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SWRANKIN NEWS

Vol. 11, No. 05 | May 2026

The Pearl News

THE NEWS
RICHLAND

THE FLORENCE
NEWS

Salute to Education recognizes Rankin's best educators, students, parents

By Susie A. Wolfe

The Rankin County Chamber of Commerce honors outstanding Rankin educators, students and parents at its annual Salute to Education event. This year's event was held April 28 at the Brandon Municipal Complex. Broadcaster Maggie Wade Dixon delivered a keynote address on the impact of teachers and also served as the Master of Ceremonies.

The Salute to Education program recognized many in education who inspire through their gift of teaching. The Top Ten finalists and winners of Teacher of the Year include: Tracy Lofton, Pisgah Elementary; Grayson Shealy, Northwest Elementary; Lynn Hill, Pelahatchie Elementary; Brooke Duke, McLaurin Elementary, runner-up; Alicia Stringer, Florence Middle; Chelsea Adams, Hartfield; Paige Robertson, Jackson Prep; Emily Brewer, Pearl Upper Elementary; Johna Wedgeworth, Steens Creek Elementary; Charles Williams, Florence High, teacher of the year; and Kristen Burkhalter, Highland Bluff.

The Rankin County School District (RCSD) teachers who received their National Board Certification include: Cassie Sumrall, Rouse Elementary; Katie Sweat, Northwest Middle; Gary Lee, Northwest High; Benjamin McDonald, Northwest High; Cynthia Morris, Northwest High; Sarah Beckham, Northwest High; Kenya Clark, Oakdale Elementary; Carita Crockett, Pisgah Elementary; and Shannon Jamison, Richland.

The RCSD also previously recognized Melody Ma-



Special to The Pearl News

The PPSD honored its top educators at the Rankin County Chamber Salute to Education Banquet. Pictured (l to r) are: Administrator of the Year Dr. Michael Brewer, Pearl High School; Teacher of the Year Emily Brewer, Pearl Upper Elementary; and Parent of the Year Randi Reid, Pearl High School. Brewer was also named a Top Ten Finalist for the Rankin County Chamber Teacher of the Year.

con, RCSD Teacher of the Year; Catie Gunn, RCSD Admin of the Year; and Lauren White, RCSD Parent of the Year.

The Pearl Public School District (PPSD) teachers who received their National Board Certification include: Emily Williams, Pearl Upper Elementary; Emily Brewer, Pearl Upper Elementary; Brandye Moore, Northside Elementary; Vashti Graham, Pearl Junior

High; and Jenny Sheppard, Pearl High.

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Each year, graduating seniors from all over the county are invited to apply by submitting an application, writing an essay, and participating in an interview process. This year, more than sixty students applied, and ten were selected to receive \$1,100 each. These ten students are from Pearl and Brandon: Terin Long, Alijah Cimarrusti-Taylor, Brady Herrington, Estella Winston, Mary Anna Boone, Barrett Brown, Katie Thornton, Haleigh McLendon, Tanner Binkley and Hunter Horton.

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Community supports Pearl Day, exceeds projected attendance

By Susie A. Wolfe

After a dark and stormy Friday night, the sun came out on Saturday, April 25, and so did the community to participate in Pearl Day activities.

"The City rallied around everything," said Stacy Smith, City of Pearl Main Street and Senior Services Director. "We estimate that there were sixteen thousand at the Daughtry and Hinder concerts that night, an all-time high. Plus, there were three hundred vehicles in the First Annual Cars for Causes Car Show at Trustmark Park."

Kathy Deer, executive director of the Pearl Chamber, who coordinated Pearl Day in the Park, said, "Everybody did well despite the bad weather



Special to The Pearl News

An all-time high crowd of sixteen thousand attended the Daughtry and Hinder concerts at Trustmark Park, part of Pearl Day activities on April 25.

the night before. We thought we were going to have to cancel the events. It was a huge success. Crowds enjoyed our concerts, and some food vendors even ran out of food."

The First Annual Pickleball Classic Tournament was held April 24-26 on the pickleball courts at Pearl City Park. The Bingo Tournament, benefiting the PHS Class of 2026, was also well attended. The Talent Show was cancelled due to lack of entries.

The annual Pearl Day celebration has been held for over thirty years. Though the tax revenue hasn't been released for that time period yet, Smith said it is also expected to exceed expectations. For more Pearl Day photos, turn to page 2.

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Richland sets two annexations in motion

By Susie A. Wolfe

Annexation is a slow process, according to Richland Mayor Clay Burns. There are stages and timelines that can last a matter of months to years.

In the March Board meetings, the Richland Board of Aldermen expressed interest in expanding two areas east and west of the current boundaries, and Mayor Burns has contacted the mayors in neighboring cities as a courtesy to see if there is interest from those municipalities before proceeding further in the process through Chancery Court. Residents will also have the opportunity to state their



Photos by Susie A. Wolfe

There could be access to the river somewhere in the future and for economic development, according to Richland Mayor Clay Burns. Pictured (l to r) are the boundaries being considered for one of the areas to annex into Richland: Highway 49 at the Pearl River, which would include the Flying J Truck Stop and the Romantic Adventures store, with the right photo showing the downtown Jackson skyline in the distance.

opinions, too.

The first area of interest is on Highway 80 near where Old Highway 49

intersects at the Pearl River. Burns said that the Corp of Engineers currently has control of the area by

consultation with Public Works Jason Stuphin.

Flying J and Romantic Adventures and would need to approve flood plans.

“There could be access to the river somewhere in the future and for economic development,” said Burns. “It could be used for activities like boating, fishing and kayaking.”

