

The Mississippi Monitor



UMMC School of Dentistry breaks ground on new building

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Mississippi Main Street Association holds Main Street Day at the Capitol

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The Mississippi Main Street Association (MMSA) recently held a press conference at the Mississippi State Capitol to educate legislators about the community and economic development successes of the Mississippi Main Street Association and its member communities.

Speakers included Lt. Gov. Delbert Hosemann, Rep. Trey Lamar, Sen. Bart Williams, Rep. Sam Creekmore, MMSA Board President Chris Hinton, MMSA Executive Director Jim Miller, and MMSA Vice President Kelle Barfield.

MMSA has eighty-four community members, and Main Street representatives from all over the state were in attendance.

Following the press conference, a luncheon was held with legislators at the Capital Club, where Main Street directors brought posters of current, publicly-funded revitalization projects in their downtown districts.

"Main Street communities represent an upward economic trajectory in Mississippi," said Chris Hinton, MMSA Board President. "Main Street is a significant part of that through placemaking and revitalization — turning empty buildings and blighted properties into thriving places of business in our historic downtowns."

"We are grateful to have earned the trust of our elected officials at the local, state and national level, and we are highly focused on economic strategies like ARPA investments and new grant programs to continue this momentum and make the most of this critical time in our state coming out of the pandemic," Hinton said.

Since 1993, when tracking reinvestment statistics began, MMSA has helped to catalyze 9,791 new businesses, 1,667 business expansions, 48,267 new jobs, 4,084 rehabilitation projects, 7,754 downtown residential units, 327 new construction projects, and 742 public improvement projects. Over \$2.2 billion in public dollars have been invested, along with more than \$5 billion in private dollars.



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UMMC School of Dentistry breaks ground on new building

All photos Special to The Mississippi Monitor



An artistic digital rendering depicts the future School of Dentistry clinical building. With the state-of-the-art facility on the horizon, the UMMC School of Dentistry is positioned to evolve and adapt to meet the demands of the ever-changing field of dentistry. School officials say that by enhancing patient care, improving student learning environments, and laying the groundwork for future expansions, the new clinical building represents a transformative investment in the school's future.

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

In a transformative step for the future of dental education and patient care, the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC) School of Dentistry has celebrated the construction of a new clinical building with a groundbreaking event on March 6.

The highly-anticipated project, supported by a \$40 million legislative appropriation, will provide an upgraded, dedicated space for student clinics, University Dentists and the Advanced Education in General Dentistry graduate program.

Medical center officials say the expansion to the School of Dentistry marks a significant investment in the next generation of dental professionals. The new facility will allow all predoctoral students to provide comprehensive care in a modern clinical area, enhancing both patient care and student learning environments. Equipped with the latest resources and technology, the new space will also lay the foundation for future expansion, ensuring that the school continues to meet the evolving needs of oral health education and patient care.

"It's exciting," said Dr. Scott Phillips, associate dean for clinical affairs. "The new clinical building gives us the opportunity to have space for all predoctoral students to provide comprehensive patient care in a larger clinical area. Currently, students are assigned to three smaller clinics across two floors. Having a lot of our clinical staff and faculty working in the same location will allow for a better experience for patients and students."

The building's design prioritizes functionality, ensuring that each floor serves a specific purpose, while providing a welcoming and efficient flow for both



Dr. Scott Phillips



patients and providers. The entrance on the first floor will lead to dedicated spaces for University Dentists and Advanced General Dentistry (AEGD), creating a central hub for faculty and graduate-level practices. Each practice will be accompanied by a waiting area designed to ensure a welcoming first impression.

The second floor will become home to the Comprehensive General Dentistry clinic, designed to optimize patient care and hands-on learning experiences for students. A spacious waiting area is planned for patient comfort, while well-planned operatories will allow for seamless patient flow and individualized care.

While concrete plans for the third floor haven't been made, the new building presents an exciting opportunity for future growth and expansion.

Officials say a major benefit of the new building is the chance to enhance and expand patient services. The AEGD clinic, for instance, will be able to treat patients with a broader range of needs, including those with physical disabilities, who previously had to travel to the Jackson Medical Mall for treatment.

The School of Dentistry is also exploring ways to bring additional services, giving patients comprehensive, centralized care that simplifies access and enhances the overall experience.



Dr. Pia Chatterjee Kirk

"This new building will allow the school to grow and thrive, potentially expanding in new and innovative ways," said Dr. Pia Chatterjee Kirk, interim dean. "I am planning on continuing to focus on bettering our curriculum, our facilities, our student experiences and our relationships. I believe in supporting our students through their development at the School of Dentistry to realize their potential, create pathways to ensure their success and create an environment that nurtures the mind,

body and soul."

"I'm overjoyed about the new dental school facility," said Dutton Day, third-year dentistry student. "We will be able to train talented students who are passionate about making a difference in their communities. This not only enhances the students' education but also helps build a healthier future for families across our state—especially those in the Jackson area—by providing better access to quality dental care."



Dutton Day

Board of Education recommends moving MSMS to MSU

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The Mississippi State Board of Education (SBE) recently voted unanimously to recommend to the Mississippi Legislature that it consider relocating the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) to Mississippi State University (MSU) starting in the 2026-27 school year. No changes to the location or operations of MSMS will occur without legislative action and appropriation of necessary funding.

The MSMS was established during the 1987 Legislative Session as a residential high school for academically gifted eleventh- and twelfth-grade students on the campus of the Mississippi University for Women (MUW) in Columbus, Mississippi. MUW faculty wrote the original rationale, proposal and plan that established the school. Since its inception, MSMS has served more than 3,000 graduates through its rigorous programming.

On February 7, the SBE invited MUW and MSU to submit proposals that will increase enrollment opportunities and enhance educational programming for MSMS students. The SBE selected these two universities because MSMS partners with both for dual enrollment and research opportunities.

