

The Mississippi Monitor



Mississippi Museum of Art purchases
Frank Lloyd Wright-designed property

Photos by G. Douglas Adams Photography

pages 4 and 5



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DMI alumna Johnson receives 3rd GRAMMY nomination

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Acclaimed audio engineer, producer and musician Audri Johnson, a Grenada native, has once again been recognized by The Recording Academy with a GRAMMY nomination for her contributions to Yolanda Adams' powerhouse album, *Sunny Days*. The project, featuring Johnson's engineering, guitar work and programming, is up for Best Gospel Album at the 68th Annual GRAMMY Awards, celebrating its uplifting blend of contemporary gospel, soulful R&B, and timeless faith-driven anthems.

As a 2018 graduate and former employee of the Delta Music Institute (DMI) at Delta State University, Johnson's technical prowess and creative vision have solidified her as a go-to collaborator for genre-defining artists. On *Sunny Days*, released in August 2024, she helped craft the infectious lead single "Church Doors" infusing the album with warmth, clarity, and spiritual depth that resonates deeply with listeners.

This marks Johnson's third GRAMMY nomination, following her 2023 win for Best Roots Gospel Album on The Urban Hymnal—a testament to her rising star in the gospel and roots music



Special to The Mississippi Monitor
2018 Delta Music Institute graduate Audri Johnson has been nominated for a GRAMMY award for the third time. She won the GRAMMY award for Best Roots Gospel Album in 2023.

scenes.

"I'm grateful and I thank God for the opportunity," said Johnson. "I'm going to continue to live and work in my purpose. I'm looking forward to what the future holds!"

Johnson, who performs as Lady Audri, recently dropped her soul-stirring single "Amen" last October, followed by "God Sent" in November. "Amen" is described as a "Gospel R&B track, a powerful declaration of faith and perseverance," and it has already garnered praise for its "soaring vocals and heartfelt lyrics, co-written and performed alongside Bailey Hinton on piano." Fans can stream "Amen" now on all major platforms. "God Sent," which will be featured on the upcoming EP "Becoming a Lady," explores themes of divine purpose and unexpected grace.

The 68th Annual GRAMMY Awards ceremony is scheduled for February 8, 2026, in Los Angeles, broadcast live on CBS and streaming on Paramount+. For more about Johnson's journey, follow @ladyaudri on social media.

The Delta Music Institute at Delta State University was recently named to *Billboard* magazine's list of Top Music Business Schools for the fourth consecutive year.



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Waters named ASA executive director

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The American Subcontractors Association of Mississippi (ASA of MS) recently announced that Joel Waters has been hired as their new Executive Director.

Waters is the former Executive Director of the Mississippi Concrete Association, serving from 2016 to 2025, and has been instrumental in their growth and success. Prior to 2016, Waters was Executive Director of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of MS.

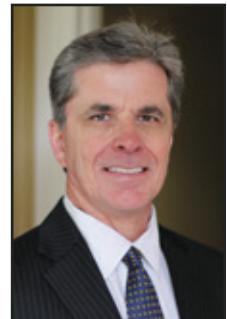
Waters has also previously been an active board member of Build MS and instrumental in the growth of that organization, along with several ASA members on that Board.

Waters brings vast experience in the Mississippi Association community and has strong ties to the Subcontractor sector and knows how to operate in the Association space.

Cody Curry, 2025-2026 ASA of MS Chairman states, "ASA of MS is proud to welcome someone of Joel Waters' work history, character and work ethic as our new Executive Director, to continue the successful growth of ASA of MS well into the future."

Waters is a 1984 graduate of University of Southern Mississippi, where he was a member of the USM baseball team.

Waters and his wife Susan have been married for 43 years and reside in Madison. They have three married children and five grandchildren.



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MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM OF ART PURCHASES FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT-DESIGNED PROPERTY



Photos by G. Douglas Adams Photography

By Susan Marquez

The Mississippi Museum of Art (MMA) has acquired Fountainhead, the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed property in Jackson's Fondren neighborhood, following approval by the Jackson Planning and Zoning Board and City Council.

The residence and its furnishings were designed by the renowned architect in 1948, and completed in 1954 for J. Willis Hughes, who lived in the home with his family until 1980.

The single-family home was next purchased by the late architect Robert Parker Adams, who spent years restoring it. In June, Crescent Sotheby's International Realty listed the property.

On the National Registry of Historic Places since 1980, it was originally named the Hughes House, but is also known as Fountainhead, because it is believed Ayn Rand's novel *The Fountainhead* was based on Wright's life. Also, due to the level changes afforded by the site's sloping topography, Wright extended the bedroom wing into the landscape with a fountain that feeds into a swimming pool that, in turn, feeds into a stream.

Inspired by the success of institutions like Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and its acquisition of the Wright-designed Bachman-Wilson House, MMA leadership is expanding its mission by purchasing this significant architectural landmark and making it available to the public for tours with advanced reservations. The purchase is part of the Museum's strategic goals to embed the Museum in neighborhoods across the city in ways that help accomplish its community-building priorities.

"This strategic acquisition is not only about preserving a culturally and historically important site—it is also a forward-thinking investment in the Museum's vision for the future," Lisa Percy, MMA Board of Trustees Chair, said. "Like Eudora Welty's House and Garden and the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home, Fountainhead will become a must-see desti-

nation and unique experience for residents of and visitors to Jackson."

MMA Laurie Hearin McRee Director Betsy Bradley said that under the Museum's stewardship, Fountainhead will become a dynamic extension of MMA's offerings.

"The site will be open to visitors for the first time, allowing access to this national treasure, inviting visitors to engage deeply with Mississippi's architectural heritage and design legacy," said Bradley. "In addition, Fountainhead will be activated through partnerships that enable it to preserve this important story and extensive archival collections related to it."