The second Richland Annexation Project would take the city further east, squaring off the strip of land down to Harper Street. The trucking business and industrial parks could continue to grow in that direction east to Pearson Road to Richland Creek, said the mayor, in



SENIOR SPOTLIGHT: Walk for Wellness promotes fitness at all levels




Special to SW Rankin News

By Guest Columnist Shea Thames, Richland Senior Services Director

Through the support of the City of Richland, the Richland Senior Center is proud to host our annual Walk for Wellness, a meaningful event that continues to grow each year as a favorite tradition for our seniors and community. This year's walk will take place on Wednesday, May 27, aligning with National Senior Health and Fitness Day, a nationwide initiative that promotes active aging and healthy lifestyles for older adults. The Walk for Wellness is designed

to encourage movement in a way that is welcoming and attainable for all fitness levels. Those joining us may choose to complete a full mile or take part at their own pace. The focus continues to center on staying active, prioritizing health, and enjoying time in a positive and supportive environment. The walk will be held indoors at the Richland Recreational Center, located at 460 E. Harper Street in Richland, providing a safe and accessible setting for all. The day will begin at 9 a.m., as doors open for those attending to visit with our registered vendors and community partners. At 10 a.m., Dr. Alyssa Bryant of Bryant PT and Wellness will lead a guided warm-up, and the walk



Special to The Richland News

The Walk for Wellness' focus is on staying active, prioritizing health, and enjoying time in a positive and supportive environment. The walk, set for May 27, will be held indoors at the Richland Recreational Center, providing a safe and accessible setting for all. will begin at a comfortable pace. Upon completion, each person will receive a medal, followed by a brief cool-down led by Dr. Bryant. The morning will conclude with lunch provided by

McAlister's Deli of Richland, along with door prizes and a time of celebration. Beyond the walk, the event brings together organizations and supporters who share a commitment to promoting wellness among our senior population. It is a time filled with encouragement and valuable resources that support overall well-being. We invite members of the community to learn more and take part in this special event. For additional information, please call the Richland Senior Center at 601-420-3401 or stop by 371 Scarbrough Street in Richland.





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The RCSD also previously recognized Melody Ma-



Special to The Florence News

Catie Gunn (left) principal of Steen's Creek Elementary in Florence, was named RCSD Administrator of the Year. Gunn is pictured with RCSD Superintendent Shane Sanders (right).

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Second Annual Mississippi Walk for Williams is Saturday, May 16, in Florence

Special to The Florence News

The family of a child with Williams Syndrome is hosting the Second Annual Mississippi Walk for Williams Syndrome on Saturday, May 16, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Hemphill Park in Florence. This year they have added a car show.

According to Jessica Vandusen, event co-chair, "This event was started in 2025 in Mississippi to honor my grandson, Stetson, who passed away in 2024, at fifteen months old, from complications from his second open heart surgery due to heart problems from Williams Syndrome.

Williams Syndrome is a rare genetic

disorder affecting development and connective tissues. Key features include cardiovascular disease (e.g., supra-aortic stenosis), a distinct "elfin" facial appearance, cognitive delays, and an overly social, empathetic personality. It affects one in 7,500 people, often involving hypercalcemia and feeding issues in childhood.

"We wanted to do something to honor him and help raise money for Williams Syndrome," Vandusen said. "We have so many kids right here in Mississippi that have Williams Syndrome, and we



Special to The Florence News

Florence resident Miranda Vandusen with Stetson.

need more research and education."

The day will include the walk, car show with plaque giveaways, door prizes, food trucks, local vendors, a silent auction and games for the kids.

If interested in walking or participating in the car show, text Mississippi to 71777 to sign up. The walk fee is twenty dollars. Donations can be sent to that number, as well. One hundred percent of the proceeds go directly to the nonprofit organization Williams Syndrome Association for research and education.

For more information, contact Jessica Vandusen, Co-Chair, Mississippi Walk for Williams, at 601-559-0784 and Hailstate2448@gmail.com.

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Community supports Pearl Day, exceeds projected attendance

The preceding evening's inclement weather didn't dampen the spirits or the size of the crowd at the recent Pearl Day, held on Saturday, April 25. Organizers report record crowds, including an all-time high crowd of sixteen thousand at the Saturday evening concerts at Trustmark Park. Pearl Day has been held for over thirty years.



SWRANKIN NEWS

P.O. Box 5963, Pearl, MS 39208
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Volume 11, Issue 05 | Circulation - 15,000

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For submission information, email
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Southwest Rankin News is published on
the second Tuesday of every month.



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All photos by Susie A. Wolfe

Burkhalter named Richland officer of the Quarter



Special to SW Rankin News

Richland Police Department recently named Lt. Beth Burkhalter the Richland Police Department (RPD) Officer of the Quarter. Police Chief Adrian Ready said that her exceptional leadership, dedication and commitment to RPD sets her apart. Richland Economic Development Association (REDA) partnered in supporting her and celebrating this achievement.





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Old Truths for Today

J.T. Morgan



The Bible, How Important Is It?

Libraries contain volumes and volumes of books. Of all these books in the world, the Bible is the only one with which man can face his eternal future. Paul stated, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes to the Jew first and also for the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written, "the just shall live by faith" (Rom.1:16-17). He also stated, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom.10:17). Of all the books in the world this is the only one that we can base our faith.

Today we are saying that they need to leave every creed and doctrine of man that he has written and believe only that which is contained in the gospel of Christ. Jesus said, "In vain they do worship me teaching for doctrine the commandments of men" (Matt.15:9; Mk.7:7). Men must not mold their doctrines and beliefs upon what they fancy, but only that which God has acknowledged as their worship, otherwise their worship is vain. Regardless of how sincere one may be in his worship of his own creation, or of man's commandments, it profits him nothing. There is no excuse when we have the Bible as our guide.

