mississippi (USM).

Officials from both schools recently announced the agreement during a ceremony on the MSMS campus in Columbus.

The announcement included presentation of tuition scholarship certificates to all one hundred six seniors at MSMS. Students who graduated in May will receive an eight-semester award for full tuition to USM, with the requirement that they enroll for the fall 2024 semester.

"Having this new partnership with The University of Southern Mississippi is incredibly significant for us," said MSMS Interim Director Ginger Tedder. "We deeply appreciate USM's full-tuition scholarship offer for the Class of 2024. This will not only provide valuable financial support for our students, but also help to address the brain drain in Mississippi by encouraging our talented students to stay in the state for higher education."

Tedder continued, "Several of our sister STEM schools have established partnerships that provide full-tuition scholarships from their in-state institutions of higher learning. Our partnership with USM thrills us, because it brings that same opportunity to MSMS graduates."

USM President Dr. Joseph S. Paul lauded the transformative partnership as an investment sure to reap invaluable rewards.

"We know that MSMS graduates are not only high ability, but have also been well prepared for college by an elite faculty," said Paul. "They have learned how to manage residential learning. They are ready for college, and, when they leave Southern Miss, they will be ready for life. We consider this a strategic investment in Mississippi's best and brightest."

The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science is Mississippi's only public, residential high school specifically designed to meet the needs of the state's most academically gifted and talented eleventh- and twelfth-grade students. With an emphasis in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education, the school offers innovative learning experiences, leadership development opportunities and holistic residential life programs geared toward high achievement students.

Dr. Kristi Motter, vice president for student affairs and enrollment management at USM, emphasized the value USM places on MSMS

graduates who are thoroughly prepared to undertake the rigors of college life.

"We have a long-standing relationship with MSMS and know that students who enroll at Southern Miss after graduating from MSMS are ready to tackle the world," said Motter. "They are ready to learn, ready to engage and ready for their next journey. We want them to enroll to make Southern Miss better because they were here."

Application to MSMS is open to any sophomore student who resides in Mississippi. The applicant's interest in mathematics, science, engineering and technology is considered, as well as past academic performance, standardized test scores, extracurricular interests and accomplishments.

To ensure that procedures for selection are fair and equitable, the State Board of Education established a process that uses three committees. These review committees are made up of educators and non-educators from across the state, representing all four of Mississippi's congressional districts. MSMS admits academically qualified students without regard to race, creed, color, sex or national and ethnic origin.

Tedder stresses that the new partnership heightens the potential for increased enrollment at MSMS, while also highlighting USM's commitment to nurturing the next generation of state leaders.

"As a state school with students from across Mississippi, this will boost awareness of the exceptional educational experience we offer," she said. "USM's investment in some of Mississippi's best students is really an investment in Mississippi. Looking ahead, as more parents and students from across Mississippi recognize that MSMS not only provides excellent preparation for college, but also offers a pathway to debt-free post-secondary education, we anticipate a surge in interest. Overall, we believe this partnership will have a positive and lasting impact on our school's enrollment."

USM Provost Dr. Lance Nail views the new partnership as a win-win situation for both schools, with notable benefits tied to burgeoning STEM-related career paths. USM is home to the renowned Center for Stem Education (established in 1964) with its ecosystem of initiatives for students in K-12 through graduate school.

"I am very excited about our partnership with The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science. This agreement furthers a symbiotic relationship that brings together students who excel in STEM-related studies and the University that leads the state in STEM education," said Nail.

For more information about MSMS, visit www.TheMSMS.org.

NASA STENNIS HELPS FAMILY BUILD A GENERATIONAL LEGACY



Photo courtesy of NASA

Eleven months after the Mississippi Test Operations became the National Space Technology Laboratories, the first static test-firing of the space shuttle main engine test on the A-1 Test Stand is conducted on May 19, 1975.

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

For Lee English Jr., the sound of a ringing phone probably sounds a lot like the roar of a rocket engine test at NASA's Stennis Space Center near Bay St. Louis.

During the 1970s, when nine-year-old English Jr. picked up the ringing phone, someone from the south Mississippi test site might say, "Tell your dad we just dropped LOX."

The caller was referring to the liquid oxygen propellant used to help fuel a new space shuttle engine undergoing developmental testing at NASA Stennis.

To the English family, NASA Stennis stands alongside cherished family heirlooms. It is a treasured place where one generation helped lead the way for ensuing ones to find career success. Both English Jr. and his son, Noah, have followed in Lee English Sr.'s footsteps to work at NASA Stennis.

