

The Mississippi Monitor



Mississippi Main Street celebrates programs, names 2026 statewide award winners

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Groves named 2026 Military Friendly® Veteran of the Year for Mississippi

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Ryan G. Groves, a Clinton resident, retired U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer Three, combat-wounded veteran, and National Park Service leader, has been selected as the 2026 Military Friendly® Veteran of the Year for the State of Mississippi and is now competing for the national title.

Groves served more than twenty-two years in the United States Army before continuing his commitment to public service with the National Park Service. He currently serves at Vicksburg National Military Park, where he has held leadership roles supporting park operations, visitor services, historic preservation and community partnerships.

Beyond his professional responsibilities, Groves remains active in veteran and community organizations. He volunteers as a group leader with Warrior Bonfire Program, helping combat-wounded veterans reconnect with purpose and community. He also serves as an Assistant Scoutmaster for Troop 88, and regularly supports

veteran employment and transition initiatives serving as a mentor for Hire Heroes USA.

"I am honored to represent Mississippi on the national stage," said Groves. "This recognition reflects the many people who have invested in me throughout my military and civilian journey, including my family, fellow veterans, mentors, coworkers and community members."

Groves is currently pursuing a Master of Science degree in Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management at Clemson University, where he is finishing his second year of graduate studies.

The Military Friendly® Veteran of the Year program recognizes veterans who continue to demonstrate leadership, service and positive impact within their communities after military service. Military Friendly® is operated by VIQ TORY, a service-disabled veteran-owned organization dedicated to connecting veterans with opportunities and recognizing excellence across the military community.



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Clintonian Ryan Groves is representing Mississippi in the 2026 Military Friendly® Veteran of the Year program. To vote for him to receive the national title, visit <https://victory.us.launchpad6.com/voy-2026/entry/447>.

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Full Circle: Children's Center alumnus begins speech-language pathology career

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He knew what he wanted to say. But the words didn't come so easily for the young Cade Culpepper—when and if they did.

Until about age three, the Laurel native experienced a language delay that presented a communication challenge for him. Typically, by 12 months of age, children say their first word or words, if no speech or language challenges are present.

Culpepper's family enrolled him at The Children's Center for Communication and Development at The University of Southern Mississippi in the early 2000s, where its dedicated team of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and developmental specialists employed proven, research-based, cross-disciplinary interventions that helped free his voice.

The center is equipped to address the multiple special needs and diagnoses of children enrolled in its programming at no cost to their families. These include challenges related to speech, hearing or language differences, cerebral palsy,



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Down syndrome, autism, rare genetic diagnoses and other conditions related to premature birth.

After graduating from the center, Culpepper thrived academically, finishing high school at Laurel Christian School in 2019, and moved on to study at Jones College as an honors student. He transferred to Southern Miss and its Honors College, choosing the place where his academic journey began. After earning a bachelor's degree, he pursued a master's degree in speech-language pathology at the university, graduating this past May.

"If someone asked me [as a child enrolled at the center] where I went to school, I would tell them I went to Southern Miss," Culpepper fondly recalls. "Was I completely wrong there? At any rate, that eventually came true."

Culpepper says those formative years at the center shaped the passion he'll bring as a speech-language pathologist, which begins in the coming school year at the Laurel Magnet School of the Arts.

Cont. on pg 13



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Mississippi Main Street celebrates programs, names 2026 statewide award winners



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Mississippi Main Street Association team members include (l to r): Anna Boyd Hawks, Director of Community Services; Paige Choat, Office Manager; Jeannie Waller Zieren, Executive Director; Beth Raney, Deputy Director; and Lila Winfield, Marketing and Outreach Specialist.



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The Mississippi Main Street Association (MMSA) recently celebrated downtown revitalization success and announced statewide award winners at its 2026 Annual Awards Luncheon at The South in downtown Jackson.

The Annual Awards Luncheon honors Main Street directors, board members, and volunteers and recognizes the most outstanding downtown revitalization projects and events from designated Main Street communities throughout Mississippi.



"A thriving downtown provides increased tax revenue and economic growth while promoting a community's unique sense of place. We celebrate all of the Main Street award winners and their relentless efforts to build stronger, more resilient towns and cities in Mississippi," said Chance McDavid, MMSA's 2026-27 Board President.

MMSA staff and award sponsors presented the 2026 awards to recipients from designated Main Street communities throughout the state.

This year's award recipients are:

1. Aberdeen Main Street Association
2. Amory Main Street
3. Brandon Main Street Association
4. Cleveland Main Street
5. Downtown Hattiesburg Association
6. Downtown Natchez Alliance
7. Downtown Tupelo Main Street Association
8. Laurel Main Street
9. Main Street Clinton
10. Main Street Columbia, Inc.
11. Main Street Greenville
12. Main Street Greenwood
13. Meridian Main Street
14. Moss Point Main Street Association
15. Nettleton Main Street
16. New Albany Main Street Association
17. Ocean Springs Main Street
18. Okolona Area Chamber/Main Street
19. Philadelphia Main Street Organization
20. Ripley Main Street Association
21. Saltillo Main Street Association
22. Senatobia Main Street Chamber
23. Starkville Main Street Association
24. Tunica Main Street
25. Vicksburg Main Street Program

In addition, the 2026 Nationally Accredited and Affiliate Main Street programs were recognized, including: Aberdeen, Amory, Baldwin, Batesville, Biloxi, Booneville, Cleveland, Clinton, Columbia, Columbus, Corinth, Crystal Springs, Itawamba County, Greenville, Greenwood, Gulfport, Hattiesburg, Hernando, Laurel, Leake County, Louisville, Meridian, Moss Point, Natchez, Nettleton, New Albany, Ocean Springs, Okolona, Pascagoula, Pass Christian, Pearl, Philadelphia, Picayune, Pontotoc, Ripley, Saltillo, Senatobia, Starkville, Tunica, Tupelo, Vicksburg, Water Valley, and West Point. 2026 Affiliate communities include: Byhalia, Indianola, Sumrall, and Woodville.