After evaluating proposals from both universities and reviewing written feedback from stakeholders, the SBE determined that MSU in Starkville offers advantages for the future growth of MSMS, while acknowledging the foundation established through its history on the campus of MUW.

MSU proposal highlights include:

- **Research depth:** As Mississippi's leading research institution, MSU proposes to provide MSMS students with access to more extensive research facilities and opportunities, particularly in STEM fields.
- **Additional academic partnerships:** MSU proposes to offer more diverse course options to MSMS students by partnering with the Starkville Oktibbeha Consolidated School District.
- **Industry connections:** MSU proposes to connect MSMS students with business and industry partners for experiential learning and internships aligned with workforce development needs.
- **Career-focused STEM and arts programs:** MSU proposes to provide tailored programs for MSMS students in high-demand fields including health sciences, defense industry, cyber security, engineering, manufacturing technology, data science, biotechnology and the arts in the digital age.

"The SBE is grateful to the Mississippi University for Women for its decades of service supporting MSMS," said Glen East, SBE chair. "MUW's partnership with MSMS has established



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The Mississippi School for Math and Science, a residential high school for academically gifted high school juniors and seniors, is currently located in Columbus on the campus of the Mississippi University for Women.

the school's reputation for excellence and created a strong foundation that has benefited thousands of Mississippi's brightest students. Our recommendation reflects our assessment of future growth possibilities and academic opportunities for MSMS students; it is not intended to diminish MUW's contributions to the success of MSMS."



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MPB honored at Mississippi Association of Broadcasters in multiple categories

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Mississippi Public Broadcasting (MPB) recently announced that MPB News and MPB Think Radio received multiple top honors at the Mississippi Association of Broadcasters (MAB) awards ceremony. MPB staff earned twelve awards in ten categories, recognizing their excellence in journalism, storytelling and public broadcasting.

Among the accolades (all in the Radio category) presented to MPB were:

- Documentary or Series of Stories – First Place
- Public Affairs Program – First and Second Place
- Continuing Coverage – First Place
- Commercial Announcement – First Place
- Achievement – Second Place
- Radio Talk Show – Second and Third Place
- Feature Story – Third Place
- Anchor/Reporter – Third Place
- Newscast – Third Place
- Radio Personality of the Year – Third Place

MPB officials say the awards highlight MPB's commitment to delivering in-depth news coverage, engaging public affairs programming, and high-quality storytelling that informs and connects Mississippians.

"These awards are a testament to the hard work and dedication of MPB's greatest asset – our staff," said Royal Aills, MPB Executive Director. "Our mission is to educate, inform and inspire

Mississippi, and these honors affirm that we are making a meaningful impact. I am incredibly proud of our team and their unwavering commitment to telling Mississippi's stories."

As a statewide public media network, MPB operates eight television channels and eight radio stations, reaching audiences across Mississippi with high-quality educational programming, trusted news coverage and thought-provoking discussions. MPB News delivers award-winning local, regional and national reporting, while MPB Think Radio provides in-depth conversations on topics ranging from current events to arts, culture and public affairs.

Mississippi Public Broadcasting is a state agency located at 3825 Ridgewood Road in Jackson, and, through a statewide network, also provides trusted information during emergencies. Since 1970, MPB has won over 350 national, regional and statewide awards, including Emmy®, Edward R. Murrow and Parents' Choice® Awards.

MPB remains dedicated to serving Mississippians through impactful journalism and innovative programming that amplifies a variety of voices and fosters informed communities.

For more information about MPB programming and coverage, visit MPBOnline.org, download the free MPB Public Media app or like and follow @MPBOnline on Facebook and X.



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LITTLE-KNOWN AUTHENTIC JUKE JOINT CALLS CLINTON HOME

By Nash Nunnery

Unknown to many Clintonians, a slice of cultural Americana rests rather inconspicuously on the edge of the city's western boundaries.

The battleship gray exterior against the camouflaged backdrop of an oak tree canopy makes the sturdy cinderblock-and-brick building barely noticeable to passers-by.

Located on the frontage road near Norrell Road and south of the four-lane ribbon of concrete known as Interstate 20, the building itself is hardly a beacon in a foggy harbor.

The no-frills white sign with red letters signifying "Dick's Place" atop the entrance is the only indicator that one of Mississippi's oldest juke joints occupies the property. It is reportedly one of the oldest Black-owned enterprises in Mississippi.

Juke joints derived their name from the Gullah word "joog" or "jook" (which means "disorderly") and quickly became a fixture on the landscape of the rural South after emancipation.

While the majority of Southern juke joints have folded under the weight of financial pressures and changing tastes, Dick's Place has a following that seems to have remained steady over the decades.

Seventy-five years steady, to be exact.

On November 17, Dick's Place celebrated its 75th anniversary with a party attended by politicians, entertainers (including legendary blues musician Bobby Rush) and a host of loyal Dick's regulars from years gone by.

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The year 1949 witnessed the United States recognizing the state of Israel, the New York Yankees beating the Brooklyn Dodgers in the World Series and Vaughn Monroe's rendition of "Riders in the Sky" reaching number one on Billboard magazine's most popular songs chart.

It also was the year brick mason and budding entrepreneur Richard "Dick" Anderson, Sr. bought a small parcel of land on Highway 80 near Norrell Road for \$140 and built a small country store with his own two hands.

He called it "Dick's Place."

However, Anderson's dream enterprise was gone in two years, as the original store stocked with everything from cold beer to hoop cheese fell to the wrecking ball with the construction of the new interstate highway system, notably I-20.

According to Dick's son Richard Anderson, Jr., his father was undeterred, despite the setback.

In 1952, like a Phoenix arising from the ashes, the current iteration of Dick's Place was constructed a few yards east of the former location, and has been open for business continuously since.

"Dick's Place soon began to evolve from a country store to a combination juke joint/night club that attracted a clientele from Clinton, Bolton, Edwards, Jackson and Terry," said Richard, a former teacher with the Hinds County Public School District. "My father said the people always need a place to gather and socialize. There were no cell phones or computers in those days.