Crescent Sotheby's International Realty listing agent Douglas Adams said for most of his adult life, he has been a super fan of Mid-Century Modern Architecture and design, and especially Frank Lloyd Wright.

"When I became a real estate agent, the thought never crossed my mind that I would one day be a small part of such a momentous transition of ownership. Working with Bob Adams, Sherri Mancil, Betsy Bradley, the Mississippi Museum of Art and many others has been a highlight of my real estate career," Adams said. "Not only have we forged a great professional relationship, but we have truly bonded as friends, friendships I will cherish beyond the day of closing. For me, real estate is much more than a transaction; it's a journey where trust is given and friendships are made."

MMA will begin work with architecture and restoration professionals to restore the home and fund a plan to maintain it properly into perpetuity. The property will be maintained and programmed under the Museum's direction, ensuring its preservation and relevance for generations to come. Buses will shuttle visitors to the house from the Museum's main campus in downtown Jackson. MMA will announce the opening date to the public at a future date.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Article courtesy The Magnolia Tribune.



FOUNTAINHEAD

Fountainhead is an example of what Frank Lloyd Wright called Usonian homes—typically designed as a single-level bungalow for middle-income families in the United States. Usonian homes feature native material, flat roofs and cantilevered overhangs, and natural lighting, among other architectural elements. Designed by Wright when he was 81, Fountainhead contains four bedrooms, two full bathrooms and two half bathrooms across 3,558 square feet, including the basement and porches.

The .97-acre property integrates Wright's signature principles of harmony with nature and organic design. The innovative design follows the contours of the landscape, which determined its parallelogram shape for the module nestled into a wooded hillside. The diamond-shape geometry is repeated throughout the house and dictates the placement of the walls and shape of the interior spaces.

With the walls and ceilings made of Heart Tidewater Red Cypress wood, the house was built without stud walls, sheetrock, brick, tile, carpeting or paint. Large windows enable ample natural light and offer views of the wooded landscape. Additional elements include Wright-designed built-in furniture, hardwood floors, wooden shutters, skylights, a carport, terrace, three fireplaces and the original copper-sheeted roof.



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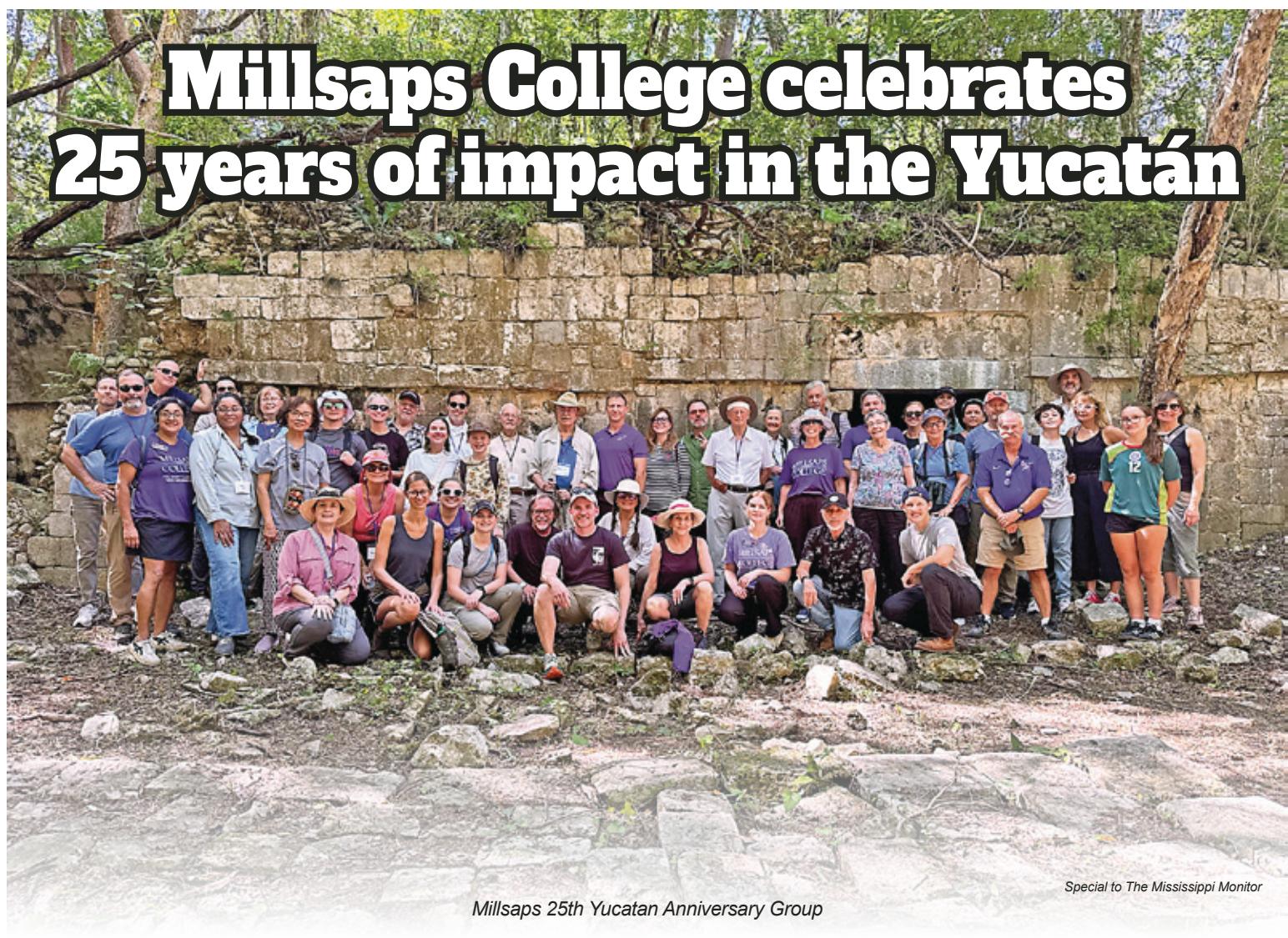
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Millsaps College celebrates 25 years of impact in the Yucatán



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Millsaps 25th Yucatan Anniversary Group

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Millsaps College recently marked the 25th anniversary of its groundbreaking Millsaps Yucatan Program, a transformative initiative that has redefined study abroad through deep cultural immersion, collaborative research and long-term community partnerships in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula.