Brandon and Magee were recognized as new designated Main Street communities this year.

New Network programs for 2026 include Long



All photos special to The Mississippi Monitor

Beach and the Farish Street Historic District.

Main Street directors who have served for 10 years or longer in their communities include: Kay Miller of Biloxi (23 years), Cynthia Sutton of Ocean Springs (19 years), Tara Lytal of Clinton (19 years), Reba Beebe of Picayune (18 years), Kim Hopkins of Vicksburg (18 years), Ann Tackett of Aberdeen (14 years), Barbara Bigelow of Columbus (13 years), Lisa Klutts of West Point (13 years), Tim Moore of Philadelphia (13 years), and Jamie Sowell of Senatobia (10 years).

In 2025, Mississippi Main Street's Designated Communities

generated 361 new businesses, 73 business expansions, 834 new jobs, and 1,526 downtown residential units.

In addition, 370 downtown projects were completed, and 1,526 downtown residential units were added. More than \$209 million was invested by the public/private sector in 2025, and more than 87,023 volunteer hours were recorded.

Since 1993, MMSA has catalyzed more than \$7 billion in public and private re-investment in Main Street communities.

MMSA currently has 49 Designated Main Street communities, three Network communities, and 31 Associate members.

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Programs in physical therapy, nursing to expand in Oxford

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The University of Mississippi Medical Center is bringing physical therapy education to north Mississippi, adding a Doctor of Physical Therapy program in Oxford to meet growing demand for licensed physical therapists across the state.

"Expanding opportunities for our physical therapy students makes our program stronger on both campuses," said Dr. LouAnn Woodward, UMMC vice chancellor for health affairs. "We're addressing the high demand for skilled physical therapists in Mississippi as part of training the next generation of health care professionals in our state."

The School of Health Related Professions will begin offering the physical therapy program in Oxford in May 2028. Students who meet admission criteria will be eligible to apply in summer 2027 for one of 35 slots, adding to the 50 available at the Medical Center in Jackson.

"Serving the health and well-being of Mississippians is central to our mission as the state's flagship university and only academic medical center," said Noel Wilkin, provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Mississippi. "These expansions create meaningful opportunities for students entering high-demand professions while broadening access to skilled care across the state."

The Doctor of Physical Therapy program, along with radiologic sciences and occupational therapy, is among the largest at SHRP. UMMC awarded 49 Doctor of Physical Therapy degrees to graduates at spring 2026 commencement exercises and has maintained a nearly 95% graduation rate over the past two years. Dr. Jacob Daniels, associate professor and 2016 alumnus of the program, will lead the Oxford program.

The expansion builds on UMMC's substantial and accelerating momentum in health care



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Cadence Tiller, Hagen Davis and Kaitlyn Hitt, all students in the Doctor of Physical Therapy program, participate in Acute Care in Physical Therapy II class in the PT lab. The Medical Center is expanding the program to north Mississippi, with classes set for the UM South Oxford Center.



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Camia White, a student in the Doctor of Physical Therapy program, acts as a mock patient during Acute Care in Physical Therapy II class in the PT lab with fellow PT student Drew Horton.

education across north Mississippi. The School of Nursing currently serves approximately 200 students in Oxford through its traditional and accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing programs. The accelerated BSN program will grow from 80 to 90 students in 2027, supported by recently completed classroom and laboratory renovations at the South Oxford

Center. Planning is also underway to significantly expand the traditional BSN program, creating a robust and growing pipeline of highly trained nurses to meet Mississippi's urgent workforce demands and improve access to quality care across Mississippi.

"Our growing clinical partnerships open doors for accessibility to high-level acuity experiences for students to practice safe, direct patient care. Combined, these efforts reflect our commitment to building a stronger pipeline of high quality, well-prepared RNs to meet the workforce needs across Mississippi," said Dr. Tina Martin, dean of the School of Nursing.

The physical therapy program brings a strong track record to Oxford. Nearly 92% of PT students at UMMC the past two years passed licensure the first time, according to data from

the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy. The program has a 98.9% ultimate pass rate the past two years, the data shows.

Oxford students will have access to the same residency opportunities that have grown at the Medical Center, including hands-on sports residency positions that now include time in NFL training rooms and a new orthopaedics residency alongside existing programs in neurology and pediatrics.

"By expanding physical therapy education to Oxford, we are investing in Mississippi's future health care workforce. Students will benefit from the hands-on training and clinical excellence that come from being part of Mississippi's only academic health sciences center while helping address the growing need for physical therapists across our state," said Dr. John Garner, dean of the UMMC School of Health Related Professions.