"A juke joint just made sense."

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Soon after opening, Dick decided to introduce a BBQ carry-out business, selling smoked chicken plates and slabs of ribs for 75 cents and \$1.25, respectively. A skilled grill master, the elder Anderson prepared his BBQ delicacies every Thursday outside in front of the bar.

"He made his own BBQ sauce from scratch and featured the old-fashioned type of thick coleslaw on the menu," said Richard. "Folks absolutely loved it and would come from miles around to enjoy his cooking."

Like many other bars and restaurants in the 1950s and '60s, Dick's Place also sold bootleg whiskey and moonshine. Until 1966, the state of Mississippi still

observed prohibition.

"It was against the law, but all the honky-tonks and bars in the state did it," Richard said. "You could hardly make any money in the business if you didn't."

Over the years, Dick Anderson's entrepreneurial spirit soared to even greater heights. He dreamed of adding a two-story hotel directly behind Dick's Place and began construction. However, the county health department put the kibosh on the project.

"In the 1970s, he built a washeteria on the property, which lasted for three to four years," said Richard. "In 1981, I made a deal with my father and turned it into Richie's One-Stop, a convenience store that still operates today. We sold the best fried chicken, but no BBQ by that time."

Upon his father's passing in 1984, Richard completed the hotel section and turned the space into apartments. The property even boasted a barbershop on the northeast corner of the bar but closed about ten years ago, according to Richard.

"Dred locks became a big thing, and the need for an old-fashioned barber-shop just wasn't there," he added.

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Among the challenges Dick Anderson faced as an African-American business owner was racism.

Mississippi was ground zero for the Civil Rights Movement, and Dick's Place, along with many other black-owned businesses, was in the crosshairs of those opposed to integration and equal rights.

"Law enforcement made frequent trips to Dick's Place during that time," said Richard. "They'd always find the [bootleg] whiskey and take [Dick] to jail. Pretty soon, he figured out how the game was played... he had to pay 'under the table' to the powers-that-be to keep the business open."

"It was like paying off the Mafia."

Unlike many juke joints or nightclubs, violence is not tolerated at Dick's Place.

"We've had maybe one fight in the last ten years, and it was in the parking lot," he said. "No shootings in seventy-five years."

Richard also recalled an incident in the early 1970s involving a local highway patrolman parking his vehicle along Highway 80 and hurling a smoke bomb into Dick's Place, scattering coughing patrons into the cold night.

"It was a struggle to stay in business, but my father wouldn't give up," said Richard. "He'd always say 'People have been socializing since the beginning of time, and they're not going to stop now'. The challenges were real."

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Entering Dick's Place is like taking a giant leap back in time.

Neon beer advertisements, an old juke box containing a treasure trove of blues, R&B and country oldies, and leftover decorations from a past New Year's Eve celebration engulf the senses.

A couple of patrons nursing beers at the bar greet a visitor with a smile. When asked about the juke box, one of the men doesn't hesitate: "We listen to everything in here, from Hank Williams to Muddy Waters."

Disc jockeys are strictly forbidden at Dick's Place. Music is either live or straight from the jukebox. No exceptions.

Now eighty-six-years young, Richard Anderson has turned over operations of Dick's Place to his daughter Valerie. "Miss Lorraine" Henderson has tended bar and kept the doors open for nearly twenty-nine years.

He's asked if Dick's Place, the "authentic Mississippi juke joint," can make it another twenty-five years to the century mark?

Richard Anderson contemplates the question carefully before answering.

"You never know how the cookie's gonna crumble," he said, with a wry grin.



Special to The Clinton Courier
Richard "Dick" Anderson, Sr.



Nash Nunnery



Nash Nunnery



Special to The Clinton Courier
"Miss Lorraine" Henderson



Special to The Clinton Courier

The original Dick's Place

Yancey Engineered Solutions bringing generator enclosure, fuel tank manufacturing to Batesville

By Frank Corder

The Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) recently announced that Yancey Engineered Solutions, a division of Yancey Bros. Co., is locating operations in Batesville. The company is locating in the former Crown Cork and Seal facility, where it will manufacture aluminum and steel generator enclosures and fuel tanks to be used primarily by data centers.

MDA notes that the project is a \$20.8 million investment that will create two hundred fifty jobs.

Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves celebrated the news, saying he was proud to welcome Yancey Engineered Solutions as the newest member of the state's thriving business community.

"The past few years have been incredible for economic development in the state, as we've attracted record-breaking investments from industry leaders and created tens of thousands of jobs in our communities," Reeves said in a statement. "This investment and the creation of two hundred fifty jobs by Yancey Engineered Solutions continue that trend into 2025."

Yancey Bros. Co. Chairman and CEO Trey Gooze said the Batesville community has been very welcoming.

"We were impressed with the Batesville-Panola County region's strong workforce development commitment," Gooze said in a statement. "We look forward to serving our customers and an important segment of the U.S. economy through our Batesville operations."

The company plans to complete the project within three years and expects to fill the new jobs within five years.

Yancey Engineered Solutions was established by Yancey Bros. in 2004 to provide specialized design and packaging services for CAT generators.

Yancey Engineered Solutions offers customized sound-attenuat-



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The company is reportedly investing over \$20 million in its Mississippi project that will create 250 jobs.

ed generator enclosures and fuel tank manufacturing. The company creates and installs enclosures for Cat generators around the United States, Canada and Mexico.

MDA said it is providing assistance through the Mississippi Flexible Tax Incentive, or MFLEX, program, and noted that the agency is also providing assistance for building improvements.

AccelerateMS, Tennessee Valley Authority, City of Batesville, Panola Partnership and the Panola County Board of Supervisors are assisting with the project, as well, MDA added.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Article courtesy The Magnolia Tribune.