Founded in 2000, the program began with the question: "Could we build something lasting here?"

Today, school officials say the answer is clear. Over the past quarter-century, more than five hundred Millsaps students, alongside scholars from around the world, have engaged in meaningful work across archaeology, biology, conservation, anthropology and cultural preservation, not as tourists, but as researchers, collaborators and guests.

There are three main facilities that encompass Millsaps' Yucatan program. Casa Millsaps is the living-learning facility in Merida, MPARC is the research facility in Oxkutzcab and Kaxil Kiuic is a 4,500-acre biocultural reserve that serves as a sanctuary for endangered animals and plants and ancient Maya ruins.

Students and faculty have contributed to archaeological discoveries, jaguar conservation and reforestation efforts.

Additionally, Millsaps is heavily embedded and invested in the community, from hiring and training locals, to partnering with various groups to understand and preserve the local culture.

"Throughout the years, we've partnered with the National Science Foundation, National Geographic and the Disney Conservation Fund. But this program is about more than discovery; it's about responsibility," said Dr. George Bey, professor of anthropology and co-founder of the Millsaps Yucatan Program. "We're developing global citizens, students who are broad-minded, culturally aware and deeply engaged with the world around them."



MILLSAPS YUCATÁN

Celebrating 25 Years

During the celebration, the college unveiled a new logo inspired by ancient Maya symbols, each representing a core element of the program:

- **OTOT (house/home):**
Casa Millsaps
- **K'an (germination/growth):**
The spirit of research and discovery
- **Ix (jaguar):**
Wildlife conservation at Kaxil Kiuic
- **K'áak' (precious/valuable):**
The partnerships and knowledge that give meaning to the work

McHale receives inaugural Champion Award for Ascent to Educational Attainment

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The Mississippi Association of Colleges and Universities (MAC) and the Mississippi Economic Council (MEC) have awarded Jim McHale, president and CEO of the Woodward Hines Education Foundation (WHEF), the inaugural Champion Award for Ascent to Educational Attainment.

The new award was created to recognize leaders who demonstrate exceptional commitment, collaboration and measurable impact toward increasing Mississippi's postsecondary attainment. McHale was selected as the first recipient in recognition of his steadfast support for students, institutions, educators and systems partners working to expand educational opportunity across the state.

"Jim's leadership reflects the spirit of partnership that is essential to advancing Mississippi's educational and economic future," said Jean Massey, Executive Director of Ascent to 55%. "The Champion Award was designed to honor those who are moving the state forward in meaningful, measurable ways, and Jim embodies exactly that."



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Pictured (l to r) are Chairman of the Mississippi Education Achievement Council and President of Itawamba Community College Dr. Jay Allen, Executive Director of Ascent to 55% Jean Massey, President and CEO of the Woodward Hines Education Foundation Jim McHale, and 2024 Chair of the Mississippi Association of Colleges and Universities and President of Mississippi College Dr. Blake Thompson.

McHale said, "The convening underscored the momentum we are building together. The next steps, deepening collaboration, enhancing supports for students and scaling proven strategies, are essential to moving Mississippi closer to its future."

The late 2025 convening brought together leaders from higher education, K-12, workforce development, philanthropy, and the business community to review progress on Mississippi's attainment goals and identify coordinated action steps for the future.

Conversations centered on expanding career-aligned pathways, strengthening financial aid access, building stronger on-ramps for adult learners and improving persistence and completion rates across the state's colleges and universities.

McHale noted the award reflects the shared commitment of a wide range of organizations and individuals working toward the Ascent to 55% goal.

"This recognition represents the collective work happening across Mississippi to ensure every Mississippian has the opportunity to earn a credential that leads to a strong career,"

About Ascent to 55%



Ascent to 55% is Mississippi's statewide attainment goal to increase the share of working-age adults with a postsecondary degree, certificate or workforce credential to 55% by 2030 and 60% by 2035. The Mississippi Education Achievement Council endorsed this goal in 2020, and it is supported by organizations across the education, policy and business communities, including Mississippi Economic Council (MEC) and the Woodward Hines Education Foundation (WHEF).

As of January 2025, Mississippi's attainment rate is 48.7%, compared to the national average of 54.9%. With 63% of jobs projected to require postsecondary education by 2030, increasing attainment is critical to Mississippi's workforce readiness and economic competitiveness.

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Mission Vigilant ruck event raises funds for veteran counseling



The Mississippi Monitor

Mission Vigilant – For the 22 provides confidential, anonymous, credentialed counseling services to Mississippi-based veterans, active duty, law enforcement and first responders – as well as their families – at no charge. The organization's goal is to help curb the tide of suicide in the military, law enforcement and first responder communities.

The annual Mission Vigilant Ruck brought the community together for a day full of support and activities, beginning with a 3-mile ruck, a walk or march while carrying a weighted backpack, often used in military training or fitness challenges. Participants usually carry a “ruck sack” with a set amount of weight—sometimes anywhere from 10 to 50 or more pounds—while walking a designated distance. The day also included a bake sale, silent auction, Grand Canyon raffle, kids zone, live music, first responder vehicles, and mental health resources. Attendees enjoyed free food and fun while supporting a great cause. Together, the event raised nearly \$19,000—enough to fund more than 100 counseling sessions



for veterans.

