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SWRANKIN NEWS

Good News You Can Use

Vol. 5, No. 12 | December 2020

The Pearl News

THE NEWS
RICHLAND

THE FLORENCE
NEWS

PCC seeking volunteers to spread Christmas cheer

Special to The Pearl News

Pearl residents interested in giving a little back this holiday season may consider fulfilling a local child's Christmas wish list. The "Tree of Angels" is hosted annually by the Pearl Chamber of Commerce (PCC), and has remained a popular holiday tradition for the past ten years.

It all begins each year when counselors from Pearl Public School District (PPSD) provide a list of names to the PCC. Each name on the list transforms into a single angel decorating the Chamber's Angel Tree. All are local residents and students in PPSD. In addition to a child's first name, each angel includes the child's age (from kindergarten to high school age), clothing sizes and a short list of their Christmas wishes.

PCC encourages interested persons to visit their office, at 110 Lonnie Jenkins Drive, during regular business hours (9

a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday), to select an angel from their Tree of Angels. They ask that any items donated remain unwrapped. The budget is up to each donor.

PCC sorts each item received by school and student's first name. As Christmas break approaches, the PPSD counselors return to collect and distribute the wrapped gifts.

Just prior to the holidays, parents of each child will collect their children's gifts from each respective school.

This year, the number of angels collected is approximately 150. As of November 18, between forty to fifty angels were claimed.

The deadline to participate is Friday, December 11, 2020. Donations must be delivered to the Pearl Chamber of Commerce's office by the end of the business day, at 4 p.m.

For more information, contact PCC at 601-939-3338.



Special to The Pearl News

PPSD's Morgigno honored for positive community impact

Special to The Pearl News

Pearl Public School District (PPSD) Superintendent Dr. Raymond Morgigno was awarded the Ray Rogers Award by City of Pearl Mayor Jake Windham. This award is given each year to a Pearl citizen who makes a positive impact in the community and goes above and beyond to make Pearl a great place to live. Raymond C. Morgigno has served as Superintendent of Pearl Public School District since 2010. Prior to assuming the role of superintendent, Dr. Morgigno served as a classroom teacher, an assistant principal, and a high school principal. Dr. Morgigno earned his Bachelor of Science from Delta State University in 1993, his Master of Education from the University of Mississippi in 1997, and his Doctor of Philosophy from Mississippi State University in 2012. He also graduated from the Center for Executive Leadership at Lamar University



Special to The Pearl News

Pictured (l to r) are: Superintendent Dr. Raymond Morgigno and Pearl Mayor Jake Windham.

in 2014. In addition to his experience in the school setting, Dr. Morgigno served for over twenty-one years in the Mississippi Army National Guard. He completed one tour of duty in Iraq in 2005 and held numerous leadership positions

throughout his military career. Dr. Morgigno retired from the Mississippi Army National Guard as a Lieutenant Colonel in 2011.

Dr. Morgigno currently serves as a member of the American Association

of School Administrators Executive Board, a member of the State Superintendents Advisory Board, a member of the Mississippi School Boards Association Workers Compensation Board, and on the executive board of the East Mississippi Center for Educational Development. He has also served on the board of directors for the Mississippi Association of School Superintendents and the Mississippi High School Activities Association. He was selected as Mississippi Superintendent of the Year in 2016-2017.

Active in his community, Dr. Morgigno is a member of the Hinds Community College Rankin Campus Advisory Board and Pearl Kiwanis Club. He and his wife Gina have two children: Kyle (twenty) and Alyssa Kate (sixteen). They are active members of McLaurin Heights Baptist Church in Pearl, where Dr. Morgigno serves as a deacon and Adult 2 Sunday School Director.



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Good News You Can Use

Richland's holiday happenings in 2020

Special to The Richland News

The City of Richland recently announced that, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions for social gatherings set forth by Governor Reeves' current mask mandate, the following annual holiday events have been cancelled this year: Totally Locally Christmas Market, "Peace on Earth" Christmas Parade, The Exchange Club of Richland's Pancake Breakfast and the Christmas Open House.

However, there are plenty of local Christmas happenings Richland residents are encouraged to participate in. For starters, the City of Richland is assisting Santa this year by posting a "North Pole Express" mailbox at Richland City Hall. It will be accessible during regular business hours Monday through Friday. Letters placed in the mailbox by December 24 are guaranteed to make it into Santa's hands in time for Christmas 2020.

Also available at Richland City Hall



Special to The Richland News

(380 Scarbrough Street) is the Mississippi Artists' Guild art exhibit. The exhibit will be open to the public from November 16 to December 29, (Monday through Friday) from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with extended hours (until 6:30 p.m) on December 15. The display case is located inside City Hall at 380 Scarbrough Street. There is no cost to attend. Art will be available for purchase. Contact Stephanie Ward at 601-420-1530 for further details.