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The backstory of Mississippi's own Cat Cora



CatCora.com

By Marilyn Tinnin

At 58, world-renowned chef, author, restaurateur, television host, and health and fitness expert, Cat Cora still possesses all the enthusiasm and energy of a high school cheerleader. She could still pass for one, too. Her rise to worldwide prominence in the culinary industry is more riddled with highs and lows than a Pat Conroy novel.

Cat's entire career has included a series of "firsts." She was the first female Iron Chef on Food Network's *Iron Chef America* in 2005. Cat became an instant star when cooking shows became the rage in the late 1990s. Her Southern accent was disarming, her original recipes to die for, and her vivacious personality was as fresh as the ingredients in her food. Invitations from Fox, Bravo, and ABC's network shows were steady.

She is still proud of her heritage and always promotes her roots and home state.

Cat Cora's brand is respected from Los Angeles to New York City to Singapore, Paris and beyond. You can find her name in a variety of themed eateries coast to coast and around the world.

In her heart of hearts, she is still Spiro and Virginia Cora's little girl who grew up on Swan Lake Drive in South Jackson in a neighborhood where everybody knew everybody and children roamed barefoot in the summertime, catching frogs and chasing fireflies after dark.

Her mother was a nurse, and her father was a history teacher at Wingfield High School. Money was always tight, but love was abundant. Spiro often took a second and occasionally a third job to supplement the family income. When Virginia decided to return to school at UAB to get an advanced degree in nursing, Grandmother Alma came to live with the Coras to help take care of Cathy (Cat) and her brothers, Mike and Chris.

Grandma Alma simply added more love, laughter, and warmth to the family dynamics. Like Cat's mom and dad, Alma was also an excellent cook. Everything was made from scratch, and there was never a time when Cat did not relish the opportunity to assist!

Spiro's father came from Greece to America in the 1930s. His surname was not Cora but Karagiozoses. While matriculating through immigration on Ellis Island, he made the wise decision to shorten his last name. Thus, the Cora lineage began, and Grandpa Pete Karagiozoses became Pete Cora, who opened his own eatery, Coney Island

Café, in Greenville, Mississippi, where he settled. Cat shares in her memoir, *Cooking as Fast as I Can*, that he chose that name because he thought it sounded American.

Love for family, food, and big community defined Cat's early memories. Her parents' sense of gratitude for the life they enjoyed and the blessings they shared meant they absolutely loved opening their hearts and home to others at Thanksgiving.

Cat recalls the menagerie of people assembled around their table. Between the nurse and the schoolteacher, the invitations to the Cora Thanksgiving encompassed a diversity that almost surpassed a snapshot of a United Nations delegation. Virginia's University Hospital's international connections and Spiro's outreach to some of his lonely high school students from sad homes meant the Coras had a big table that welcomed everyone.

That example of hospitality and acceptance has forever shaped Cat's concept of hospitality and food.

No restaurant on the planet could match her grandmother's cheese-cake, her mother's pizza crust, or her father's grilled everything. Her godfather was Peter Costas, a longtime Jackson restaurateur who encouraged and, in many ways, guided her culinary aspirations. He invited her into his famed white tablecloth restaurant's kitchen many times. Such an experience for Cat was better than being turned loose in a candy store.

Cat was initially named "Melanie," and was born to an unwed teenager in Greenwood, Mississippi, in 1967. She spent one week in the custody of the Mississippi Children's Home Society before being given to her adoptive parents, who could not possibly have been a better match for this determined, creative, feisty child.

A wonderful loving home, however, could not protect her from a devastating ongoing series of sexual abuse from the time she was six until she was eleven. Her abuser threatened her should she tell, and so she did not. The abuse ended when her father accidentally walked in on an encounter.

But there was no follow-up, no counseling, no "Let's deal with this." It was the 1960s, and the world was different. Cat was just thankful it would never happen again.

Cat graduated from Wingfield in 1985 and enrolled at Hinds Community College. From Hinds, she went to the University of Southern

cont. on page 16

A match made in service: Mississippi Air Guard's kidney donation finds unexpected recipient in Alabama airman

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Master Sgt. Ron Bohl didn't hesitate.

His brother, Matthew, was battling stage 5 kidney disease, and time was running out. When he learned the wait for a donor kidney could take up to six years, he knew he had to act.

Matthew Bohl had been on dialysis since early 2023, but his condition was worsening. His blood pressure would shoot up to 180/140 without warning. Dialysis helped, but his blood pressure remained dangerously high.

"We really couldn't go anywhere for any length of time, because he had to be close to a dialysis center to be able to dialyze three times a week for four hours at a time," Bohl said.

Bohl, a master sergeant in the Mississippi Air National Guard, serves as a cyber operations noncommissioned officer in charge at Mississippi National Guard headquarters in Jackson. When he learned his brother's wait for a transplant could last years, he immediately volunteered to be a donor—if he was a match.

Bohl went through a yearlong screening process, only to find out he wasn't a match for Matthew. However, he learned about a paired donor program through the University of Alabama at Birmingham, which operates one of the largest kidney transplant programs in the country.

According to UAB Medicine, its Paired Kidney Donation Program allows incompatible donor-recipient pairs to be matched with other pairs, increasing the chances of finding a compatible kidney. The incompatible kidney program has facilitated more than 125 kidney transplants since it launched in 2013 and completed one of the longest-running transplant chains in the US.

Bohl's kidney might not go to his brother, but, through the program, he could still save a life.

Bohl was on board.

As Bohl searched for ways to help his brother, another Air National Guardsman from one state over, Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Sargent, was also in desperate need of a kidney.

Sargent, an equipment maintenance flight branch chief at the 117th Air Refueling Wing in Birmingham, Alabama, had been diagnosed with stage 5 kidney disease in March 2023 and faced the same predicament as Bohl's brother.

Three potential donors stepped forward on his behalf: his brother, James Vick; a member of his church; and a family friend, Nicole Brannon. But, one by one, complications arose.

"My brother was actually a match for me, but, during the screening process, he found out he had colon cancer," Sargent said. "Thankfully, he's okay now."