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Keep Mississippi Beautiful honors Simmons by planting tree for America 250



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Pictured (l to r) are representatives from KMB joining Commissioner Willie Simmons and his team during the commemorative magnolia tree planting: Scott Sones, MDOT District 3; Carlos Jones; Mamie DuBose, Copiah County KMB Director; Mary Carol Patrick, KMB Assistant Director; Sarah Kountouris, KMB Director; Commissioner Willie Simmons; Jack King; and Calola Williams.

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Keep Mississippi Beautiful (KMB) recently planted a magnolia tree in Gallman in honor of Mississippi Transportation Commission Chairman Willie Simmons as part of the nationwide celebration of America 250.

"Keep America Beautiful asked all states to choose a project for America 250, and we chose to plant 250 trees across the state, as we have lost so many due to recent storms," said Sarah Kountouris, KMB Director. "KMB is proud to honor Commissioner Simmons with this magnolia tree planting for all he does to keep our state beautiful."

The tree planting recognizes Simmons' dedication to public

service and his commitment to improving Mississippi's communities and transportation infrastructure. America 250 commemorates the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States.

"I appreciate KMB and all they do to beautify our state," said Simmons. "As our state tree, the magnolia symbolizes strength, beauty and growth—values that we as Mississippi Transportation Commissioners and the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) try to reflect through its commitment to improving our communities and transportation infrastructure."

"As we celebrate America's 250th birthday, let us reflect on how far we've come, appreciate the liberty, and look forward with optimism to the next chapter of our nation's journey," Simmons added.

Tollison named interim president at the Mississippi University for Women

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) Board of Trustees has named Dr. Scott Tollison as the interim president of the Mississippi University for Women (MUW). Tollison most recently served as provost and executive vice president of academic affairs at MUW. He assumed the role of interim president on July 1, 2026.

"The Board of Trustees has full confidence in Dr. Tollison and appreciates his acceptance of this responsibility," said Gee Ogle-tree, president of the IHL Board of Trustees. "We look forward to working with him as he helps the university maintain its reputation for academic excellence, its commitment to its students and role as a key regional university in the state's public university system."

Tollison served as interim provost for one year before he was officially approved as provost in 2019. He was dean of the College of Business and Professional Studies at MUW from 2012-2018. A native of West Point, Mississippi, Tollison earned his undergraduate and master's degree in business information systems at Mississippi State University. He earned his doctorate at MSU in 2009.

"I am grateful to the Board of Trustees for their confidence, and I am excited about the opportunity to serve MUW in this important role," Tollison said.

Former MUW President Nora Miller announced her retirement in January. She served as president until June 30, 2026. The Board of Trustees has not yet announced next steps related to the search for a new president.



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Dr. Scott Tollison

Mississippi wins national awards for economic development accomplishments

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

The state of Mississippi has been honored with a Gold Shovel Award by *Area Development* magazine. The national award honors Mississippi's historic accomplishments in economic development throughout 2025. Additionally, *Area Development* named the \$210 million Amazon project in Marshall County as one of its Non-Manufacturing Projects of the Year.

AREADEVELOPMENT

"This national recognition is further proof that the Mississippi Momentum is going strong," said Governor Tate Reeves. "The Gold Shovel Award represents billions of dollars in new private capital investment and thousands of new high-paying jobs created in communities throughout our state. Our conservative policies and world-class workforce continue to deliver results. It's another great win for Mississippi and her people."

Submissions are evaluated on "job creation, capital investment, industry diversity and alignment with each state's broader economic development strategy." Based on the projects submitted by the Mississippi Development Authority, Mississippi won a Gold Shovel Award in the "under 3 million population" category.

Mississippi's Gold Shovel performance in 2026 is anchored by a surge of warehousing, advanced manufacturing, and energy infrastructure investment that reflects the state's growing competitiveness in logistics-driven industries.

Amazon leads the way with a \$210 million distribution and warehousing operation in Marshall County, bringing 1,000 jobs and reinforcing Mississippi's position along major freight corridors.

Howard Industries follows with \$237 million and 450 jobs in electrical transformer manufacturing across Clark, Jones and Simpson Counties — a critical infrastructure play given the national push to modernize the power grid. Modine adds 450 jobs in data center cooling equipment manufacturing in Grenada County, bringing \$38 million in investment and connecting Mississippi to the booming data center supply chain.

The project list broadens into agriculture, industrial machinery and clean energy. Amick Farms brings 192 jobs to Laurel, ABB adds 122 positions and \$40 million in industrial machinery to Senatobia, and Southeastern Timber Products invests \$123 million in Ackerman for lumber production. TerraForge Biocarbon Solutions makes a \$136 million metals and clean energy play in Magnolia, and ROCKWOOL contributes \$105 million in consumer products to Marshall County. BWC Terminals rounds out the story with \$316 million in transportation infrastructure in Pascagoula.

"Economic development is results-based, and this Gold Shovel Award is a clear indicator of the results Mississippi is delivering," said Mississippi Development Authority Executive Director Bill Cork. "We compete with every state in the nation for investment and jobs, and companies continue to choose us because they know projects can move here. Our state has become one of the best for business growth and investment, and we are proud to once again be recognized for our dedication to bringing new opportunities to all Mississippians."

Area Development is a leading economic development publication covering site selection and facility planning. For more information about the award, visit AreaDevelopment.com.