Mission Vigilant – For the 22 got its name from statistics showing that an average of 22 veterans commit suicide each day. It was started after Susan and Eric Cleland lost their Air Force veteran son to veteran suicide in June 2019. The non-profit was formalized in the fall of 2023.

Mission Vigilant – For the 22 currently holds two events each year - a golf tournament on the third Saturday of July at Pearl Municipal Golf Course, and the Ruck/Silent Auction on the third Saturday in September at Lake Caroline Bellevue Clubhouse in Madison.

For more information about the organization's free and confidential services or to volunteer, visit www.MissionVigilant.org, or call or text the phone number on their website. Callers are not required to share a name; the only identifying information that needs to be provided is how the individual who needs assistance serves/served or if the assistance is for a family member. Services are provided across Mississippi.

All photos Special to The Mississippi Monitor



From desks to doorways: The Tangerine Motel and The Hill & Moor



Photo courtesy of The Tangerine Motel/Hill & Moor

By Richelle Putnam

A few years ago, B.L. Moor High School, once the educational cornerstone of the local Black community in and around Crawford, was reimaged and restored as a stylish boutique motel, The Tangerine Motel. According to Brooks Herrington, whose family owns the property, that rebirth was deeply personal.

"I actually grew up just a couple of miles down the road from the old B.L. Moor High School," says Brooks. "I've always loved the Crawford community and the people here. As we purchased the building and began the renovation process, I learned even more about the school's rich history. One of my favorite parts of this journey has been hearing stories and memories from people who stop by and share what B.L. Moor meant to them."

B.L. Moor High School was founded in 1960 by consolidating several smaller African American schools in Pleasant Grove, a rural community just outside Starkville. The school was a K-12 institution that was a vital educational and cultural hub for Black students during the era of segregation. It was where young Jerry Rice played his way to fame.

Due to the reorganization of Oktibbeha County's historically Black schools, the Moor campus went through several transformations. After a 2002 fire, B.L. Moor merged with another rural Black school, Alexander High. The combined campus was renamed East Oktibbeha County High School, which remained in place until 2015, when the Mississippi Legislature mandated the merger of the Oktibbeha County School District with the Starkville School District. This merger formed the Starkville-Oktibbeha Consolidated School District. As part of that consolidation, East Oktibbeha County High School was closed, and Starkville High School absorbed its students.

Regardless of the changes over the decades, community members still referred to the building as "Moor," a testament to the school's lasting identity and legacy.

Saving that legacy happened in 2022, when the Herrington family stepped in.

"Growing up in a close-knit family, the opportunity to build and grow this project alongside my dad and uncle has been incredibly special," says Brooks, who returned to the area after earning her MBA from Mississippi State University. "It's exactly the kind of work I always hoped to do."

Today, two spaces exist on the site:

- The Hill & Moor, a 12,000-square-foot climate-controlled venue, and
- The Tangerine Motel, an 18-room boutique motel.

"We officially opened in February 2023. Since then, this place has



Photo courtesy of The Tangerine Motel/Hill & Moor

The revitalization of B.L. Moor's campus has been about continuity and community in Oktibbeha County.

really become a spot where people celebrate and connect," Brooks explains. "We've designed things so the two complement each other instead of competing. It's honestly the best of both worlds: a place where people can gather and celebrate but also unwind and feel at home."



Photo courtesy of The Tangerine Motel/Hill & Moor

On weekdays, Mississippi State University (MSU) and Golden Triangle groups attend luncheons, meetings and on-site trainings. The weekends are full of energy with weddings, celebrations and people traveling to MSU events. The Tangerine offers a quiet change of pace from the hustle and bustle of Starkville.

"We're just nine miles from campus, but it feels like a little getaway."

For guests who once walked through the halls as students, there is a sense of shared pride.

"Locals already know a bit about the history, so there's a familiarity when they visit," Brooks explains. "Out-of-town guests are seeing it for the first time — they're usually blown away by the transformation and love to chat with us about the story behind it."

What might surprise visitors most is the sheer charm of Crawford itself.

"A lot of people who come to Crawford for the first time are surprised by what they find here. They'll tell us they didn't expect something like The Hill & Moor and The Tangerine to be tucked away in a small town like this. I think it's helped put Crawford on the map in a new way — people see the charm, the community and the potential here. It's been really rewarding to watch visitors leave with a whole new appreciation for this area."

The revitalization of B.L. Moor's campus has been about continuity and community.

"We want this to continue being a spot that brings people together — where families celebrate milestones, students from Mississippi State come to events and travelers discover the charm of Crawford."

Brooks believes B.L. Moor would love seeing the school as a place where people still gather, where pride remains visible in the structure, in the laughter of memorable moments, the joy of exchanged vows, and the celebration of family and friends.

"Our goal from the very beginning was to bring life back into this building while honoring history and the people who were part of it. We didn't want it just to sit here and fade away. We wanted it to have purpose again."

To learn more, visit TheTangerineMotel.com and TheHillAndMoor.com. The Tangerine Motel is located at 1699 Moor High Road in Crawford, Mississippi.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Article courtesy The Magnolia Tribune.

A step back in time at Landrum's Homestead and Village



Photos from Landrum's Homestead & Village

In a world that's always rushing ahead, Landrum's stands quietly as a reminder that sometimes the best way to move forward is to remember where we came from.

By Meredith Biesinger

There's a place tucked among the pines and pecan trees near Laurel where time seems to slow down, and, if you listen closely, you can almost hear the echoes of another century drifting through the trees. Welcome to Landrum's Homestead & Village, a little pocket of Mississippi where the past isn't forgotten—it's still alive and breathing all around you.