Sargent was 0-1.

The church member was also a match, but had to opt out due to his own health issues.

Sargent was 0-2.

That left family friend Nicole Brandon. She was a match.

Then, a UAB transplant coordinator told Brannon that she actually matched with a different donor in addition to Sargent and asked if she would be open to donating to another kidney seeker—a paired donor.

She agreed.

At the same time, Matthew Bohl was told that he had a match. His match was Nicole. Sargent's match was Ron Bohl.

After coordinating schedules, December 20, 2024, was set as the day of the transplant. The two pairs of donors would undergo their respective procedures simultaneously.

In the waiting room, their spouses sat anxiously, hoping for the best. As they waited, a conversation sparked between two strangers about their family members in surgery. They soon realized their spouses were both service members.

When the surgeries concluded, the kidney swaps were a success. Within a few days, all four were on their way home.

Bohl recounted the "victory lap" each patient must complete before discharge.

"They make you take two laps around the nurse's station before you can go home," Bohl said. "We all took our lap together."

Sargent's quality of life has improved substantially since the transplant.



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Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Sargent (middle with maroon shirt) and family visit with Master Sgt. Ron Bohl (second from left) and his family at a Tuscaloosa restaurant, celebrating one month after a successful kidney transplant for Sargent and Bohl's brother, Matthew. Master Sgt. Ron Bohl, a Mississippi Air National Guardsman, donated a kidney to Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Sargent, an Alabama Air National Guardsman, through a paired donor program, after Bohl was found not to be a match for his brother, who ultimately received a kidney from another donor, Nicole Brannon (second from right), in a successful kidney swap (photo provided by MSgt. Ron Bohl).



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Master Sgt. Ron Bohl (right) and his brother, Matthew, share a smile after a successful three-week checkup, marking a major milestone in Matthew's recovery from a kidney transplant.



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Three days post-transplant, Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Sargent (left) and Master Sgt. Ron Bohl, who donated a kidney to Sargent, share a smile at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, marking a new beginning for Sargent's health journey. Bohl, a Mississippi Air National Guardsman, donated a kidney to Sargent, an Alabama Air National Guardsman, through a paired donor program, after Bohl was found not to be a match for his brother.

No longer bound to dialysis, he has regained his freedom and energy.

"You don't have to be tied to a machine or to a dialysis clinic three to four days a week, and all of that would have never happened without somebody with a heart like Ron and Nicole," Sargent said.

Sargent and Bohl agree that the kidney exchange was meant to be. Not only do they now share a kidney, but they were born just hours apart on nearly the exact same day.

It's often said that the National Guard is a family, but, for Bohl and Sargent, that phrase is no longer just a cliché—it's their reality.

"This kidney was meant for his biological brother, but his brother still got it," Sargent said.

"We are family now."

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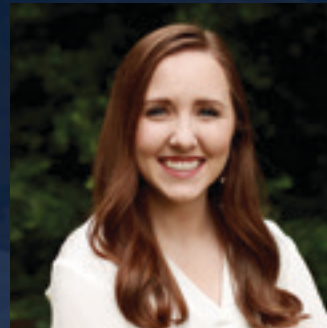
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172nd Airlift Wing holds groundbreaking ceremony for new fire station



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Leaders from the 172nd Airlift Wing were joined by Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith, Rep. Michael Guest, Maj. Gen. Bobby Ginn, the Adjutant General of Mississippi, representatives of the Jackson Medgar Wiley Evers International Airport, Duvall Decker Architects and V-Line Services as they celebrated the ceremonial groundbreaking of a state-of-the-art fire crash rescue station intended to serve the 172nd AW, the Jackson Medgar Wiley Evers International Airport and the thousands of people who travel through the airport every year.

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The Mississippi Air National Guard's 172nd Airlift Wing recently hosted a groundbreaking ceremony celebrating the construction of a new state-of-the-art fire station at Allen C. Thompson Field, 141 Military Drive in Jackson.

The new facility will be 19,400 square feet and will also support the Jackson-Medgar Wiley Evers International Airport. The main station will be adjacent to the flight line, greatly improving response times to on-base emergencies. The location of the main station will provide drill-status firefighters with an adequate training facility on base, saving hundreds of man-hours per year.

The new satellite station will replace the existing station and meet the Department of Defense and Federal Aviation Administration response time standards for the entire airport. The project will provide proper facilities

for the firefighters, who live and work there daily, to protect the people and assets on the base and the airport.

Support from Mississippi's congressional delegation jump-started the project, which took twelve years to program, design, fund and award.

The 172nd Airlift Wing's mission is to provide strategic airlift and combat forces in defense of the nation and support of the state. The 172nd Airlift Wing's primary weapon system is the C-17 Globemaster III. The C-17 is capable of rapid, strategic delivery of troops and all types of cargo. The aircraft can transport litters and ambulatory patients during aeromedical evacuations. The C-17's inherent flexibility and performance are needed to meet potential armed contingencies, peacekeeping, or humanitarian missions worldwide.

For more information about the 172nd Airlift Wing, visit www.172aw.af.mil/.



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JD Johnson named Mississippi's 2025 Children's Miracle Network Hospitals Champion

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JD Johnson is a healthy, active eight-year-old boy, thanks to a team of Children's of Mississippi experts. This year, he'll be sharing his story as the state's 2025 Children's Miracle Network Hospitals Champion.

His new role was announced a day before his 9th birthday during a news conference at the Kathy and Joe Sanderson Tower at Children's of Mississippi.

Every year, 170 local Children's Miracle Network Hospitals choose a Champion in each of their local communities to serve as the face for children treated at their local children's hospital. These ambassadors spend their year advocating for children's hospitals across North America.



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JD hasn't let his condition define him, said Dr. Jennifer Shores, who first met him when his mother, April Johnson, was a patient in the UMMC's Center for Maternal and Fetal Care.



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Dr. Guy Giesecke

Care at Wiser Hospital for Women and Infants on the UMMC campus.