English Sr., an engineer working for the Rocketdyne Division of Rockwell International Corporation in the 1970s, moved his family to Mississippi from California when work was just beginning on how to test engines for NASA's new Space Shuttle Program.

He is remembered as a "key guy" who helped develop the testing blueprints. He had to be available for consultation at a moment's notice, since testing could happen at all hours, including at night. He also is credited with conducting the first seven space shuttle main engine tests at the Fred Haise Test Stand (formerly

A-1 Test Stand).

"Every time we do something new, you don't know what you don't know," said Maury Vander, chief of the NASA Stennis Test Operations Division. "These teams were taking the first steps toward getting an engine ready that was required to make the shuttle successful."

Initial hot fires were one second or less.

"There was a lot to learn," Vander said. "The new engine was extremely complicated, taking about twenty tests to achieve a duration of two seconds, then reaching a duration of ten seconds on test number forty-two."

Now, a team of operators from NASA; Aerojet Rocketdyne, an L3 Harris Technologies company, and Syncom Space Services (S3) routinely test RS-25 engines for five hundred seconds. The evolved version of the space shuttle main engine, manufactured by Aerojet Rocketdyne, helps power NASA's SLS (Space Launch System) rocket for Artemis missions to the Moon

and beyond.

From answering the telephone to answering the call to continue a legacy, English Jr., now sixty, has worked in various roles for over three decades at NASA Stennis. As an instrumentation technician for S3, he now helps collect and process engine performance data during hot fires.

"There's a sense of pride when you see something you feel like your family has worked towards for lots and lots of years," English Jr. said. "At the time, I'm sure when my dad and the team



Danny Nowlin

Lee English Jr., left, and his son, Noah, follow in the footsteps of the late Lee English Sr. by working at NASA's Stennis Space Center.

were doing their work, they never thought we would be using those same engines to try to go to Mars or even back to the Moon.”

As English Jr. helps collect data on engine performance, his son, Noah, 28, works with S3 as a senior mechanical technician to support propellant transfer for engine testing.

“This place is special - and not only for my family,” Noah said. “This place is special for Mississippi. The jobs and opportunity here are a big part of Mississippi. It would be amazing in the future to have a child who works out here and have the legacy continue.”

English Sr.’s last visit to NASA Stennis came more than seven years ago. He passed away in 2019 at the age of eighty-eight.

“He was amazed at how efficient things had gotten over the years,” English Jr. recalled. The assessment is a tribute, not only to the groundbreaking work of the original test team, but to countless others – like his son and grandson – who have followed and who work daily to ensure NASA Stennis is better than they found it for the benefit of all.



Photo courtesy of NASA

An image from 1975 shows the original space shuttle main engine test team standing at the base of the A-1 Test Stand, now known as the Fred Haise Test Stand. Lee English Sr., front right, is pictured holding a white hard hat.

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High school grads, there's a big world to discover!

By Toni Miles

The good news - you've done it, grads! Congrats.

Now, you have your whole life ahead of you, with new decisions to make at almost every turn. Some of these decisions will be life-affecting on all the major fronts of your life. The decisions you make during this season of your life will ultimately lead you to your career, possibly into various job fields over the course of your life, and possibly to whom you will wind up marrying and who your children will be - not to mention the financial means by which you will live.

A LOT of pressure, right?

I was there once, years ago, and I have the unseen bumps, bruises and battle scars to prove it. Fortunately, I've learned a few things along the way that may help you. Maybe not. I know I myself didn't listen to all the wise counsel I was given during these formative and exciting years of life. Hopefully (and likely) you're smarter than I was, and will find at least some value in these thoughts I share with you.

First and foremost - **stay true to yourself**, your authentic self, the parts of you even your parents and best friends might not know. Each of us is made uniquely. Embrace this. Share it. The world needs it. Carve your own path in life, uniquely created and made just for you.

How do you know what this path is? Glad you asked. This leads to number two - **follow your passion**, your heart. There will be naysayers along the way. Some of them will be well-intending and closest to you, but your passion indicates your purpose in life, no matter how "crazy" it may seem.

Before I even began kindergarten, I knew what I wanted to be - a TV journalist, which I was for more than twenty years (and now I have switched back to my first love - print journalist, one of the career change possibilities I referenced earlier). I remember the excitement I felt over watching TV news, and how I was over the moon and full of questions (good trait for a wanna-be reporter) when a real, in-the-flesh TV news reporter from the local station came to visit my second-grade class.