Since the "righteousness of God" (Rom.1:17) is revealed in the gospel it is imperative that we follow that we follow what God has authorized (Rom.10:3). The world, you and I, will be judged by the "righteousness of God" (Acts 17:31). The word "righteousness" simply refers to God's way of saving man, the plan of salvation, in opposition to the ways and means invented by the fancies or prejudices of men.

By coming into the world in human form, Jesus was enabled to bring the light of heaven within the grasp of man, thereby delivering him from spiritual darkness (Jno.12:46). Jesus came to provide a plan whereby the world might be saved from the bondage of unbelief (vs.47). If a man rejects the plan offered by Jesus for his salvation, then God will judge him in the last day. When that day arrives, God will bring condemnation upon the disobedient, finding him guilty under the words that were spoken by His Son (Jno.12:48). If we mishandle the Bible, God's word to man, we will answer in that day of judgment.

We are warned not to add to or take from God's word (Rev.22:18-19; Prov.30:5-6). We are not to pervert the gospel (Gal.1:8-9). We must study, handling God's word in the proper way that will save our soul (2 Tim.2:15).

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Jack Tullos, Jr. posthumously awarded the 2026 Ray Rogers Award

By Susie A. Wolfe

At the 2026 Pearl Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, hosted by the Pearl Chamber of Commerce, Mayor Jake Windham recognized former Pearl legend Jack Tullos with the Ray Roger's Award for outstanding community service. When the sixty-four-year-old Tullos died in a car crash in 2018, the Pearl community mourned the loss.

In presenting the award to Tullos' daughter, Kristy Tullos Gregory, Mayor Jake Windham said, "Some people pass through a community...and some people help build one. Jack Tullos was one of the people who helped build Pearl, Mississippi."

"Jack loved Pearl, and Pearl loved Jack," Windham said. "Jack was what many would call 'larger than life.' He was loud. He was passionate. He loved hard and lived big."

Former Pearl Pirates Head Coach John Perry said, at the time of Tullos' death, that Tullos was the



Tullos family members are still strong supporters of the Pearl community. Pictured (l to r) are: Michael Gregory, Jack's son-in-law, a former Pearl football coach; Kristy Tullos Gregory, Jack's daughter, an administrative assistant at Pearl Junior High; Becky Tullos Jones, Jack's sister, a career coach at Pearl High School; and her husband, Troy Jones, currently the Pearl Chamber of Commerce President of the Board.

second-best Pearl Pirate football fan behind the former state representative Ray Rogers, for whom the Pirate's stadium is named.

Many folks in Pearl have "Jack Tullos" stories, mostly about him helping the city and



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Mayor Jake Windom is shown presenting the 2026 Ray Rogers Award to Kristy Tullos Gregory in memory of her father, Jack Tullos, one of the people who helped build Pearl.

schools, but always about helping the kids. "Some are heartfelt. Some are funny. And, some... are unforgettable."

The Tullos family members are still strong supporters of the Pearl community. Jack's sister, Becky Tullos Jones, is a former City alderwoman, and her husband, Troy Jones, is currently the Pearl Chamber of Commerce President of the Board. Currently, Tullos Jones is a career coach at Pearl High School, and Kristy Tullos Gregory, Jack's daughter, is an administrative assistant at Pearl Junior High. Her husband, Michael Gregory, is a former Pearl football coach who is now at Pelahatchie High.

Mayor Windham concluded his tribute with, "And I know Jack would want us to honor his legacy by loving people... by showing up for our kids... by standing firm in what we believe will move the community forward...and by continuing to build the kind of Pearl he loved so deeply."

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Captain Bryan Hill named PFD Firefighter of the Month

Special to SW Rankin News

The Pearl Fire Department Firefighter of the Month is Captain Bryan Hill. He began his career at the Pearl Fire Department in 2001.

Captain Hill has lived in Pearl his entire life and graduated from Pearl High School in 1997. He then enlisted in the U.S. Army and was an infantryman for three years. Throughout his twenty-five-year career, Captain Hill has served the citizens of Pearl and continues to do so at Station #3 on B Shift.

PFD officials say that Hill's dedication, leadership and wealth of knowledge have played a vital role in the continued growth and success of PFD. Captain Hill is a Certified Mississippi Smoke Diver and a Nationally Registered EMT who has completed countless hours of specialized training and certifications through the Mississippi State Fire Academy.

Battalion Chief Ricky Purvis praised his dedication to the fire department and his willingness to share his knowledge and experience with the younger firefighters.



Special to SW Rankin News

A Pearl native, Captain Bryan Hill is the son of Michael and Tommie Hill. He has served the citizens of Pearl for twenty-five years and continues to do so at Station #3 on B Shift.

Captain Hill and his wife, Wendy, have two children, Mary and Mike, who both attend Pearl Public Schools. Hill's parents are Michael and Tommie Hill of Pearl.

The Pearl Chamber of Commerce presented him with certificates and gifts.

Star's fifteenth Spring Festival raises \$12,000+ for St. Jude's



Special to SW Rankin News

Star Baptist Church hosted its fifteenth annual Spring Festival, bringing the community together to raise \$12,440 for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Hundreds of neighbors, families and friends came out festival, which included over one hundred and fifteen vehicles, as well as a display of classic cars, big rigs, tractors, and off-road vehicles. There were also twenty-five vendors who offered food, drinks and handmade goods.