April Johnson had awakened on a Sunday at home in Mize with a suspicion that something didn't feel right. A labor and delivery and well-baby nurse, she had a fetal Doppler at home and put it on her belly to listen.

What she heard was different from the normal, rhythmic beat from her doctor's appointment the prior week. Her local hospital sent her to the Center for Maternal and Fetal Care, where a multidisciplinary care team from UMMC and Children's of Mississippi discussed possible diagnoses with her and husband Jay.

The next day, Dr. James Bofill, professor of obstetrics and gynecology, had answers. The Johnsons' unborn baby had twenty-six congenital heart defects and heterotaxy syndrome, a rare birth defect involving the heart and other organs.

After hours of ultrasound scans, Shores talked with the Johnsons.

"She said, 'I'm going to explain this the best that I can, and then I'm going to tell you how we're going to fix it. I'm going to be with you every step of the way,'" April Johnson said. "And she absolutely has been. She was very

JD, a Mize native, travels from Leesburg, Georgia, regularly for Children's of Mississippi care from disciplines including cardiology, surgery, asthma and allergy, dermatology, ophthalmology and otolaryngology.

"We're proud to have cared for JD since before he was born," said Dr. Guy Giesecke, Children's of Mississippi CEO. "He's been a champion his whole life, and we think he will be a great representative for Children's of Mississippi."

JD said he counts on faith, family and friends for support and enjoys school, church and sports.

"I get my strength from my parents, sisters, family and friends, but, most importantly, God," he said.

Dr. Jennifer Shores, professor of fetal cardiology at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, first "met" JD when his mother April was about twenty-seven weeks pregnant and a patient at the Center for Maternal and Fetal



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JD Johnson has been named Mississippi's 2025 Children's Miracle Network Hospitals Champion.



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The Johnson family includes father Jay, sisters Natalee, Julianna and Bella, JD and mother April.

comforting and has a heart of gold."

To prepare for JD's birth, the family relocated to Ronald McDonald House on the UMMC campus at thirty-six weeks to be nearby for daily monitoring.

"If something happened, they wanted me to be right there," she said.

An electrocardiogram on JD shortly after his birth confirmed heart defects, a complete heart block and heterotaxy syndrome. At a week old, JD had his first surgery, a six-hour operation that included placing a pacemaker.

His second surgery, at almost six months, lasted ten hours. He's also had three heart catheterizations, ear tube surgery, an appendectomy and a Ladd procedure to correct malrotation of his intestines, part of heterotaxy syndrome.

Two other surgeries were performed at Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital in Houston.

Doctors and nurses at Children's of Mississippi cared for JD "just as if he was their own child," she said.

Through all his procedures, JD has been "a trouper," Shores said. "He never lets anything slow him down. He never complains and just keeps going, no matter what."

As the state's Children's Miracle Network Hospitals Champion, JD will share his story of having congenital heart disease, which occurs in about 1 in 100 births, and heterotaxy syndrome, which happens in 1 out of every 100,000 births.

"He is proud of his heart history and of the fact that he has overcome it," she said. "He is in all ways a normal little boy who is active in school, plays baseball and loves his family and friends. He has a great attitude about his heart defect and his life."

JD is a younger brother to sister Natalee, 11, and older brother to Bella, 6, and Julianna, 3.

He's also supported Children's of Mississippi by serving as a patient ambassador and sharing his story during Mississippi Miracles Radiothon.

Children's of Mississippi care is letting JD live a full, healthy life, April Johnson said.

"He loves going to 'his hospital,' as he calls it. He feels safe and comfortable there. He loves telling his story about how much time he has spent at his hospital. We are so very proud of him and are forever grateful for all Children's of Mississippi has done and continues to do for JD and our family."



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Mississippi's 2025 Children's Miracle Network Hospitals Champion JD Johnson speaks during a news conference Friday, as mother April Johnson and sister Bella look on.



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Drs. John and Vera Mae Perkins honored for service



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Pictured (l to r) are Trustee Dr. Ormella Cummings, Liz Perkins, Dr. John Perkins and Priscilla Perkins.

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The 2025 Karen Cummins Community Service Award was recently presented to Drs. John and Vera Mae Perkins for their commitment to community development, racial reconciliation, education, housing and more over the past sixty years.

In presenting the award, Trustee Dr. Ormella Cummings noted that the Perkins “have had an impact on communities from California to Mississippi and everywhere in between through their dedication to social justice.”

Married since 1951, the Perkins established the Voice of Calvary Institute in Mendenhall, Mississippi, and were quickly seen as leaders in the work to ensure equality and justice. In 1982, they established the Harambee Christian Family Center in Pasadena, California, and later the Christian Community Development Association, which works to strengthen underserved people in urban settings.

The Perkins returned to Mississippi in 1996, and created the John and Vera Mae Perkins Foundation and the Spencer Perkins Center, named in memory of their son, Spencer, which provides after-school tutoring, art camps, higher education internships, and youth gardening programs.

The Karen Cummins Community Service Award is presented every year as part of Black History Month, and is named in memory of former Trustee Karen Cummins, who passed away in 2017.



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The backstory of Mississippi's own Cat Cora

Mississippi to pursue a degree in exercise physiology and biology.

Fitness was and continues to be a top priority for Cat. She worked as an instructor in several fitness clubs and gyms after graduating, but she did not feel like she had found that thing she planned to do for the rest of her working life. Cooking had, perhaps, been something so natural and routine – almost as normal as brushing her teeth – that she had not given serious thought to making it her vocation.

Soon after her college graduation, she embarked on a three-month European adventure with a Eurail pass and a bare-bones budget. With no frills, she spent time in Portugal, France, Italy, and finally Greece, where her father's family in Skopelos rolled out the red carpet and ignited a passion in Cat. She remembers thinking, "The passion my Greek relatives put into their food, and the passion my southern family put into their food [are] the same. This so moved me that I felt a goal begin to materialize."