Plenty of people, even those closest to me, discouraged this, pointing out that the odds (truly) were stacked against me. I'm glad I went with my heart. Yes, the struggle was real. I lives off cans of green beans and potatoes, which were 33 cents when I started out (and I was dozens of pounds lighter), but the short-term sacrifices were worth it in the long run. I'm a firm believer the money will come when you follow your passion and connect to your purpose.

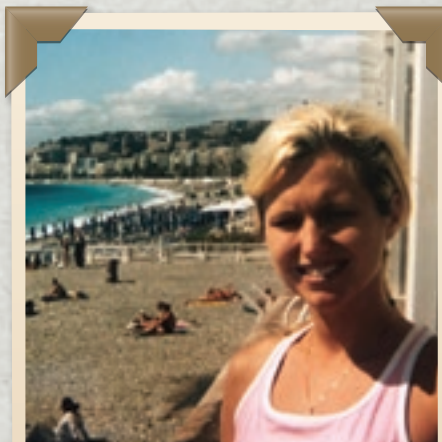
Before you embark on your career of choice and finish college (if this is the path you choose) - or even if you go straight into the work force and get vacation time - **GO**. This is the time of your



Golden Gate Bridge,
San Francisco



Roosevelt Hotel,
Hollywood, California



French Riviera



Horseback riding in Hawaii

life when you won't likely be "saddled" with responsibilities that will keep you from traveling, especially places around the world.

A college professor advised me my freshman year to **travel as much as possible**. Travel broke, if you have to (have the means to get back home, of course). You want to go to Rome - do it. Save up money from your side or summer job, and just GO. I did (not long after I got out of college, anyway).

Traveling, especially outside of the U.S. and overseas to Europe, opened a vast, new, amazing world I can't imagine having never discovered. If you can be part of an exchange program, my suggestion would be to jump on it. The world is made up of a kaleidoscope of

people beyond the 39560 zip code, and meeting, living in and experiencing the cultures of others enhances your life and understanding of this big world we live in.

Strike a balance. Find time for rest and recreation, but make sure you do the best you can and put in the effort required, no matter what you choose to do.

Also, **be careful who you choose as friends.** We truly do, knowing or not, become a reflection of those we keep in our inner circle. Choose wisely. People, over time, should earn your trust and be supportive, positive, encouragers and good influences. You've likely seen or read stories about how one stupid decision in a young person's life turned his or her world, reputation and future

upside-down. This is the day of social media, selfies and cell phones. You never know who is watching, so live upright and transparently.

And lastly, **have faith.** If you are a person of faith, hold tight to that faith. It's the one thing that will never leave you, if you cling closely to it. There is something to the law of attraction - where our mind leads, our lives shall follow. I can tell you first-hand, and, believe me, I've faced some tough trials in life and made some not-so-smart decisions more than once or twice, but it does end up all working out alright.

Go for the gusto, while you are still young. Shoot for the stars.

And remember, you can always find your way back home.

Asylum Hill discoveries are something personal

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

It was Dustin Clarke who found the wedding band with the inscription, “Ever true to thee,” in an unmarked grave.

Clarke, who died last year, was an archaeologist on the Asylum Hill Project, an ongoing commitment to respectfully exhumate the remains and memorialize the lives of as many as 7,000 people who were buried on University of Mississippi Medical Center land, the former grounds of the long-vanished Mississippi State Lunatic Asylum.

Clarke is the late husband of Dr. Jennifer Mack, the lead bioarchaeologist for Asylum Hill.

“Dustin was so proud of finding that ring,” Mack said.

Sometime around Valentine’s Day, Mack got a foot tattoo that includes this inscription: “Ever true to thee” – an indelible reminder of a small but telling detail from someone’s personal story, which has now become part of hers.

The 18-carat gold ring Clarke unearthed is one of many personal items collected from the 400-plus graves excavated over the past year-and-a-half from an asylum gravesite on the northeast corner of the campus alongside University Drive. Mack believes the graves date to the early 20th century.

Renamed the State Hospital for the Insane in 1900, the institution served about 30,000 patients between 1855 and 1935, time enough for thousands of residents to die and be buried there – mostly in pine coffins that have not survived – and time enough for their identifying wooden markers to deteriorate and disappear.