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As a 3-term State Representative, Nick:

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- ★ Led the fight to prohibit gender transition surgeries on minors
- ★ Co-authored landmark law that overturned Roe v. Wade

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From the Pearl Boardroom



Special to SW Rankin News

The Pearl Mayor and Board of Aldermen met on April 7 and April 21, to discuss the City's business.

Discussing a zoning variance, the Board agreed to do more due diligence on uses for the Sethi property which had intended to be a pawn shop, but that property is not zoned for that type of business. The Sethi brothers asked about other uses. The building is currently empty, so the Board needs a timeline.

Attorney Brendan Sartin asked the Board to amend the Zoning Ordinance for Conditional Use Provision with hotels and restaurants in the Commercial District. He said the Central Mississippi Planning and Development District (CMPDD, which provides professional planning services to local governments) advises the City to do this because it is landlocked and needs to continue to prepare for growth.



Special to SW Rankin News

Will Roberts has been selected as the City of Pearl Employee of the Month. Roberts is an Emergency Operator-Tractor Driver who began his career in Public Works in May 2018. Public Works Director Shane Burrell gave him a certificate of appreciation and thanked him for his dedication and work ethic saying he is always willing to work wherever he is needed. Roberts is a devoted family man and has coached soccer in the PFC for four and a half years.

The Board approved cleaning up the property located at 612 Excell Circle that is owned by James C. and Pablo I. Allen. Director of Community Development Brad Robertson said that the property is a nuisance, and the grass hasn't been cut this year. Recommendation is to adjudicate right away and have the property cleaning be completed by the next Board meeting on May 5.

The Board approved two requests, one for Spinal USA, Inc. to be granted a Free Port Warehouse License, and one for Nissan North America, Inc. to be exempt from all ad valorem taxation on personal property shipped out of state for a period of four years as authorized by Section 27-31-51 of the Mississippi Code of 1972.

The Central Mississippi Regional Library System (CMRLS) Director Maura Polk and Pearl Library Manager updated the Board on attendance, events, and new services.

Obituaries

NAME	AGE	CITY	DOD	FUNERAL HOME
Tyler James Owens	40y	Pearl, MS	03/31/2026	Chancellor FH
Gary Eugene Moak	71y	Florence, MS	04/02/2026	Chancellor FH
Harlon Don Caldwell	67y	Florence, MS	04/03/2026	Chancellor FH
Donald E. Brown	95y	Raymond, MS	04/04/2026	Chancellor FH
Noel Renee Turner	68y	Brandon, MS	04/05/2026	Chancellor FH
Stephen Christopher Minton	52y	Brandon, MS	03/22/2026	Chancellor FH
Michael Joseph Finnegan, Sr.	84y	Florence, MS	04/07/2026	Chancellor FH
Edith Marie Phillips	79y	Florence, MS	04/09/2026	Chancellor FH
Daryl Scott Crowder	56y	Pearl, MS	04/10/2026	Chancellor FH
Richard Dale Patterson	64y	Brandon, MS	04/13/2026	Chancellor FH
Kate C. Harper	78y	Florence, MS	04/18/2026	Chancellor FH
Buddy M. Frith	78y	Florence, MS	04/19/2026	Chancellor FH
Amanda Fairbank Williams	55y	Madison, MS	04/27/2026	Chancellor FH

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Cohn receives Taylor Medal, University of Mississippi's Highest Award



Special to SW Rankin News

Ethel Scurlock, dean of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College at the University of Mississippi, speaks to the Taylor Medal recipients at a dinner in their honor.

Special to SW Rankin News

Kaylea Cohn of Pearl, majoring in Integrated Marketing Communications, was among the more than ninety University of Mississippi (UM) students to receive a 2026 Marcus Elvis Taylor Memorial Medal, the university's highest academic award.

The honorees were recognized for their achievements on April 9, 2026, with a dinner at The Inn at Ole Miss Ballroom followed by a ceremony at the Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts.

The Taylor Medals were established at UM in 1904 by Dr. William A. Taylor, of Booneville, in memory of his son, an honored 1871 alumnus of the university.

The award recognizes no more than one percent of the student body each year.

From the Richland Boardroom

Special to The Richland News



The Richland Mayor and Board of Aldermen met on the first and third Tuesdays in April.

The Board adopted an Ordinance to amend Ordinance 2025-1 regulating Residential Rental Property, the Inspections and Related Fees, to add a Duration Provision and a Registration Fee.

An ordinance was also adopted to amend Section VII of Ordinance 2011-1 regulating the Requirements for Factory-Built Homes, presently located in and to be located in the City of Richland, to remove the Renter Registration Fee.

The Consent Agenda items were approved, and then invoices for engineering service in the amount of \$172,926.09 to Thornton Construction Co. Inc., to be paid out of the M.U.T. Bond Debt Fund, for work performed on the 2023 Street Improvements Project.

The Board awarded the 2026 Street Overlay Project to AJ Construction utilizing the Rankin County Unit System Semi-Annual Joint Asphalt Bid through the existing inter-local agreement, with cost estimated at \$900,000.

The Board approved the purchase of a Kubota M5-111HDC-1 Tractor and a KSM60 Arm with 60" Rotary, Blade Pan for the Street Department from Deviney Equipment under State Contracts for \$127,014.12.

Aldermen also approved the sole-source purchase of software and the annual license from Forerunner for floodplain and stormwater management compliance in the amount of \$11,000 for the Planning Department.

Payment for engineering service of Invoice No. 74543 in the amount of \$7,411.13 was approved to be paid out of the M.U.T. Fund for CE&I work completed and as appointed by the Board on November 5, 2024, for the Interaction Im-

provements at Old Highway 49 and Carrier Boulevard.