Mississippi's top job creation and/or investment projects contributing to winning a Gold Shovel Award include:

Mississippi

Gold Shovel Award for state with population under 3 million

Company Name	City	Jobs Created	Investment Amount	Industry
Amazon *	Marshall County	1,000	\$210 Million	Warehousing and Distribution
Howard Industries	Clark, Jones, and Simpson Counties	450	\$237 Million	Electrical Transformer Manufacturing
Modine	Grenada County	450	\$38 Million	Data Center Cooling Equipment Manufacturing
Yancey Engineered Solutions	Batesville	250	\$21 Million	Power Generation Packaging
Amick Farms	Laurel	192	\$75 Million	Agriculture
ABB	Senatobia	122	\$40 Million	Industrial machinery
Southeastern Timber Products	Ackerman	40	\$123 Million	Lumber products
TerraForge Biocarbon Solutions	Magnolia	36	\$136 Million	Metals and Mining; Clean Energy
ROCKWOOL	Marshall County	34	\$105 Million	Consumer Products
BWC Terminals	Pascagoula	25	\$316 Million	Transportation
Jabil	Marshall County	24	\$70 Million	Healthcare and Medical Devices
Ergon Refining	Vicksburg	20	\$400 Million	Automotive

* denotes Non-Manufacturing Project of the Year



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Rare, fully preserved cast iron casket recovered from Asylum Hill excavation

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Archaeologists excavating remains from the site of the Asylum Hill Cemetery on the University of Mississippi Medical Center campus in Jackson have unearthed a rare, fully preserved cast iron casket dating back to the late 1800s.

The rusted casket, which weighed nearly 200 pounds and was sealed with 24 heavily corroded bolts, was discovered in March by a six-member excavation team near the ridge of the cemetery. Researchers say the find is unlike anything uncovered since the excavation project began.

Dr. Jennifer Mack, lead bioarcheologist, said cast iron caskets were uncommon in institutional cemeteries because of their cost.

"We have seen in the patient records where someone has said, 'Well, I can't get my loved one, but we are going to wire this much money for the purchase of a casket,'" said Mack. "It wasn't uncommon for people to send the money for a burial here, but the cast iron casket is just a particularly pricey example of that."

According to Mack, it is possible the individual's family purchased the casket with plans to reclaim their loved one, but those plans may have changed.

Historical records indicate that a cast iron casket in 1865 cost approximately \$44.11 wholesale, including shipping and a protective shipping box. In contrast, a plain wooden coffin during the same period cost about \$2.50.

Mack said it took the team more than two hours to open the casket using a drill. Once opened, researchers discovered cracks in the



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Rare cast iron casket discovered on the ridge of Asylum Hill excavation site.



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

An excavation team of six pull a rare cast iron casket from the grounds of the former Asylum Hill site.

lid and sides and a damaged glass viewing pane beneath its metal cover. The damage likely accelerated the deterioration of the remains inside.

Researchers believe the individual was a woman of European ancestry between the ages of 30 and 55 at the time of her death. Mack estimated the woman stood between 4 feet, 9 inches and just over 5 feet tall.

The only personal item recovered from the casket was a brass ring with a red glass center "gem." Researchers also found the woman had lost all of her teeth before her death, making identification more difficult.

Mack said the excavation crew worked closely with UMMC's Department of Environmental Health and Safety, the biological safety officer, the chemical safety officer and Employee Occupational Health Services to ensure the safety of both the team and the public throughout the recovery process.

The Department of Advanced Biomedical Education provided expertise, protective equipment and secure storage for the remains until testing confirmed there was no biohazard risk. The Center for Comparative Research remained on standby to provide additional analysis space, if needed, while the Department of Biomedical Materials Science is currently analyzing samples to determine whether embalming chemicals are present.

According to biological safety officer Anthony Walters, the opening of the cast iron casket was a carefully coordinated effort. While there was initial hesitancy due to concerns about its

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Cont. from pg 4

Full Circle: Children's Center alumnus begins speech-language pathology career

"I think there's something very poetic about needing speech-language intervention growing up, having that therapy open doors to new possibilities, and then using those same possibilities to go back into the same field that helped me, that shaped me so much with some of the same people that helped me so early on in my life," he said.

Culpepper is a firm believer in the right of every child to education, noting that "language is such a fundamental part of that."

"Education wouldn't be possible without the base of language in which learning occurs," he said. "Verbal communication and nonverbal communication sit at the very core of learning, so the role of the speech-language pathologist is crucial to a child's overall trajectory in the case of speech or language concerns."

Culpepper intends to be as staunch an advocate for those with speech-language challenges as his family, friends, therapists and teachers were for him.

"Learning needs to be tailored to the needs of the individual student to maximize success," he explained. "Whichever methods work best for the student are those that need to be implemented."

"For example, I remember working with a student and discovering that hands-on play with a mouth model allowed the student to have a better idea of the motor movement needed for the sound. Over the next several sessions, the sound just came alive."

"A supportive atmosphere and repeating the methods that work can go such a long way," Culpepper continued. "Also, collaboration is an important part of the therapy experience. The Children's Center hits the nail on the head with that, engaging various professionals to work with the children in the same room: SLPs, physical therapists, occupational therapists and assistants, among others. I wish it were feasible for other educational settings to get that same level of consistent collaboration."