A list of asylum patients who were buried in the cemetery between 1912 and 1935 is available; but, without markers, no one knows exactly where each one lies.

The graves have yielded such ephemera as an “At Rest” plaque from a coffin lid; Oxford-style shoes; work boots about three-quarters intact; a coin minted in 1895; railroad tokens; marble footstones; hair combs; gold tooth fillings; and, in more than one grave, dentures tucked under an arm.

But a widely reported discovery is not something a person can wear, buy or inherit. It was an internal organ – a beige, calcified turtle egg-sized object found in December 2022 and known in the medical world as a porcelain gallbladder.

A team of experts, including Mack, reported the discovery this year in the *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology*.

“It was so much better preserved than the skeletal remains found in that grave,” Mack said. “As a bioarchaeologist, I had no idea that the body could do this or that you could find one preserved.”

Dr. Ralph Didlake, a retired UMMC surgeon, serves as director of the Asylum Hill Project and UMMC’s Center for Bioethics and Medical Humanities.

“It’s one of those things we talk about in surgery training, but never see,” Didlake said. “The list of things it could be is very short. Surgery training is full of ‘zebras’ like this,” he said, referring to the term for a rare or unusual medical condition.

Considering the setting – a mental hospital – and the time – mid-19th century to early 20th century – signs of certain other medical conditions are likely to be come up, Didlake said.

“We should find evidence of tuberculosis; patients were admitted and treated for TB,” said Didlake. “We would also expect to find bony changes



Photo circa 1915

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

that mark untreated syphilis; patients with the disease were admitted there, because syphilis has neuro-psychological implications.”

“And we would expect to see evidence of some type of trauma. Patients with head injuries would have been admitted; also, the asylum operated before anti-seizure medications were available, so, we would expect to see trauma from that.”

“With a closer examination of the remains, we may find such conditions and create what Dr. Mack calls an osteobiography. “One goal of the project is to carefully study the remains of each individual and fill in the stories of these former patients.” Which, in her work as an archaeologist, is the heart of Mack’s motivation.

“I’ve always liked telling stories,” said Mack, who is also an assistant professor in the School of Population Health. “And I enjoy returning people’s personhood to them. When we can do that, we are returning them to their families, too, in a way.”

To that end, a gold ring says more about a person’s soul than a ruined gallbladder, and the souls revealed are not limited just to those of patients. The graves have yielded secrets of many who may have never been buried at the asylum.

Over the years, Mack has had the opportunity to see, through the lens of various idiosyncrasies and intimate mementoes, not ghosts but, instead, human beings – at burial sites across the U.S.

But what sets Asylum Hill apart from the others is its scale, she said.

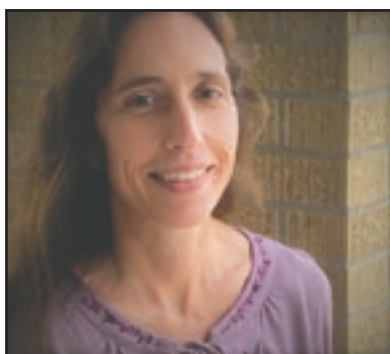
“As does the amount of involvement from descendants. They continue to help determine the questions we will investigate.”

Around 175 descendants of asylum patients are involved right now, said Lida Gibson, assessment and research coordinator for the project. “The large majority don’t live in Mississippi; in all they represent about sixteen different states.”

They are permitted to visit the excavation site and the laboratory where the artifacts are kept, Gibson said, and they are kept abreast of developments through virtual meetings, as well as scheduled public events.

“It’s important to find out what they want,” Mack said. “These are their ancestors.”

For more information about the project, visit AsylumHillProject.org.



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Lead bioarchaeologist Dr. Jennifer Mack



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Christian school focused on special needs headed to Clinton

The Mississippi Monitor

A Christian school's relocation from Jackson to the Morrison Heights Mission Campus in Clinton opens new horizons, as Providence Christian Academy (formerly Kaleidoscope Heights) finds a more suitable space and fills a niche in the community's education choices, school and church leaders say.

The academy, accredited by the Midsouth Association of Independent Schools, is one of the few Christian schools in the state that primarily serves children with special learning needs.

The move folds the private nonprofit K-12 Christian academy into a family-oriented neighborhood setting — a vast improvement over its current office building surroundings, which offer little access to outdoor recreation, Head of School Becky DeWett said.