Four quotes were received for the removal of several trees around City Hall and the Library: Couch Tree Service LLC submitted a quote for \$13,250, Cuevas Land & Trees LLC submitted a quote for \$12,500, Porter's Tree Service submitted a quote for \$15,000, and Sullivan Tree Service submitted a quote for \$11,000.

Several assets were declared as surplus property having no value, destruction was authorized, including an HP Pro Desk 400 G5, an HP Pro Desk 400 and an HP Prodesk 600.

The Board approved the donation request from Richland Economic Development Association as budgeted in the amount of \$15,000, for 2026 Special Events.

They approved the re-hire of Bobby "Joe" Minga as a Park Attendant, at the rate of \$12 per hour, and of Ann Lynn Bishop as a Summer Camp Worker, at the rate of \$10.50 per hour.

The Board authorized the Joint Law Enforcement Operation Task Force Agreement for Lt. Coty Hamilton's position with the U.S. Marshals Task Force from October 2026 through September 2027, and authorized the Police Chief to sign the Obligation Documents.

The Board approved the promotion of Detective Joseph Mullins to the position of Patrol Lieutenant effective April 15, 2026, at the pay rate Level 4/Step 1.

The renewal of the three-year contract with Converge One was approved.

The Board approved the hire of Cassie Webb, Shelby Duran, Mason Moha, Peyton Perkins, and Courtney Roberts as Summer Camp Workers at Richland Parks and Rec.

The group went into Executive Session to discuss potential litigation.

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From the Florence Boardroom

Special to The Florence News

Present at the April 7 Florence Board of Aldermen meeting were Mayor Trey Gunn, along with Aldermen John Banks, Mason Herrin, Kyle Martin and Brent Sistrunk. Alderman Brian Grantham was absent.

Mayor Gunn called the meeting to order, and the City's business was discussed.

The Board voted to send Officer Daniel McCue to the annual MS Association School Resource Officers conference in Biloxi on July 12-16, 2026. The Rankin County School District will pay the registration fee, and the City will pay other related costs. Also, the Board voted to send Officer Brenna Alexander to Axon Taser Instructor Training on April 27-28, 2026, at the Co-Lin campus.

Upon recommendation of Park Director Mark Hester, the Board agreed to increase softball and baseball umpires' pay to forty dollars per umpire per game for age group five- through eight-year-olds.

Community Development Director Joel Sims requested to set a public hearing for the next Board meeting on May 5, at 6:30 p.m. for consideration of a special exception for conditional use for the allowance of manufactured and modular home sales, which include a permanent building in C-3 Zoning District in the City of Florence. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote.

Director Sims also asked the Board to approve signage for Rain Forest Car Wash located at 2974 Highway 49 South as presented by Munn Enterprises, Inc. He also asked the Board to approve signage for Huntington Bank located at 111 East Main Street as presented by Philadelphia Sign. The motions were carried by a unanimous vote.

Director Sims also asked the Board to approve the quote of JKW Painting, LLC to provide material and labor to wash, prep and paint the exterior of the municipal complex at a cost of \$4,800, the lowest and best of two quotes received



March 17, 2026.

The Board went into executive session to discuss personnel matters in the Police Department involving the position of dispatcher and anticipated litigations.

Motions were made in executive session to direct City Attorney Bobby Lingold to contact Windstream concerning a claim Windstream filed for damage to their line located at 116 South Church Street.

The Board also agreed to accept the resignation of dispatcher Joanna Karras effective April 3, 2026, and to hire Brandy Cates as a part-time dispatcher at \$14.50 per hour starting April 10, 2026.

Upon a recommendation by Police Chief Brad Burns, a motion was made in executive session to hire Brittney Overstreet as a full-time dispatcher at \$16.00 per hour starting April 21, 2026. A motion, carried by a unanimous vote, was made to return to regular session. Having no further business, Mayor Gunn adjourned the meeting.

The Board approved the recommendation by City Engineer Tim Parker for Thompson Brothers Drilling to proceed to with the new well project for the City of Florence.

Mayor Gunn was approved to attend the Mississippi Association of Planning and Development District's annual conference April 21-24, 2026, in Biloxi.

The Board approved the claims docket and the Minutes of

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Florence HS' Williams named RCSD Teacher of the Year

By Susie A. Wolfe

Charles Williams was named the Rankin County Chamber of Commerce 2026 Rankin County Teacher of the Year at the April 28 Salute to Education Banquet held at the Brandon Municipal Complex. He received a \$5,000 reward that he said he will use to purchase classroom materials, including graphing calculators for his students and AP teaching resources to support his AP Calculus class.

“Receiving the Rankin County Chamber of Commerce 2026 Rankin County Teacher of the Year Award is truly one of the greatest honors of my life,” said Williams, a 15-year Florence High School (FHS) veteran who is the dual credit mathematics instructor, head coach of boys and girls track and field, and assistant coach of boys basketball, “and I remain committed to continuing to serve my students, my school, and my community with dedication and passion. Thank



Special to SW Rankin News

The Florence High School (FHS) delegation received a variety of awards at the recent Salute to Education program. Pictured (l to r) are: Jason Thomas, FHS principal; Sammy Sebren, awarded for completion of the Rankin Youth Leadership Program; Addison Grantham, who also completed the Rankin Youth Leadership Program; Charles Williams, Rankin County Chamber of Commerce 2026 Rankin County Teacher of the Year, who was rewarded with \$5,000; Mary Yates, who completed the Rankin Youth Leadership Program and received a \$2,500 scholarship; and Caleigh Berch, who completed the Rankin Youth Leadership Program and received a \$1,000 scholarship.

you again to everyone who has been part of this journey.”