During the month of December, Richland Senior Center (RSC) is collecting socks and lap blankets for Plainview Assisted Living in Richland. Senior Adult Services Director Terri Wood explains that "so many of [Plainview resi-

dent's] loved ones have not been able to visit them, and we want them to feel special during this Holiday Season." Donations may be dropped off at RSC (371 Scarbrough Street) and will be accepted through December 18. Contact Wood at 601-420-3401 for further information.

Running December 7 through December 28 is the second annual "Christmas Trees on the Square." Businesses and organizations located on the Richland Town Square will be decorating their Christmas trees for public viewing. Contact Special Events Coordinator Barbara Adams 601-420-3402 for further details.

Richland's Toys for Tots drop off locations for 2020 are Richland City Hall and the Richland Community Center. Local residents interested in providing gifts to less fortunate children in the community may drop-off new, unwrapped toys in the collection boxes provided at these locations.

City offices will be closed for Christmas December 24 through 25, and December 31, through January 1, 2021, for New Years.

Richland police chief honored by Governor

Special to The Richland News

Governor Tate Reeves recently honored Richland Police Chief Russel James with the 2020 Excellence in Government Awards. The foundation of these awards is to encourage the development of innovative systems of public administration. In 2012, the Mississippi State Personnel Board established and presented the inaugural Mississippi Excellence in Government Awards program at the direction of the Mississippi Legislature.

As the recipient of the Excellence in Local and District Government, James has improved the Richland Police Department by creating a drug interdiction unit that seized massive amounts of illegal narcotics and currency, and

these proceeds were utilized to build a state-of-the-art training facility and new police department at no cost to taxpayers. He also created an award-winning Police K-9 division. Under his leadership, the police department implemented new technology initiatives, which led to the city collecting more than \$2 million in outstanding fines. Chief James also created a traffic division with motorcycles to assist with funeral processions and a unit to proactively pursue illicit drug users and dealers. He has served as the chief of police



Special to The Richland News

Pictured (l to r) are: Jeworski Mallett, Mississippi Department of Corrections; Governor Tate Reeves; and Police Chief Russel James, City of Richland.

for the City of Richland since 2002.

Also receiving the Excellence in State Government Award was Jeworski "Jay"

Mallett. Mallett is the deputy commissioner of institutions at Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC). Under his leadership, staff and inmates report an overall increase in positivity at MDOC.

"Each day, thousands of government employees provide quality services to all Mississippians," said Governor Reeves. "Today, we celebrate the achievement of two individuals that have demonstrated a commitment to their work and those they serve."

MSPB Executive Director Kelly Hardwick said, "This year's recipients demonstrate dedication to service, even in the most challenging times. It is an honor to join Governor Reeves in recognizing these outstanding individuals."



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Good News You Can Use

Florence High reclassifies to 5A for sports teams

By Andy Kanengiser

Florence High Eagles players, coaches and fans will notice schedule changes for their favorite sports teams starting next season.

The Mississippi High School Activities Association recently announced statewide reclassifications for 2021-23. The Eagles will move up to 5A ranks, a switch from 4A.

The move impacts Florence Eagles teams, including football, baseball, basketball, soccer and tennis.

With 732 students, Florence High will be one of the smallest schools in Mississippi's 5A ranks. West Harrison High in Gulfport is the biggest in 5A, with 1045 students, with 1037 enrolled at George County, the second largest. The Magnolia State's smallest 5A teams? Vancleave on the Gulf Coast and Laurel each enroll 709 students.

MHSAA changes always stir conver-



Florence High Eagles

Special to The Florence News

sations among high school coaches, players and school fan bases.

Florence High is no different.

Rod Davis, head coach for the Florence High Eagles, weighed in with his thoughts on the move.

"We are transitioning from one of the biggest 4A to one of the smallest 5A, which will be a challenge we look forward to," Davis said. "We will play in the toughest district in 5A. We understand what's in front of us won't be

easy."

MHSAA reclassifications are just another hurdle that schools like Florence High are ready to conquer next season. Mississippi schools, like their counterparts nationwide, are dealing with the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

"As true competitors, we embrace this challenge and are excited to get back to work after Thanksgiving. We can't wait," Davis said.

The 2021 Eagles football season will start off with a couple of familiar Florence foes, like Richland and Magee, before competing against a new lineup of teams in the 5A district.

Florence expects to battle 5A football squads like Natchez High, Hattiesburg, South Jones, Brookhaven, Wayne County and West Jones next season.

The new Florence schedule reminds Coach Davis of the one he faced as a player at Gulfport High School. "We look forward to competing against our new district."