A stint as a conscientious waitress at Jackson's popular Italian restaurant Amerigo led to a promotion as a cook in their kitchen. Not long after, she entered and won a local competition called "The Taste of Elegance." Cat was the only female participant and the most uncredentialed as far as a career with a beloved restaurant around the city. The famed Paul Prudhomme was the judge.

Cat Cora knew she was just beginning. She had so much to learn, but this career would combine her love for the cuisine of her childhood and the joy of gathering with friends and family around a common table to celebrate the best of life together. Cat wondered, "Can I make a living doing what I love?" She rolled up her sleeves and set her strong will toward making it happen.

Cat's focus became achieving her goals. When she happened to see a newspaper announcement one morning that the renowned Julia Child would be signing a new cookbook in Natchez in a few days, she convinced her mother and her grandmother Alma that they must go.

Patiently waiting until the crowd had cleared, Cat positioned her-

self in front of Julia and said, "Mrs. Child, I want to cook."

Cat's application and acceptance to the Culinary Institute of America, the Harvard of all culinary schools, came from that brief conversation. She enrolled and found it brutal and so beyond her skills at the time. Crushed and defeated, she withdrew after two weeks.

However, it did not take long for her determined will to recover. She sent a letter begging for another chance, explaining that she had been totally overwhelmed by her inexperience. She was ready for the challenge and eager to learn.

The Institute replied that they would welcome her back after a year spent gaining more experience in a professional kitchen. Cat hit the jackpot when she landed a position under the wing of Chef Paul at Jackson's University Club, the private club at the top of the Deposit Guaranty Plaza, quite the elite place at the time.

Chef Paul and Cat's relationship was fraught with conflict in the beginning but evolved into a friendship marked by mutual respect and eternal gratitude on Cat's part. His seemingly unreasonable demands birthed a discipline and commitment to perfection that served Cat well.

She was completely prepared when she gave the Culinary Institute a second shot and did not disappoint those who believed in her. From there, the doors opened, and she has spent decades racking up awards, shattering glass ceilings as a female chef and an actual female tour de force, appearing on every major network, opening eateries in her own name, and even giving back to humanitarian efforts during natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina.

Cat is currently single. She lives in Santa Barbara, California, where she enjoys life as the mother of six boys, all of whom enjoy being put to work in their mom's kitchen. For much more on Cat's life story, pick up her memoir, *Cooking as Fast as I Can*.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Article courtesy The Magnolia Tribune.

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¹ "Medicare & You," Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2025. ² "Aging changes in teeth and gums," medlineplus.gov, 4/17/2022. ³ American Dental Association, Health Policy Institute, 2020 Survey of Dental Fees, Copyright 2020, American Dental Association.

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Governor and Mississippi Development Authority unveil new branding campaign



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Gov. Tate Reeves and Mississippi Development Authority have unveiled a bold new branding initiative: "Let's Break New Ground." Created in partnership with Ridgeland-based The Ramey Agency, the new campaign conveys the state's commitment to bringing new investments and good-paying job opportunities to Mississippians through its pro-business policies and favorable business environment.

"When it comes to economic development, Mississippi is breaking new ground for business and its people. This brand campaign highlights our state's pioneering spirit, the strength of our partnerships and our willingness to think creatively to help businesses succeed," said Governor Tate Reeves. "We've experienced record-breaking economic development successes over the last few years. As the economic landscape evolves across sectors, we are excited to 'break new ground' and further expand both our diverse portfolio of industries and opportunities for Mississippians."

Earlier this year, Gov. Reeves announced Compass Datacenters is locating in Lauderdale County, a project that will create thousands of jobs and will represent a \$10 billion investment at full build-out. Last year, substantial investments from companies like Amazon Web Services, Amplify Cell Technologies, Liebherr and PCC Gulf Chem were announced throughout the state. These four projects combined represent nearly \$12.8 billion in new capital investments and the creation of nearly 3,500 jobs.

The "Let's Break New Ground" initiative reflects the state's proactive approach to recruiting these types of game-changing projects. This includes a commitment to explore new possibilities and embrace a fresh perspective to increase speed to market. It also emphasizes several key attributes that make Mississippi a top destination for business: a streamlined process with less red tape and innovative incentives; collaboration with local leaders, utilities and educational institutions to reduce risk; and flexibility to tailor solutions that benefit both businesses and local communities.

"Mississippi has a proven track record of delivering results for businesses," said MDA Executive Director Bill Cork. "With 'Let's Break New Ground,' we're sending a clear message that Mississippi is the place where innovation meets opportunity. We're ready to roll up our sleeves and work alongside companies so they can go from investing money to making money in record time. The 'Mississippi Momentum' is strong, and we have no intention of slowing down any time soon."

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Spring blooms bring out allergies, remedies

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Pollen season is upon not only Mississippi, but also the nation, and it's becoming more difficult to determine when and which types of pollen will affect which people, allergists say.

White, sticky powder from pine trees is now covering everything from car roofs to street curbs. Yellowy dustings of pollen from elm, juniper and oak, also common in early spring, make for big sneezes and other nasty reactions for those with allergies.

"Spring allergy season has arrived and, as the trees start budding, so does spring hay fever," said Dr. Gailen Marshall, the R. Faser Triplett Sr. MD Chair in Allergy and Immunology at UMMC and director of the Division of Clinical Immunology.

In the past, specific pollens had specific seasons for fairly well-defined periods of time, Marshall said. Tree pollen generally posed the biggest threat for prompting upper respiratory and sinus infections from March 1 through April 30. Blooms of certain species of grasses then filled the air with pollen from May through July, followed closely by various weeds such as ragweed from September through October.

Mississippi's already-variable climate swings coupled with climate change in general has made the dates on that calendar tougher to nail down, Marshall said. Still, those with and without known allergies can still keep the facial tissues away by talking to their doctor.