Williams, who has a B.S./M.S. in mathematics and Ed.S. of K-12 administration, teaches dual credit college algebra, dual credit trigonometry, dual credit elementary statistics, dual credit business calculus, and AP Calculus AB. He spent eight years teaching at Velma Jackson High School in Madison County before moving to Rankin County and beginning his career at FHS. He and his family live in Pearl.

“What I enjoy most about teaching is seeing my students succeed at the next level and return to share how my class helped prepare them,” said Williams. “It brings me joy to pass on to my students the education I received in high school and college. I’m especially passionate about the challenge of teaching higher-level mathematics to gifted students, including high honor roll students and top ACT scorers.”



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Get Fit Florence 5k is set for August 15



Special to SW Rankin News

The Get Fit Florence 5k will be held on Saturday, August 15. The 5k run and walk will start at 7:30 a.m. at Florence High School, and the Kids Fun Run will start after the 5k is complete. The race is a fundraiser for Florence High school Medical Science Academy, McLaurin High school Health Science Academy and Discovery Christian School athletics. To sign up for the race, visit RaceRoster.com and search for Get Fit Florence 5k or sign up for the race the day of the event.

The Richland Senior Center holds talk on mental health and aging



Susie A. Wolfe

Oceans Behavioral Health recently held a Lunch and Learn at the Richland Senior Center, discussing mental health and aging. Approximately forty seniors attended to hear Oceans' Director of Outpatient Services, Natalie Henderson, touch on practical ways to support overall well-being, including the "Three Cs"—Care, Connect, and Call for Support. Henderson pointed out that staying socially connected can help reduce the risk of depression and support cognitive health—making conversations and community more important than ever. If someone is experiencing a mental health crisis, call the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by dialing 988—similar to calling 911 for emergencies. If calling is not an option, text 714714 to connect with support. Pictured (l to r) are: Rose Wooten of Oceans; Donna Shaw, door prize recipient; Natalie Henderson of Oceans; and Shea Thames, Richland Senior Center Director.




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Pearl Indoor Percussion advances to finals for seventh time



Special to SW Rankin News

Pearl Indoor Percussion students advanced to the finals round at the WGI Percussion World Championships, where they placed thirteenth overall. This is the seventh time the group has advanced to the final round in program history.

Bishop, Yarborough honored at Co-Lin



Special to SW Rankin News

At the annual ASCLS-MS/LSCLS Bi-State meeting in Biloxi recently, Co-Lin Medical Laboratory Technology student Whitney Bishop of Florence was honored as Student of the Year. Also, Co-Lin MLT Program Director Paula Yarborough was named Member of the Year and received the Omicron Sigma Award for Service. Pictured (l to r) are Yarborough and Bishop with their honors.

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FHS holds prom for self-contained students of RCSD high schools

Special to SW Rankin News

An Enchanted Evening, the 2026 Rankin County School District (RCSD) prom for ninth to twelfth graders in the self-contained classes district wide, was held at Florence High School (FHS) last month. Most of these students don't attend their school's regular prom, so this event was just for them.

"At this prom, our students with disabilities are able to come and enjoy, dancing without judgement, and partying with supports," said Tiffany Withers, who serves as the FHS self-contained Special Education teacher. "With this prom being for self-contained students, we are able to make it sensory-friendly - lights dimmed so not completely dark, music can be quieter and lots of balloons for sensory play. Students are able to bring family members and even dates! There was no fee to get into the RCSD prom, and all the food was free."

Students were able to wear whatever they are comfortable in, whether it be jeans and a t-shirt all the way up to a formal gown or tux. A professional photographer was there to take pictures of the students and



Photos by Martin Tucker, C.M. Tucker Photography

At this RCSD prom, students with disabilities came and enjoyed dancing without judgement, and partying with family members and dates. It was sensory-friendly, so the lights were dimmed but not completely dark, and the music was quieter.

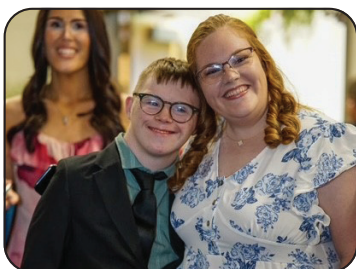
their families, and Dewayne Williams, aka DJ Hypnotic, played music and loved to take special requests.

FHS JROTC provided a red carpet, and students under the direction of Sergeant Major Douglas Feazell escorted students into the prom to give it that extra special touch to make them feel special. Student Council members donated water and served at the prom.

Withers wanted to make sure all donations were recognized, including The Mississippi Council for Exceptional Children and Mississippi Professional Educators. FHS student volunteers came and served as well as partied alongside the students.

FHS Transition Classes under the direction of Tiffany Withers worked hard to make it all come together. Helping with set up and decorating was Nicole Greer (and family), Brittany Eaves, Lauren Mason, Patti Hauser (and family), Wendy Crumbley (master carpenter), Crystal Bridges, Miles Martin, Dawn Sutton, Richard Withers and Shalonda Powell.

Simply Balloons created the balloon entrance and the multitude of balloon creations throughout the event. Country Meat Packers in Florence donated a full course meal. Jackson SnapBooth was on hand for prop photos.



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Hinds CC President Emeritus Dr. Clyde Muse passes away

Special to SW Rankin News

Hinds Community College President Emeritus Dr. Clyde Muse passed away on Wednesday, April 15 at age 96. Dr. Muse retired on June 30, 2020, after having served as president since July 1, 1978.