The first time I visited Landrum's with my family, I wasn't expecting to feel so connected to it. My boys took off down the dirt path, laughing and hollering, and I just stood for a minute, soaking it all in. The smell of wood smoke, the creak of an old porch swing and the sound of folks greeting one another—it all felt like stepping into a memory I didn't even realize I had. Landrum's is the kind of place that is built with heart, history and a whole lot of grit—and it is a Mississippi gem.

Landrum's isn't your typical museum or roadside stop. It's a living story—built from sawdust, sweat and faith—a place that honors hard work and family ties. It all started when Thomas Landrum and his family decided to build a small replica of a late-1800s settlement on their land.

What began as a way to show their grandkids how folks used to live slowly grew—board by board and nail by nail—into a community treasure.

Before the homestead existed, the Landrums ran a pine-furniture business. Beautiful pieces, all hand-made, a nod to Laurel's roots in the timber industry. But Thomas wanted more. He wanted people to linger, to feel something when they visited. So, he built a cabin.

That first cabin went up during a Christmas promotion, and neighbors stopped by just to see what he was working on. Curiosity turned into excitement, and, before long, one cabin became two, then three—and the homestead began to take on a life of its own.

These days, Landrum's Homestead & Village holds more than 85 buildings and displays, each one built to tell a piece of Mississippi's story. There's a one-room schoolhouse, a blacksmith shop where you can still hear the clang of metal on an anvil, and even a "mystery house" that'll make you question gravity itself. Kids can pan

for gems or hop on a wagon ride, while grandparents smile, remembering a time when a day's work ended with sore hands and a whole heart.

It's the kind of place where generations meet in the middle—where kids learn, parents slow down and grandparents share the stories that connect us all. School groups come from across the state to watch demonstrations of blacksmithing, corn grinding and biscuit-making using an old woodstove. And honestly, each visit feels less like a field trip and more like a life lesson in grit, gratitude and togetherness—the

same things that built Mississippi from the ground up.

If you've never been during Christmas, make it happen. The whole place glows with tiny white lights. You can hear carolers near the chapel, smell cocoa and pine in the air and see families bundled up on wagon rides beneath the stars. The Christmas Candlelight Tour has become a tradition for so many Mississippi families, and it's easy to see why. It's magic—simple, pure and full of heart.

When Thomas Landrum started building the homestead back in 1984, he wasn't chasing fame or fortune. He was creating something lasting—a space where families could laugh, learn and remember what really matters. What began as a simple project to show his grandchildren how their ancestors lived has turned into a living history museum that still carries his vision today. His family keeps it alive—still building, welcoming visitors and still adding new touches every year.

I can still picture my boys running through the cabins, calling for me to come see what they'd found. And, standing there, I thought about all the hands that built this place and all the stories hidden in every nail and board. Landrum's is a reminder that our heritage isn't something tucked away in a book—it is ingrained in all of us.

So next time you're near Laurel, take that little detour. Wander the paths, peek into the old schoolhouse, listen to the wind move through the trees. Because in a world that's always rushing ahead, Landrum's Homestead & Village stands quietly as a reminder that sometimes the best way to move forward is to take a step back and remember where we came from.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Article courtesy The Magnolia Tribune.

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Sojourn 250 flag welcomed to Mississippi



The Mississippi Monitor

An enduring symbol of America made a historic stop in Jackson late last year, as the traveling U.S. flag from the America Waves Flag Sojourn 250 arrived in Mississippi. Community members, state leaders and partners gathered to welcome the flag as part of a nationwide tribute honoring the Stars and Stripes.

Governor Tate Reeves and First Lady Elee Reeves, co-chair of the America250 Mississippi Commission, delivered remarks before members of the Mississippi Air National Guard's 172nd Airlift Wing raised the flag.

Hosted in partnership with the National Sheriffs' Association on behalf of America250, the nonpartisan commission created by Congress to lead the nation's 250th-anniversary commemoration, the event underscored Mississippi's role in the upcoming semi-quicentennial.

America250's mission is to inspire reflection, participation, and pride in the American story ahead of 2026.

A cornerstone of this effort, Flag Sojourn 250, features a single American flag traveling to every U.S. state, territory and overseas military cemetery. Before reaching Mississippi, the flag had already been raised at all twenty-six overseas cemeteries, honored fallen service members abroad, stopped in Guam, and officially began its stateside journey at Arling-

ton National Cemetery on Veterans Day.

"America's journey has been marked by innovation, resilience and a steadfast commitment to freedom," said Gov. Tate Reeves. "I look forward to seeing how America250 Mississippi celebrates our state's role in America's exceptional story."

"I take pride in knowing Mississippi's patriotism for the United States will shine during these commemorative events and programs," said First Lady Elee Reeves. "This coming year is going to be a truly inspiring celebration of America's founding!"

According to America250, the flag is the first of its kind — no other flag in American history has made a unifying journey of this type. After touching all American overseas installations and all fifty states, the flag will conclude its journey with a commemorative event at the White House on July 4, 2026.

America250 is the official national initiative commemorating the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Through grants, civic events and educational programs, it aims to

bring Americans together to explore their shared heritage and the enduring symbol of the Stars and Stripes. The National Flag Foundation, a key partner, organized the Flag Sojourn 250 as a living symbol of unity, remembrance and community.

For more information on A250 MS opportunities, programs and initiatives, visit America250.ms.



Photos Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Pictured (l to r) at the America250 Mississippi flag raising are Governor Tate Reeves, Commissioner Charlotte Seals, Co-chairs Jolynn White and First Lady Elee Reeves, Development Director Nancy Carpenter, and Commissioner Patrick Roberts of America250 Mississippi.



MS State Dept. of Health dedicates EMS memorial

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) dedicated an Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Memorial last fall at its central campus in Jackson. The memorial was erected to honor the EMS personnel killed in the line of duty. MSDH State Health Officer Dr. Dan Edney, Governor Tate Reeves and family members of the fallen were among those in attendance.