Children's Center Director Sarah Rouse Myers said, "Cade brings such a passionate drive to his pursuit of helping children. He understands what it's like to be unable to participate fully in life due to communication issues, and he is empathetic and incredibly bright. He brings a resiliency to his work that's needed as an SLP, supporting families and children with additional needs."

Ladell Kraft, a retired Children's Center staff member, concurs with Myers. Kraft provided speech-language therapy and instructional services to preschoolers in a group therapy setting at the center during Culpepper's time there, as well as clinical supervision of graduate students.

"It's such a pleasure to bear witness to Cade's graduation from Southern Miss and his entry into his chosen profession of speech pathology," Kraft said. "He'll bring unique experiences and insights into his practice."

From that young boy learning to unlock his own voice to the man who hopes to help others find theirs, Culpepper credits Southern Miss for shaping who he is today.

"In a way, I experienced Southern Miss and graduated from it three times, including at the center," he further reflected. "That, along with the journey itself, is a story I couldn't have written on my own."

For more information about The Children's Center for Communication and Development at Southern Miss, visit bit.ly/4wPfn7G.

Camp Shelby expands UAS training capabilities with swarm threat

Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center has expanded training opportunities at its Unmanned Aircraft Systems Flight Center, providing units with enhanced capabilities to train against friendly and opposing force unmanned aircraft systems, including swarm-enabled threats, in a contested airspace environment.

The expanded capability is now an enduring training asset available to units conducting exercises at Camp Shelby. The addition of opposing force UAS, particularly swarm-based scenarios, increases training realism and prepares service members to respond to rapidly evolving threats on the modern battlefield.

With the expanded capability, units and partner organizations training at Camp Shelby can integrate realistic UAS and counter-UAS scenarios that require disciplined reporting, layered defense and coordinated responses. The training environment allows commanders to identify gaps in tactics, techniques and procedures before deployment or major training rotations.

In partnership with the Combat Capabilities Development Command's Threat Systems Management Office, Aerial Threat Systems Branch, the Camp Shelby UAS Flight Center has added the T-Swarm TS-M800, a military-grade threat simulation platform capable of controlling approximately 100 unmanned systems from a single ground control station. The system mirrors capabilities currently employed at Army Combat Training Centers and counter-UAS training facilities.

The T-Swarm TS-M800 replicates enemy intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance drones, supports call-for-fire training scenarios and simulates munition and payload effects designed to drive realistic reactions and decision-making by training audiences.

The UAS Flight Center, working alongside Camp Shelby's Emerging Threat Replication Program, also maintains additional systems capable of replicating one-way attack drones and first-person-view-style threats. These systems and associated trainers are available to support maneuver and counter-UAS training at little or no additional cost to training units.

Recognized as a Multi-Domain Center of Excellence, Camp Shelby provides scalable training designed to support commander training objectives across joint all-domain operations. Units can tailor training complexity based on readiness levels, mission requirements and available training time while minimizing additional costs.

"Camp Shelby provides training venues and capabilities for units from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, as well as federal law enforcement partners," said U.S. Army Col. Ashley Sullivan, Camp Shelby base commander. "The addition of the T-Swarm capability allows units training at the installation to experience the same threat replication capabilities found at Army Combat Training Centers at no additional cost, providing commanders a valuable tool to prepare their formations for realistic threat-based scenarios."

The expanded capabilities support a wide range of training objectives, from individual and small-unit tasks to staff integration and mission rehearsal exercises. Training can be tailored to prepare units for operational environments where unmanned systems are persistent, adaptive and increasingly accessible to adversaries.

Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center continues to provide scalable, mission-relevant training that supports operational readiness for active-duty, National Guard and Reserve forces, as well as federal, state and local interagency partners. By integrating advanced unmanned aircraft systems and threat replication capabilities into its training environment, the installation strengthens its role as a premier training location for forces preparing to operate in complex and contested conditions.

The initiative supports preparation for future operating environments by modernizing training range capabilities and integrating force-on-force drone warfare into realistic combat training scenarios, ensuring units train as they expect to fight.



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Unmanned aircraft systems configured for swarm operations are staged on a flight line at the Camp Shelby UAS Flight Center at Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center.



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Multiple unmanned aircraft systems fly during a swarm threat replication training event at the Camp Shelby UAS Flight Center. The capability allows training audiences to experience realistic unmanned aircraft system threats and supports counter-UAS readiness across a variety of operational scenarios.



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

A soldier observes an unmanned aircraft system during training at the Camp Shelby UAS Flight Center. Camp Shelby's expanded UAS training capabilities include opposing force aircraft and swarm threat replication designed to prepare units for emerging battlefield threats and contested airspace operations.

Enjoy one last tasty recipe with summer's juicy tomatoes

The Mississippi Monitor

As the summer begins winding to a slow close, many will mourn the waning of the bounty of freshly grown tomatoes that had become a summer kitchen staple. Before the summer crop is gone, give this recipe a try. It can be used as an appetizer or even a main dish or a light lunch. It takes a little effort and preparation (the dough needs to chill about an hour), but the tender crust and flavor-filled center is worth it.