Visitation was held on Monday, April 20, at Cain-Cochran Hall on the Raymond Campus of Hinds Community College, with a service following.

Dr. Muse is survived by three children, Julia Muse Cole (Sellers, deceased), Susan Muse Rucker (Randy) and Vernon Clyde Muse Jr. (Jan), as well as seven grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren.

“He was one of those figures who was ‘bigger than life,’ and it is hard to contemplate that he is no longer with us,” said current Hinds President Dr. Stephen Vacik. “His life was dedicated to service above self, as his 42 years as president of Hinds CC exemplify. Under his leadership, this institution rose to a place of prominence among others in the state and region – and we remain there today because of the foundation that he helped established.”

As Dr. Muse wrapped up his final year as president in 2019-2020, he led the largest community college and the fourth largest institution of higher learning in Mississippi.

During his 42-year tenure, Dr. Muse showed himself to be a visionary leader who set the standard for creating innovative ways to serve the college’s many communities. He exemplified the true servant leader with his gentle but persistent efforts on behalf of the community college family.

Often called the “Godfather” of the state’s community colleges, his influence is felt – and will continue to be felt – throughout Mississippi as well as the nation.

Clyde Muse came from modest beginnings. Born in Benton County in north Mississippi, he was the fifth of seven sons. He graduated from Sebastopol High School in 1947 and attended East Central Junior College in Decatur, which he initially paid for with a job milking cows.

However, Coach Arno Vincent saw his basketball potential and arranged for him to wash dishes in the cafeteria instead, a job that wouldn’t conflict with his practice schedule. That held him until he earned a full basketball scholarship after beating six players vying for the center position.

Muse earned another basketball scholarship to Delta



Special to SW Rankin News

A Celebration of Life for Dr. Muse was held on April 20, 2026, at the Cain-Cochran Hall at Hinds Community College. Muse lived a life defined by faith, humility, and a steadfast commitment to others. His obituary said that the seeds he planted, in classrooms, on courts, in communities, and in hearts, will continue to grow for generations to come. A digital board pays tribute to the long-time president is shown on campus.

State Teacher’s College. There he met Leland freshman Vashti Underwood, and they married in 1952.

In his first job out of college, he taught multiple classes – science, math and even a reading class – and coached basketball, track and junior high football at Canton High School.

In 1959, the next step in his career led him to Starkville, where he enjoyed much professional success, made lifetime friendships and made many contributions to the community, including inventing tee-ball.

While teaching and coaching the 1961 State Championship boys’ basketball team in Starkville, he earned a Master’s degree in school administration from Mississippi State University and later became principal at Starkville High School as well as assistant superintendent. By 1969, he had completed all requirements for a Doctorate in Administration at MSU with a dissertation on early childhood education.

That same year, Dr. Clyde Muse became superintendent of the Hinds County school system, the second largest school district in Mississippi at that time. He invested two years as Hinds County Schools Superintendent during an extraordinarily turbulent time marked by a federal desegregation order. The experience proved to be a training ground for him years later. In 1971, Dr. Muse accepted the superintendent’s position in Meridian and led the school district for seven years.

At the urging of then-Board President Ted Kendall III and with the approval of the Board of Trustees, he returned to Raymond as president of Hinds Junior College on July 1, 1978.

He successfully handled the difficult task of managing the federal court-ordered merger of Hinds Junior College and Utica Junior College in 1982.

He immediately set about a multifaceted mission of guiding the college’s academic ship through complex waters of social change and phenomenal enrollment growth begun by his predecessors. Among his immediate priorities was upgrading physical facilities.

Early in his presidency, Dr. Muse coined the phrase “The College for All People.” As part of that endeavor, he supported developmental programs for students who need more help in successfully completing college-level classes and the Honors Institute for high achievers who need more challenging programs.

In 1987, Hinds was among the two-year institutions in Mississippi that officially became a “community college” to reflect a broadening sense of value to the state as a whole.

Throughout his presidency, Dr. Muse was at the forefront of establishing community colleges as the primary workforce training entity in the state, fostering workforce partnerships with industry to drive career-tech programs.

Both Clyde Muse and his wife Vashti Underwood Muse, an eminent developmental education professional in her own right, fought for equitable educational opportunity for all students. For more than 50 years, Mrs. Muse, who died in July 2010, was the underdog’s champion who made sure that at-risk students had an opportunity to succeed.

While Dr. Muse’s accomplishments are many, he was perhaps best known for his dynamic personality, warm smile, caring nature and his servant’s heart for all people.

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Spring Lake Garden Club keeps Pearl beautiful, plans Spring Fling



Photos special to SW Rankin News

The Spring Lake Garden Club of Pearl and Keep Pearl Beautiful members volunteered their time at the Earth Day Recycling Event on April 22. The ladies (l to r) are: Judy Moulder, Judy Logue, Sissie Haynie, Brenda Vernamonti and Joy Willis.

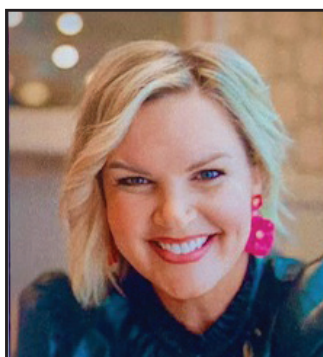
Special to SW Rankin News

The ladies of Spring Lake Garden Club are currently selling tickets for their upcoming Spring Fling event. The program, set for Saturday, May 16, beginning at 1:30 p.m., will feature guest speaker Heather Lenard.

Lenard is co-host of “Dear Heathers” podcast, and she will present “Finding the Funny Between the Weeds.”