"We are so proud to have the memorial on our campus and to have been charged with its stewardship," said Edney. "It is particularly important to recognize the inherent dangers of working in EMS in the field. We don't take the service of our EMS professionals for granted, and we certainly don't take the sacrifice that has been paid by these brave men and women who are on the monument today for granted."

During a particularly emotional part of the ceremony, attendees paused to remember the twenty-three fallen whose names are etched into the stone and steel memorial. The observance also featured a presentation of the EMS Honor Guard and bell ceremony, which was rung as each name was called.

Mississippi has more than 5,000 licensed EMS professionals – including EMTs, paramedics, dispatchers, flight medics and first responders – who serve across all eighty-two counties. Every year, they respond to over half a million emergency calls. Whether it's a car crash on a rural highway, a heart attack in a small town, or a natural disaster that strikes without warning, EMS professionals serve the communities.

"These are the men and women who responded to the call, not knowing what they would face, but knowing that someone in our state needed help," said Reeves. "They served with courage, with compassion and with an unwavering commitment to saving other people's lives. This memorial is more than just stone. It is a symbol of sacrifice. It is a promise that we will never forget."



Photos Special to The Mississippi Monitor



Fallen EMS responders whose names appear on the memorial include:

Philip Allan	2023
James Archer	2005
Trey Auld	2017
Jeff Cartledge (not shown)	1989
Mike Collums	2017
John Mitchell Crow	2023
Jennifer Hesselbein	2019
Jakob Kindt	2025
Andy Lewis	2020
Mack McCann	2020
David Martin	2020
James Douglas Ming	2021
Robbie Pearson	2021
Mary Katie Pipkins	2024
Dustin Pope	2025
Dustin Raines	2020
Kenneth Rainey	2020
Dennis Rushing	2014
Ryan Shields	2021
William Alan Smith	2014
Jim Spruill	2017
Wade Spruill	2021
Cal Wesolowski	2025



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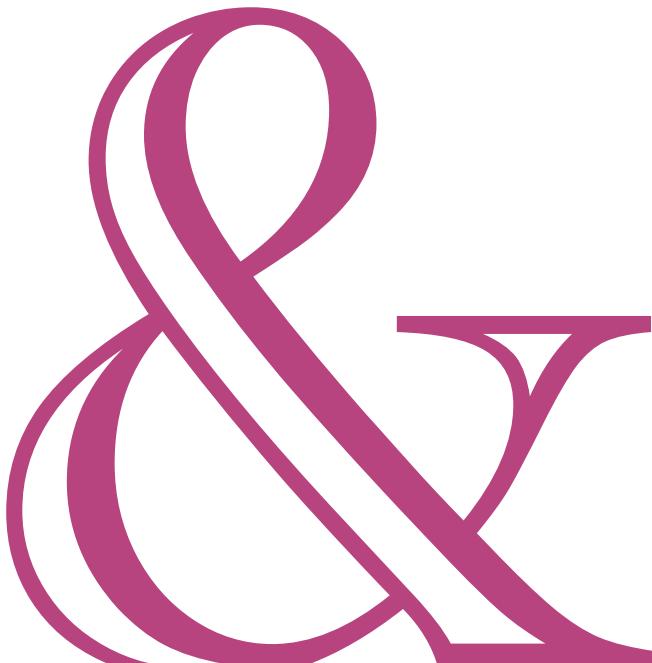
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Hinds CC trainees graduate from AWS upskilling program aimed at meeting MS workforce needs

Hundreds more workers needed to build and maintain state's tech sector infrastructure



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Twenty Hinds Community College trainees graduated from an Amazon Web Services training program last fall after four weeks of learning trade skills - HVAC, electrical, plumbing, fiber optics and more - necessary to build, connect, power and operate information economy infrastructure. The skills they learned are in high demand in Mississippi. Graduates included (l to r), front row: Megan Stewart of Jackson, Joel Mbembe of Jackson, Jaylin Cobbs of Brandon, Larry Sweet of Vicksburg, JaMond Bradley of Jackson, Rose Sanchez of Clinton, Daniel Armon of Jackson, Al'Jordan Cannon of Jackson and Maceo Simmons of Jackson; and back row: Collins Pollock of Madison, Denerick Aldridge of Clinton, Bryson Andrews of Brandon, Tyler Smith of Jackson, Jesse Washington of Jackson, Jasiah Lewis of Jackson, Marlon Brown of Pickens, Hunter Gibson of Clinton, Jaiden Taylor of Jackson, Martin McCurtis of Jackson and Kashaundra Walker of Clinton.

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Hinds Community College graduates of an Amazon Web Services (AWS) upskilling program have a chance to propel into new careers as demand grows for workers to build, connect, power and operate infrastructure for Mississippi's burgeoning information economy.

Last fall, Hinds trainees graduated from AWS' Information Infrastructure Pre-Apprenticeship (I2PA), a paid four-week program. Taught by instructors from Hinds, Build MS and Central Mississippi Planning and Development District (CMPDD), trainees learned skills in HVAC, electrical, plumbing, fiber optics and more.

The skilled trades are "priority occupations" in Mississippi, meaning demand for workers is high. AWS is investing \$10 billion in the state to build two data centers in Madison County, and VAIQ Digital is planning a \$6 billion AI-ready campus in Brandon.

Jackson-area residents, served by Hinds, responded to the training opportunity in droves.

"We had thousands apply for the Hinds program, and we need people to go into these industries," said Nick Lee-Romagnolo, AWS Principal of Economic and Workforce Development. "We hope this is just the beginning of many, many, many more opportunities."

Rose Sanchez, 32, of Clinton, a film company CEO who recently moved to Mississippi from Detroit, and 37-year-old Megan Stewart of Jackson, a college graduate with thirteen years of computer science experience, aggressively pursued the pre-apprenticeship to gain skills they know are critical in today's rapidly evolving technology economy.