The move also represents another key community mission for Morrison Heights Baptist Church, whose former campus in Clinton's Easthaven subdivision is now the meeting base for three churches, as well as home to a day care facility and a food pantry.

"We see it as a mission opportunity to our community, and also to the school," said Morrison Heights Associate Pastor of Missions Tim Rowan. The school will partner with the Hispanic church, Iglecia Hispana de Clinton, in one building's use, and occupy other areas exclusively.

"I think it's going to be transformational," academy teacher Tabatha Tucker said of the move. She praised the uplifting, supportive environment the school provides for students, including her own son and daughter. "It opens up a way for every student to get an education they deserve, in a Christian environment that helps encourage them, and strengthens their faith."

The academy was founded as Kaleidoscope Heights three years ago, in the wake of the state welfare scandal that embroiled New Summit School owners and led to their school's closure. Kaleidoscope Heights formed to fill the educational void for children with learning disabilities.

The newly-named Providence Christian Academy continues to serve a diverse range of students with specialized learning needs — children with dyslexia or anxiety and those on the autism spectrum, for instance — who can benefit from the school's smaller class sizes and more individualized instruction. Its Christian founding principles emphasize the full embrace of its mission.

"We are all created in the image of God, and God does not make mistakes," said DeWett, a Clinton native who served as a missionary based in Ukraine for nearly thirty years and returned home when war broke out. She has been with the school for two of its three years in existence.

"We try to help our students understand that they may have a difficulty to overcome, but they're still image bearers of Christ... We don't just teach the minds. We teach the hearts, the minds and the souls. We believe in the well-rounded student, in every aspect."

The school's name change honors the providence of God.

"We're guided by divine care, prudent preparation, community belonging," DeWett said, echoing the school's purpose as a place "where faith meets wisdom."

Providing options to meet individual learning needs, along with opportunities to earn a degree or complete a track toward possible employment, is a real ministry to families searching for the appropriate education for their children, Rowan said.

"And, it's a great opportunity to get to know these families and invite them into our church, to be able to meet other needs



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Providence Christian Academy will open in Clinton in August, offering K-12 education to primarily serve children with special learning needs.

that they may have, as well."

The new location's more affordable rent offers another bright outlook.

"We're going to be able to invest in some more state-of-the-art training and state-of-the-art equipment — things that our kids are going to need in the long run," DeWett said.

The academy has fifty-four students and fifteen staff members now, with the goal for a student body of sixty-five next fall.

"In time, maybe next year, we'll have more space and can expand more," DeWett said. Class sizes never exceed twelve students. "We adapt and make allowances for different students. We meet them where they are, and take them beyond."

The school will begin its move to Clinton as early as late May, and start classes there in mid-August. Fall enrollment is now open. The seventh- through twelfth-grades classes are near capacity with limited openings, with greater availability in the elementary levels, DeWett said.

The school welcomes partnerships, sponsorships and donations from local businesses, particularly for scholarships.

"We have many students that are far below the poverty line, that struggle to pay our tuition, which is not exorbitant," DeWett said. "We have parents that have three and four jobs, because they believe that their child needs to be here. We would love to look at them and say, 'Look, we've covered half of your tuition, give up two of those jobs and be with your child.' We want to minister to the family - and the child."

"The Clinton community needs to know that we're there and we're ready to help families and students to prosper."

For more information, call 769-233-8813, or email: ProvidenceAcademyClinton@gmail.com.



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Real Estate Tips:

Fall Home Maintenance Tips:

- Have your heating unit serviced and ready to use when cold weather gets here.
- Check your chimney for blockages and that damper is functioning properly. If you haven't had your chimney serviced and cleaned in more than a year. Now is the time.
- Continue to monitor that water is draining away from the home and not pooling around or going under your foundation.
- Ceiling fans should be changed to clockwise for optimal circulation.



Tips to ready your home for sale:

- **The importance of hiring an experienced real estate professional:** There are so many facets that go into selling a home. Hiring a seasoned agent to help you navigate this process is a worthwhile consideration. Duties include, walking sellers through the whole process from the initial consultation, pricing, listing, showings, contract negotiations, all the way to closing. I will help you through it all. Also, statistics show that hiring a REALTOR to sell your home increases your net by up to thirty three percent.
- **Curb appeal is so important.** It is your first opportunity to impress buyers.
- **Repaint/repair any areas that have paint peeling or is damaged.**
- **Placing fresh mulch/pine straw in flower beds always dresses up the property.**



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