The Spring Fling, which will be held at the City of Pearl Community Center at 2420 Old Brandon Road, will also include light refreshments and door prizes.

For tickets, which are \$10, contact garden club president Brenda Vernamonti at vernamo@bellsouth.net or Judy Moulder at judymoulder@comcast.net.



Heather Lenard

A little brown light: Point of surrender



Special to SW Rankin News

POINT OF SURRENDER

I guess I never really knew how many stripes it would take for You to heal me.
I never could have dreamed the depth of Your grief as You drank the sin cup for me.

Sweat drops of blood on the garden floor.
The painful crown of thorns You wore.

The nails that tore Your stretched out hands and feet.
The rocks on the road as You stumbled and fell.

The dreadful agony no one can tell.
While the demons of hell just danced along the way.

The blows You took and the price You paid.

All the tears and the blood that were shed that day.

Your friends ran away and left You all alone

Suffering Servant, I understand That somehow that day was

Your Father's plan.

The weight of the world was resting in Your hands.

I see You kneeling there in Gethsemane Underneath the olive trees

Knowing that soon You would give your life for me.

Jesus, bring me to that point of surrender.

Show me what You suffered for me.

Call me to my knees in the Garden.

Walk me up the hill of Calvary.

I see Your broken heart rending.

Your will never bending.

Your pain never ending,

With angels attending.

My battle defending.

My sinful soul mending.

My life depending.

My brand new beginning.

Bring me to that point of surrender

And walk with me.

Becky Brown
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written after seeing

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Florence MS names April, May Eagles of the Month



Florence Middle School (FMS) recently named its Students of the Month for April. Pictured (l to r) are: FMS Principal Brock Sistrunk, Sixth Grade Student of the Month Evie Rae Cain, Seventh Grade Student of the Month Tucker Eady, Eighth Grade Student of the Month Cole Reed and Student of the Month Sponsor Tanner Wilson of Farm Bureau Insurance.



Florence Middle School (FMS) recently named its Students of the Month for May. Pictured (l to r) are: FMS Principal Brock Sistrunk, Sixth Grade Student of the Month Jeremy Wilson, Seventh Grade Student of the Month Van Henry, Eighth Grade Student of the Month Megan Dear and Student of the Month Sponsor Tanner Wilson of Farm Bureau Insurance.

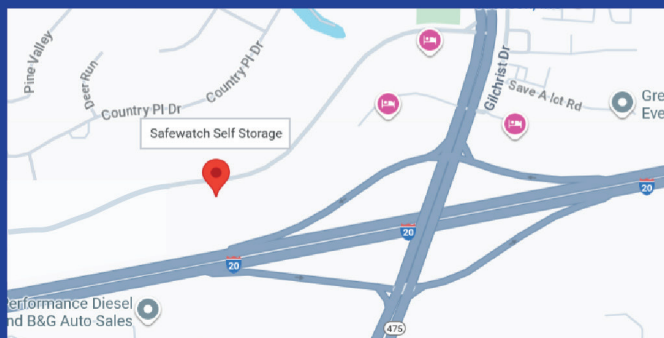


Photos special to SW Rankin News

Florence Middle School (FMW) recently named Teachers of the Month for April and May and Staff Member of the Quarter. Pictured (l to r) are FMS Principal Brock Sistrunk, April Teacher of the Month Cassandra Carnley, May Teacher of the Month Mary Smith, Staff Member of the Quarter Robert Higdon, and Teacher/Staff Recognition sponsor Representative Lance Varner.

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Bishop named spring Hinds IDEAList



Special to SW Rankin News

Penny Bishop of Pearl was recently named one of the spring 2026 IDEAList honorees at Hinds Community College. The IDEAList employee recognition program showcases employees who represent Hinds' college values of Integrity, Diversity, Excellence, Accountability, Leadership and Stewardship. Bishop is the Criminal Background and Health Records Specialist for all nursing and allied health programs. Based at Nursing Allied Health in Jackson, she has been a Hinds employee for eleven years. She also is a Hinds alumnus.

Tomlinson recognized by MS legislators



Special to SW Rankin News

Rankin County Representative Lance Vamer and Rankin State Senator Brian Rhodes recognized Florence High School (FHS) junior Mary Grace Tomlinson in April for her accomplishments. Rhodes said Tomlinson is an impressive young lady who excels in the classroom, in athletics, in leadership, and, most importantly, in her faith. He noted that Mississippi has a bright future with young people like her leading the way. Tomlinson also represents Rankin County as its Distinguished Young Woman.

Thurman named Discovery head girls basketball coach



Special to SW Rankin News

Beyond the classroom and field, Coach Thurman is active in the community. He is one of ten Rankin County Young Professionals and was the first-ever Rankin County Dancing with the Stars Champion.

Special to SW Rankin News

Coach Jay Thurman has been named the new girls head basketball coach at Discovery Christian School (DCS). He began his teaching and coaching career at DCS, and this year marks his sixth year.

During his first year, Thurman coached girls basketball. By his second year, he was coaching both basketball and football. In his third year, he added elementary physical education (PE) to his responsibilities. His fourth year brought a full-time teaching role, where he taught elementary PE, health, and life skills,

while also serving as an assistant track coach and continuing his work with football and basketball programs.

In addition to coaching at DCS, Thurman also serves as a youth leader at Restoration Church, where he has been a member for sixteen years and has served in youth ministry for the past eleven.

He began his college journey at Jackson State University in 2019, studying PE. After taking a break, he is now continuing his education at William Carey University, where he is working toward a bachelor's degree in physical education, health, and therapeutic recreation. He is set to graduate in August 2026.

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