"This has taught me I can do other things. It opens the door to other opportunities," Stewart said.

Sanchez wanted to learn hands-on construction skills she can use to build sets for her films. She also plans to pursue career opportunities with AWS or a local contractor. Stewart said the program not only furthered her carpentry and electrical knowledge, but it also convinced her to change careers. One of her goals is to someday assist older people whose homes need repairs.

"Older people who own houses often cannot afford to make necessary repairs," Stewart said. "I hope to give back by helping them improve their lives."

Angela Crain, MS Reconnect and STEP Project Manager for CMPDD,



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Rose Sanchez of Clinton, right, talks with Entergy Systems Operations Specialist Pete Prather about career opportunities during a career fair for Hinds Community College graduates of the Amazon Web Services Information Infrastructure Pre-Apprenticeship program. Sanchez, 32, who owns a film company, plans to continue pursuing a career as an electrician with AWS or a local contractor supporting Mississippi's information sector infrastructure growth.

said the Hinds graduates will serve employers well. Narrowing down the applicants was no small task, but the process worked well, Crain said.

"It's a diverse and talented group - several are continuing their education in electrical, construction, HVAC or fiber, while others are actively seeking employment opportunities. There are truly some outstanding candidates in this cohort," she said.

The graduates represent a tiny fraction of the number of skilled workers needed to support hundreds of new jobs expected from AWS's investment in Mississippi, Lee-Romagnolo said.

"Local companies, they are looking for skilled workers they can hire so they can grow their businesses as they work for AWS," Lee-Romagnolo said. "It's really about economic development, not just workforce development. We won't be able to create enough programs like this for the need."

Jaylin Cobbs, 27, moved to Brandon four months ago from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, to pursue new job opportunities and expand his job skills. Cobbs, an experienced crane operator, was released from an Arkansas correctional facility two years ago. The program graduate decided during incarceration that he would become a productive citizen and blaze a trail for others. It was difficult finding work at first, but he stayed positive.

"I didn't want to fall back into my old ways," said Cobbs, who plans to pursue a certification in HVAC and hopes to one day own his own business. "In prison, I kind of found myself. As I build myself, I can build others."

Also attending the graduation on the Hinds Jackson Campus were Hinds CC President Dr. Stephen Vacik, Accelerate MS Executive Director Dr. Courtney Taylor, CMPDD Director Dr. Robin Parker, Mississippi Development Authority Executive Director Bill Cork, State Workforce Investment Board Chair Patrick Sullivan, AWS Director of Workforce Development and Education Christopher Affranti and AWS VP of Economic Development Roger Wehner.

Wehner said AWS cannot scale its growth without community college partnerships like the one with Hinds. Mississippi has hosted more AWSS pre-apprenticeship programs than any other state at three, he said.

"Without partners like you, we couldn't do it," Wehner said at the graduation. "Never doubt yourself. The community college has led the program and we have stepped back."

Mississippi Poison Control Center offers lifesaving expertise around the clock

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

When a worried parent calls after their toddler swallows a handful of melatonin gummies or an ER physician needs guidance managing a snakebite, the phone rings at the Mississippi Poison Control Center, and a team of poison information specialists is ready to help.

Available twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, the Mississippi Poison Control Center at the University of Mississippi Medical Center serves as the state's lifeline for poison exposures, offering free, expert assistance to both the public and health care providers.

"We get calls about everything from suicide attempts and drug overdoses to spider bites, snake bites and pesticide exposure," said Jenna Davis, managing director of the center. "A lot of people think poisoning equals children, but it really crosses the entire age span—older adults accidentally double-dosing their medication, workers exposed to chemicals on the job or parents calling to make sure it's safe to mix certain medicines."

In 2024, the MPCC handled 17,342 cases, including 15,599 human exposures, 327 animal cases and 1,416 information calls. More than half of those were managed at home under the team's guidance, preventing unnecessary emergency department visits.

The center is staffed primarily by registered nurses and pharmacists certified as Specialists in Poison Information by America's Poison Centers. These clinicians field calls from across Mississippi, aided by a group of emergency medicine specialists, including a physician, a nurse practitioner, a pharmacist and a medical toxicologist.

Because patients are remote and often panicked when they call, critical thinking and communication are essential on the job.

"You have to know what to ask," Davis said. "Our specialists don't have the luxury of seeing the patient in front of them, so every question matters—how much, how long ago, what symptoms they are experiencing. They rely on knowledge and instinct to assess the situation and make recommendations that can save a life."

Nancy O'Rourke, RN, joined the team in 2020 after working in various clinical settings at UMMC. She said her favorite part of the job is helping worried parents through tense moments.

"My favorite thing is when I can ease the mind of an anxious parent," O'Rourke said. "Kids manage to get into all sorts of things, and parents appreciate having someone they can call who will tell them whether it's going to be a problem or not."

O'Rourke said the job's variety keeps it interesting and meaningful.

"We get questions about insect stings, toxic plants, chemicals and medications," she said. "Anyone can call us when they aren't sure what to do next. We'd much rather people call and ask than wait and worry."

Behind the scenes, every call becomes part of a broader effort to improve poison prevention and patient care. The Mississippi Poison Control Center maintains a statewide database that tracks the nature, cause and outcome of every exposure.

"We monitor, educate and advise not just for patient care, but for pub-

lic health," said Dr. Michael Marlin, medical director of the center. "We provide the Mississippi State Department of Health with quarterly reports to assist state epidemiologists. Regionally, we have assisted the CDC in developing incident response protocols for mass casualty events, including radiation exposures."

Near real-time data is shared by all fifty-five poison centers in the country through the National Poison Data System, which allows toxicologists and public health agencies to quickly spot trends or emerging threats.