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Savory Tomato Pie

Ingredients:

For the crust:

- 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1/2 cup sour cream

For the pie:

- 4 medium tomatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2" thick slices (about 1 1/2 lb)
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 3/4 cup mayonnaise (not reduced fat)
- 1 can crab meat, drained (not imitation) (approx. 1/2 cup)
- 3 green onions, chopped
- 2 Tblsp fresh basil, chopped
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese (not canned)
- 1 1/2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese

Preparation:

For the crust:

1. Stir together flour, baking powder and salt.
2. Cut shortening into flour mixture with a pastry blender or knife until mixture resembles small peas.
3. Add sour cream; stir with a fork or mix with hands until combined into a dough.
4. Shape dough into a flat disk.
5. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill one to twenty-four hours.

For the pie:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Place tomatoes in a single layer on paper towels. Sprinkle with salt and let stand for 20 minutes, then pat dry with paper towels.
3. Stir together mayonnaise, crab meat, green onions, basil and cheese, reserving 1/4 cup of the mozzarella cheese for later.
4. Roll sour cream dough into a large circle on a lightly floured surface. Put into a 9" pie plate, crimping edges.
5. Bake dough for 10 to 12 minutes until lightly brown. Remove from oven.
6. Sprinkle the remaining 1/4 cup of mozzarella cheese on top of the crust.
7. Arrange tomato slices over the cheese on the crust.
8. Spread mayonnaise mixture over tomatoes.
9. Bake at 350 degrees for 34 to 37 minutes, or until lightly browned on top.
10. Let cool at least five minutes before serving.

MHA Board of Governors elects John Anderson as Chairman, Jessica Embry named Chair-Elect



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

John Anderson



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Jessica Embry

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The Mississippi Hospital Association ("MHA") Board of Governors has elected John Anderson, administrator and chief executive officer ("CEO") of Baptist Anderson Regional Medical Center in Meridian, as its 2026-27 Chairman of the Board. Anderson's term began July 1. He succeeds Jim Hobson, CEO of Magnolia Regional Health Center in Corinth, who has served as Chairman since July 1, 2025.

The Board also elected Jessica Embry, CEO of Yalobusha General Hospital and Nursing Home in Water Valley, as Chair-Elect. Embry will be the first woman to assume the role since 1983, when Sister Josephine Therese Uhl of St. Dominic Health Services served as Chair. Embry's term begins July 1, 2027.

"Mississippi's hospitals face unique challenges and tremendous opportunities to improve health outcomes for our communities," Anderson said. "I look forward to continuing to work with my fellow board members, MHA staff, policymakers and others across the state to champion sustainable rural and community health care, support innovative care delivery and ensure every Mississippian has access to high-quality services close to home."

Anderson is responsible for overall operational management of Baptist Anderson Regional Medical Center, Baptist Anderson Regional Medical Center-South, Baptist Cancer Center-Anderson, and a network of primary and specialty clinics. He began his career at Baptist Anderson in 1990 as an assistant administrator, advancing to Vice President of Operations in 1997 and administrator of Baptist Anderson South before becoming CEO in 2015. His key achievements include leading the organization through the COVID-19 pandemic and overseeing the 2024 merger with Baptist Memorial Health Care.

Anderson holds a Bachelor of Science from the University of Mississippi and a Master of Science in Health Administration from The University of Alabama at Birmingham. He is a past fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives and currently serves on the MHA Board of Governors and the MHA Committee on Legislation.

"I am truly honored and excited to serve as Chair-Elect," Embry said. "Drawing on my experience in rural hospital leadership, I look forward to supporting our members in addressing workforce needs, enhancing quality and safety, and championing policies that ensure strong, sustainable healthcare services for all Mississippi communities."

Embry is an experienced healthcare executive and registered nurse with more than 20 years of leadership in hospital administration, operations management, quality assurance, risk management and clinical education.

She earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Mississippi Medical Center and has held key roles at Yalobusha General, including Chief Operations Officer and Quality Assurance/Risk Manager, prior to her appointment as CEO in 2020.

Richard Roberson, MHA President and CEO, praised the selections.

"The election of John Anderson as Chairman and Jessica Embry as Chair-Elect reflects the depth of talent and dedication within Mississippi's hospital community," Roberson said. "We also want to thank Jim Hobson for his outstanding service as Chairman over the past year. As MHA approaches its 100th year, we remain an organization which puts service first—just like the hospitals and hospital employees we represent. John and Jessica's proven leadership will be instrumental as we continue advocating for policies that sustain and strengthen healthcare access across our state."

For more information about MHA, visit www.mhanet.org.

Tasting creativity: Kyla Jacobs' Olive Oils and Vinegars



All photos special to The Mississippi Monitor

By Cara Pridemore

More than 1,000 miles apart, two locations of Olive Oils and Vinegars exist. Opened in December 2013, Kyla Jacobs manages the second location in Pass Christian. Inspired by the success of her family's original store in Northfield, Minnesota, Jacobs saw an opportunity to bring the unique concept to the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

"There wasn't anything like that, at least on the Mississippi Gulf Coast," she said. "I thought, 'How cool would that be to bring something like this to our community, who enjoys cooking, enjoys entertaining, and enjoys drinks.'"

In 2012, Jacobs' father and stepmother opened the first Olive Oils and Vinegars location while Jacobs was enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi. After graduating with a degree in interdisciplinary studies and an emphasis in nonprofit, she decided that opening a second location in Pass Christian, a city she'd lived in when she was younger, was the next best step in growing the business. Thirteen years later, she says she still enjoys the sales aspect just as much as the culinary side of her work.