"There is little disagreement about the observation that winters are shorter and wetter in the Deep South, with warmer weather accompanied by plenty of showers. All the extra carbon dioxide in the air acts as plant food for the trees, which then produce all the extra pollen," Marshall said.

About a quarter of adults in the U.S. deal with the effects of seasonal allergies, which include itchy and/or watery eyes, scratchy throat and noses that just can't stop running. Increasingly short winters mean warmer temperatures take hold for more of the year, which means the seasons for specific pollens are overlapping, Marshall said.

Pollen counts in the Jackson area remain high, with elm, juniper and oak pollens being the top allergens detected at the end of March. However, the city managed to stay out of the upper half of this year's top 100 allergy capitals in the nation, measured annually by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.

Usage of over-the-counter medication in Jackson to combat allergies was rated worse than average by the nonprofit organization, though the availability of board-certified allergists/immunologists was rated better than average. The two results mean not enough allergy sufferers are seeing a doctor to seek possible remedies to their seasonal symptoms.

"When over-the-counter remedies aren't good enough to keep symptoms at bay, it can only lead to symptoms worsening to include higher stress and anxiety associated with chronic allergies," said Dr. Charles Grogan, assistant professor of medicine and pediatrics and medical director of the UMMC Adult Allergy Service.

"Intranasal steroids are the gold standard to prevent and treat symptoms of allergic rhinitis, or hay fever," Marshall said. "Antihistamines are most helpful as an add-on for symptoms not fully controlled by other medications."

UMMC has multiple board-certified allergists-immunologists available at



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Dr. Gailen Marshall

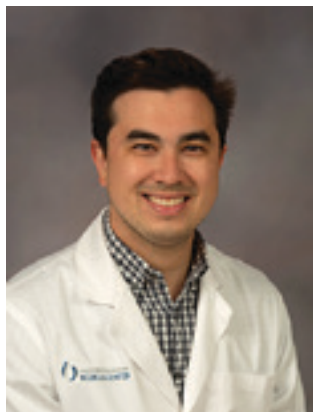


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Elevated pollen counts in spring can include sneezing, watery eyes, scratchy throat and runny nose, among other symptoms for those with specific sensitivities to known allergens.

Those with allergies that flare up with any change in weather can practice a few mindful tips to manage both exposure and symptoms:

- **Lower exposure** – Avoid activities when pollen counts are highest. Pollens are released most abundantly when the sun comes up and reach a maximum level around the middle of the day. Thus, the best times to enjoy the outdoors are early morning and early evening.
- **Clothing and cleanliness** – Pollens tend to stick to clothing and are transported indoors quite easily. Consider changing clothes and taking a shower immediately after prolonged periods outdoors.
- **Start a medicine regimen before the season arrives** – Get a jump on any change in weather by using as directed any number of over-the-counter meds, such as specially-formulated nasal sprays and antihistamines.



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Dr. Charles Grogan

several sites in Hinds, Rankin and Madison counties with same- or next-day appointments available.

"Self-referral is welcomed. These physicians can help diagnose specific allergies, provide advanced prescription medical therapy and, if needed, provide allergen injections to decrease or possibly eliminate the allergic sensitivity that a specific patient has," Marshall said.

To see a specialist at UMMC's Allergy, Asthma and Immunology clinic, call 888-815-2005.

Partnership helps special ops forces vets enter WCU College of Osteopathic Medicine

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

William Carey University's College of Osteopathic Medicine is partnering with a non-profit organization to help military retirees of special operations forces units enter medical school.

The organization, called Special Operations Forces to School of Medicine (SOFToSOM), fosters the transition of these highly skilled veterans to post-military careers in medicine.

Under the agreement, SOFToSOM retirees who meet specific criteria — including an MCAT score of 500 and a science GPA of 3.60 — are guaranteed an interview when they apply to the WCU College of Osteopathic Medicine (WCUCOM).

"This partnership reflects our commitment to serving those who have served us," said Dr. Italo Subbarao, dean of WCUCOM. "By creating clear pathways for veterans to enter the field of medicine, we are not only enhancing the diversity of our future healthcare providers but also strengthening the healthcare system as a whole."

Special operations forces (SOF) service members receive more advanced medical training than their counterparts in conventional military units. Within SOF, medical preparedness is a critical skill set, as these units often function in environments where immediate medical support may not be available.

"This represents an incredible opportunity to cultivate the next

generation of combat-proven physicians," said Brentyn Jones, SOFToSOM director of partnership.

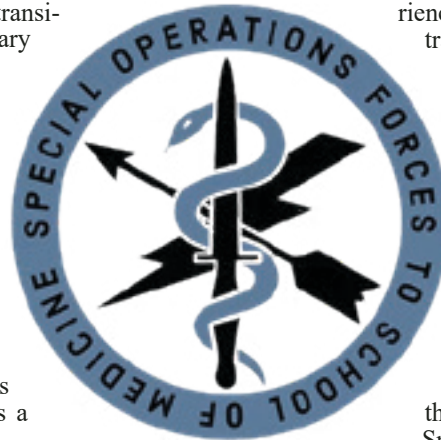
"SOFToSOM Scholars bring exceptional qualities, including leadership, decisiveness, mental resilience, and unwavering commitment to excellence — traits honed through their experiences in special operations forces. These attributes translate seamlessly into the medical field, where maintaining composure in high-pressure situations is invaluable."

The new agreement also ensures guaranteed acceptance for qualified applicants into WCU's one-year Master's Degree in Biomedical Science program. SOFToSOM Scholars who complete this master's program with a grade point average of at least 3.50 will be guaranteed an interview with WCUCOM.

SOFToSOM students can also apply for scholarships to attend an in-person summer course to help them prepare for the MCAT, further enhancing their chances of acceptance.

Special Operations Forces to School of Medicine is the first non-profit organization dedicated to aiding Special Operators in their medical education pursuits. The agreement between WCU and SOFToSOM, effective for three years, establishes a formal affiliation with a goal of supporting the mission of both organizations.

For info, visit www.softosom.org/contact-us.



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