"We work closely with the Department of Health, the CDC and others on surveillance for things like cannabis, kratom or carbon monoxide," Davis said. "Recently, we were seeing a semi-synthetic version of kratom causing patients to need Narcan, so we helped issue a health alert with the Department of Health."

The center's data have also shed light on a rise in pediatric edible cannabis exposures, primarily related to delta-8 THC products. In 2024, children ages one to five accounted for the largest portion of poison cases, nearly six times that of any other age group.

The MPCC will soon be deploying a cannabis-based call center to assist with medical questions specifically regarding cannabis, Marlin said. It will also develop a registry to track adverse events to better describe the burden of cannabis legalization on the health care system.

Calls are routed through cell towers directly to the Mississippi Poison Control Center, where someone is always available—day or night, holiday or weekend. Some days bring over one hundred calls; others, forty. The pace often mirrors the state emergency department's seasonal and rising trends.

"We see lots of calls about pesticides and pool chemicals in the spring and summer," Davis said. "It's not always necessarily because someone has been exposed. They may just be inquiring about safe use and storage of chemicals."

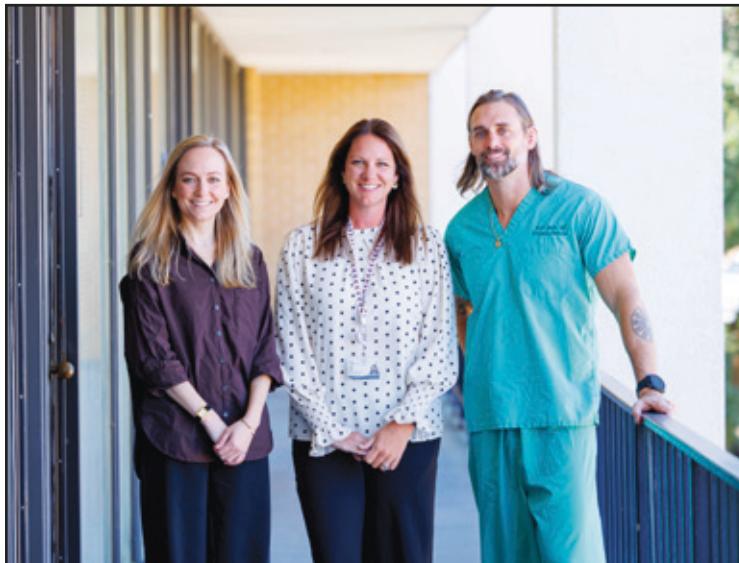
Davis and other directors help oversee daily operations, clinical protocols and toxic surveillance trends. They also provide twenty-four-seven on-call support for the poison specialists and assist with phone coverage when needed.

"Each day is different," said Mallory Pullman, assistant managing director. "I might be monitoring productivity, contributing to strategic planning or analyzing data on exposures across the state. My background as a pharmacist helps me guide the team through complex medication-related cases."

Pullman said the most rewarding part of her work is being part of a highly specialized, interdisciplinary team that is united by a common goal.

"We're all here to safeguard the health of Mississippians. Every call matters, and every person who picks up the phone makes a difference. People don't always realize we're here or that they can call us for free," she said. "But if someone's in doubt—whether it's a child with a mouthful of something they shouldn't have, a medication mix-up or a question about a chemical, they should call. That's what we're here for."

In the case of suspected poisoning or for questions about a possible exposure, call the Mississippi Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222. For all general information, call 601-984-1675.



Mississippi Poison Control Center faculty include (l to r) Assistant Managing Director Mallory Pullman, Managing Director Jenna Davis and Medical Director Dr. Michael Marlin.

Mississippi 4-H holds first state slingshot competition



Photos by Kevin Hudson

4-H'ers at the Clay County tournament hailed from Alcorn, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Clarke, Itawamba, Lowndes, Newton, Noxubee, Tishomingo, Union, Webster, Winston and Yalobusha Counties.

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Mississippi 4-H Shooting Sports is the first in the nation to offer a slingshot discipline and hold a statewide tournament. Late last fall, the Mississippi 4-H Slingshot State Championship hosted forty-nine 4-H'ers at the Jimmy Bryan 4-H Youth Complex in West Point.

The competition featured three components: a written quiz, a trail course and a speed range. The trail course had twenty steel targets, and participants had five opportunities to hit each target from a set distance. The speed range had five targets to be struck in a minute or less.

Already, approximately 3,500 4-H'ers across the state are learning self-discipline and safety skills in Mississippi 4-H Shooting Sports. With about one hundred 4-H'ers in the slingshot program, organizers hope that even more young people between eight and eighteen years old will get involved because of its low cost, user friendliness and relaxed environment.

Reid Nevins, 4-H education specialist with the Mississippi State University Extension Service and coordinator of the state's 4-H Shooting Sports program, developed the 4-H Slingshot program with Jim McAdory, Extension agent in Winston County. Others who have been instrumental in launching the program include Extension Agents Vicki Ganann of Leake County, Rayne Arnold of Scott County and Tina Phillipson of Smith County, as well as 4-H Volunteer Leaders Jeff and Karen Pugh of Newton County and Scott and Danyelle Yeatman of Webster County.

Young people who participate in 4-H Slingshot learn the same safety and sportsmanship principles as those who participate in other 4-H Shooting Sports disciplines, Nevins emphasizes.

In response to other states' expressions of interest, Nevins is working with administrators to make 4-H Slingshot available nationally.

For more information, visit Extension MsState.edu/4-h/4-h-safety-programs/4-h-shooting-sports.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was compiled by Leah Bowers, Mississippi State University Extension Service.



Pictured (l to r) are 4-H Volunteer Leaders Jeff and Karen Pugh of Newton County and Danyelle and Scott Yeatman of Webster County, at the Mississippi 4-H Slingshot State Championship.



Photos by Kevin Hudson



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