Working in retail during college taught Jacobs the importance of customer service and satisfaction. While designing Pass Christian Olive Oils and Vinegars, she wanted customers to walk directly into a tasting room, where they can sample a variety of oils and vinegars before making a purchase.

"It's more of an experience, rather than just coming in and purchasing a bottle off a shelf," Jacobs said.

For Jacobs, developing relationships with customers is crucial in helping them find their ideal bottle of olive oil, vinegar, or pairing, which is a mix of the two in the form of a vinaigrette.

Inside the store, more than seventy different olive oils and vinegars are stored in stainless steel "fusties," or tanks, before being transferred into one of four bottle sizes. Throughout the process, customers can sample products and create combinations that fit their preferences.

"Instead of just hoping that it will taste good, you'll know if it tastes good," Jacobs said.

She extends this personalized approach throughout the business. From her recycled bottle program to the recipes available online, Jacobs seeks to create an experience that goes beyond a simple transaction.

Strictly regulating sourcing ensures the premium quality of her oils and vinegars, as Jacobs moves between the Southern and the Northern hemispheres, depending on seasons and harvests. In addition, all her products come from small, family-owned farms and businesses.

The personal relationships Jacobs has cultivated with her customers, employees and suppliers has created a constant

flow of recipes and new ideas, from personal experimentation to social media trends.

"Cooking is gathering, socializing and experimenting," she said. "In my eyes, there is no wrong way."

Among the four different categories of oils and vinegars – infused oils, fused oils, extra virgin olive oils, and balsamic vinegar – customer favorites have emerged. Garlic, butter, and Tuscan herb remain some of the most popular infused oils.

"Tuscan herb is definitely a classic bread dipper, but you can do so much with it between vinaigrettes, marinades, roasting vegetables, using it in rice dishes, pasta dishes," Jacobs said. "It is very versatile."

For fused oils, the flavors change according to the seasons, although lemon olive oil remains a popular choice. When choosing an extra virgin olive oil, customers typically select mild, medium or robust varieties, depending on how they plan to use them. Traditional eighteen-year-aged red balsamic is the most popular vinegar, while fruit flavors are common during the summer and richer maple flavors in the winter.

"It's all based on season and what's available as far as fruits and vegetables," Jacobs said. "It changes constantly."

This variety in products reflects the variety of Jacobs' customers. Throughout the year, the store welcomes local residents, snowbirds, summer visitors and attendees of community events. She enjoys connecting with each new crowd and forming a following within various events.

"We have created a clientele within the 'Cruisin the Coast' community," Jacobs said. "It's really a beautiful thing; we get really excited to see them. They come in, they stock up, and we've developed a relationship with them."

Looking ahead, Jacobs hopes to continue expanding both the products and experiences her store offers. She plans to add more kitchenware, as well as in-store experiences, such as private tastings and cooking classes.

"We're always trying to think of new ways to keep it interesting, always researching product knowledge – and when you talk to customers, you hear about new things," Jacobs said. "My biggest thing is always growing, always learning."

Throughout the history of her business, Jacobs has taken ideas and transformed them into something tangible. She brought her family's business model from Minnesota to the Mississippi Gulf Coast, evolved to meet customers' needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, provides shipping to anywhere in the U.S., and continues to adapt to seasonal produce changes. She says she hopes her customers leave with that same sense of creativity and the confidence to take an idea, make it their own and share it with others.






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MPB announces new original documentary on Blues legend Bobby Rush



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Mississippi Public Broadcasting will premiere its new original documentary, *King of the Chitlin' Circuit*, on broadcast television August 10, 2026, celebrating the life and legacy of Grammy Award-winning Mississippi blues artist Bobby Rush.

For more than seven decades, Rush has traveled the country performing blues music, building a career that began in Delta juke joints and expanded to stages around the world. Told through Rush's own reflections, *King of the Chitlin' Circuit* explores a life shaped by music, perseverance and a deep connection to Mississippi's blues heritage.

"At MPB, we believe it is our responsibility to preserve and share the stories that define Mississippi," said the film's producer and MPB Chief Content Officer, Taiwo Gaynor. "We are the keepers of Mississippi's stories, and Bobby Rush's story is an important part of our state's cultural history. Hearing Bobby tell his story in his own words and reflect on his remarkable journey has been an experience creating this film that I will never forget."

King of the Chitlin' Circuit continues MPB's commitment to documenting the people, places and cultural traditions that have shaped Mississippi and influenced audiences far beyond its borders.

The documentary was directed by filmmaker Al Warren and produced by Taiwo Gaynor, director of *Everlasting: Life and Legacy of Medgar Evers*.

Early availability on MPB Passport members begins July 30. The documentary will premiere on MPB Television August 10 at 8 p.m. Visit mpbonline.org for more information.



Cont. from pg 12

Rare, fully preserved cast iron casket recovered from Asylum Hill excavation

contents, multiple safety procedures were in place prior to opening. Walters noted that, despite those concerns, there was also a sense of anticipation, and the team worked quickly to ensure preservation efforts were maintained.

"From a biological safety standpoint, we were able to learn a lot, because it was a unique situation, so we were able to see this is what we are capable of, and maybe these are some areas we can adjust a little bit," said Walters. "I think this gives us a much broader view of the historical health of Mississippi and a better understanding of what the Asylum did and who was here, because there are a lot of misconceptions."

While excavation crews have uncovered remains from wooden caskets throughout the project, this marks the first cast iron casket recovered from the site.

The team is awaiting results of X-ray imaging on the remains in hopes of learning more about the woman's possible cause of death. Researchers estimate between 5,000 and 7,000 individuals are buried within the cemetery's 12-and-a-half-acre site. Mack said the estimate is based on a 1948 engineering plan and calculations of burial density across the property. At least 1,065 bodies have been exhumed.



Special to The Mississippi Monitor

Lead bioarchaeologist Mack and machine operator Johnny Bass spent hours using a drill to open the cast iron casket.

How I earned membership into the 50-50-7 Exclusive Travel Club

By Guest Columnist Charles L. Gentry

It was a lifelong dream finally accomplished!! I did it!! I mastered a goal established as a young boy growing up on my father's rural farm in Noxapater, Mississippi. I am honored to share my reflections of a dream that was not deferred.

In 1959, at the age of nine years old, Rev. Dock Jones, a local preacher in the Hathorn Community in Noxapater, told me that he had traveled to all fifty states in the United States. I was so impressed in meeting someone who had traveled so far outside of Winston County. I thought to myself, that's what I want to do someday.

I kept that thought in the back of my mind throughout elementary school, high school and even college. While working in the fields on my father's farm, airplanes would fly over, and I would fantasize about flying to faraway places. During those formative years in Noxapater, I dreamed of visiting California, New York, London, Paris and Rome.

While in high school, I had the opportunity to visit Tuskegee, Alabama, when my brother, Lepolian, received his Master's degree from Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University). The next year, my sister, Ruth, received her Master's degree from the University of Oklahoma. I traveled on a Greyhound Bus from Noxapater through Tennessee to Norman, Oklahoma to attend Ruth's graduation.

In 1966, I enrolled at Jackson State College (now Jackson State University) in Jackson, Mississippi, at the age of sixteen. I had numerous opportunities to meet students from different states and various countries. I thoroughly enjoyed talking with students from other states and especially foreign students regarding their countries, culture, traditions and family life.

After my graduation from Jackson State University in 1970, I started my professional career with the General Electric (GE) Company in 1971 in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. I had the opportunity to visit all of the New England states, which included Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

I traveled to my first country outside of the United States, Canada, in 1975 during my four years in Pittsfield. I was employed by

GE for twenty years in Massachusetts, Virginia, Mississippi and two locations in Florida. When not working, I welcomed the opportunity to tour adjacent states and several international countries. In 1985, I toured the Bahamas, Jamaica and Mexico; in 1987, I toured England, France, Italy, Vatican City and Switzerland; and, in 1989, I toured Austria, Germany and Liechtenstein.

By 2011, I had visited forty-two states, with only eight states remaining. My wife, LaVerne, joined my bandwagon for traveling.

During the summer of 2012, we flew to Denver, Colorado, rented a car and toured those remaining eight states over a period of sixteen days. We visited Kansas, Utah, Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin. We turned in the rental car in Chicago and flew home to Mississippi. I reflected back to Rev. Jones!! What would the great traveler think of me now?

After visiting all fifty states in 2012, we got the notion to visit fifty countries and all seven continents. In 2015, we toured the Holy Land and Jordan; in 2016, we toured South Africa; in 2017, we toured Australia, New Zealand and Fiji; in 2018, we toured Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand and Japan; in 2019, we toured Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, England, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Russia, Finland and Sweden; in 2020, we toured United Arab Emirates and Oman; in 2023, we took an expedition cruise to Antarctica; in 2025, we toured Cyprus, Egypt, Greece and Turkey; and, in 2026, we toured Antigua, Aruba, Barbados, Bonaire, British Virgin Islands, Curacao, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Saint Kitts-Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Maarten and Trinidad-Tobago.

On November 22, 2018, we crossed the International Date Line on a 17.5 hours nonstop flight from San Francisco, California, to Singapore. On March 8, 2019, we cruised Cape Horn, which is located at the southernmost tip of South America. On March 9, 2020, we crossed the equator in the Indian Ocean on a cruise from Dubai, UAE, to Cape Town, South Africa.

On March 20, 2026, I obtained and was awarded membership into the 50-50-7 (all 50 states, 50 countries, and all 7 continents) Exclusive Travel Club. All of my travel dreams have come to fruition.



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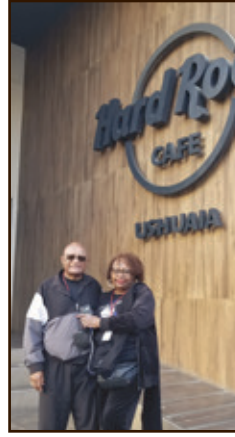
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I have been blessed beyond measure. To God be the Glory.

My ultimate travel dreams finally became a reality!! At this point, we are fully committed to continue exploring and traveling the globe. LaVerne and I have two international adventures planned in June and October of this year and another international adventure planned in January 2027.

International travels have completely reshaped our perspectives

on the global community. Global travels broaden the horizon, deepen an understanding of international issues and provide memories that will last a lifetime.

We pray that our traveling experiences will inspire, empower and motivate others to travel. Our challenge is extended to those who are young and the not so young. Get on board, join our travel bandwagon. DREAM, PLAN and PACK YOUR BAGS!!

All photos Special to The Mississippi Monitor



Charles Gentry holding
his 50-50-7 Exclusive
Travel Club plaque



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