Florence High Principal Tony Martin, parents, players, coaches and fans will all be cheering for Eagles student-athletes in 5A starting in August 2021.

The Eagles football team finished the 2020 season in 4A Region 5 with a 4-6 record. Highlights included two road wins: 51-44 in overtime against Forest, and a 24-8 triumph over Richland. The Eagles defeated Collins 21-8 at home.

Scouts continue community outreach during holidays

By Alexa Haik

According to Scoutmaster Todd Bridges, a vital part of being a member of Troop 85, Florence's local scout organization, is community outreach.

During the summer of 2020, and despite restrictions imposed by the ongoing pandemic, Troop 85 got creative in implementing service project ideas. These ideas included: a letter writing campaign for local nursing home residents who were unable to receive guests; a "feed the heroes" initiative for the staff of these nursing homes and a building project which included the construction of standing flowerbeds and gardens for Florence and Richland retirement homes.

Troop 85 also organized can drives for local church pantries, as Bridges explains, "because we know these local food pantries are about to be slammed



Special to The Florence News

Pictured (l to r) are: Maddox Spencer, Jason Rideout, Colson Spencer, Zach Rideout and Peyton Rideout.

if they aren't already slammed. We have people in need, so one of the things we stress at meetings is that we are scouts. We still have our responsibilities to take care of others, and that doesn't stop just because we are separate."

The holiday season has been no different for Troop 85 in regards to community outreach. On November 19, the cub scouts delivered almost 700 food items the pack collected for the Quest Community Church food bank in Florence. Lee Hester, Youth Pastor at Quest Community Church, had

this to say about the special delivery, "At Quest Community Church, we have a purpose, a calling, to love God and our neighbors!!! Boy Scouts Pack 85 joined us in that calling this week, when they provided our food pantry with over 600 food items. The items Pack 85 donated through their food drive efforts will help provide families throughout the

Florence community with needed food resources this holiday season. Thank you, Pack 85, for loving your neighbors!!!"

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, Troop 85 has not been able to organize the usual number of community service projects for Christmas 2020. They will continue service work with The Salvation Army by posting scouts as bell ringers at various locations throughout Richland, Florence and Pearl, including: Richland Walmart and Kroger on November 27 and 28, Ramey's in Florence and Sam's in Pearl on December 5, Richland Kroger and Walmart on December 12, and Ramey's in Florence and Richland Kroger on December 19.

See "Troop 85 community outreach, past and present" photospread on page #5.



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Jamison, Richland High's Teacher of the Year

Special to SW Rankin News

During the Junior High football celebration, Shannon Jamison was given flowers and many socially distanced admirations as she was honored with Teacher of the Year at Richland High School (RHS). Although Jamison explains, "I was in shock and at a loss for words," it was no surprise to the students or her colleagues that she received this recognition.

Jamison is a seventh-grade math teacher at RHS and is in her sixth year of teaching. She is known for her work ethic and "always being a team player" when collaborating with her department. She is looked upon as a mentor for many teachers instructionally, technologically, and relationally; if someone has a question, she is the one with the answer.

When Jamison first came to Richland, "she made herself a part of the community and built strong relationships with both students and faculty." She attributes much of this to her success in the classroom.

"I let them talk, share their thoughts, and I tell them I am always available to help and listen. I encourage my students every day, and I reward them for their hard work." She has a firm, yet warm



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Pictured with Jamison (standing, l to r) are: Assistant Principal Dr. Terrance McEwen, Assistant Principal Corey Yates, Principal Marcus Stewart, Assistant Principal Dr. Thomas Dudley and Jimmy Tullos.

demeanor towards her students, and it is the perfect balance.

Her passion as a teacher is evident. She works tirelessly on her craft, and is continually looking for ways to improve her instructional practice. When asked what sets her apart, administration commented, "She is awesome and deserves to be recognized over and over for the work she puts in at our school." It is for these reasons and many others that Jamison is RHS's Teacher of the Year.

Attention Pearl residents, the "North Pole is Calling"



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The Pearl Mayor's Youth Council is teaming up with Santa by working a direct phone line from the North Pole to make each child's holiday extra special. Pearl residents interested in participating are asked to visit www.cityofpearl.com/register-for-a-call-from-santa to complete the online form. Information needed by Santa's helpers includes: child's name or nickname; address; phone number; names and ages of siblings; child's hobbies; pets name and type; and Christmas gift requests. One form per child is required for registration.

Once the forms have been submitted, and contact information collected by a member of the North Pole team, each applicant will receive a call from Santa's workshop on Thursday, December 17, anywhere between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. The North Pole workers will attempt a call twice. Be aware that Caller ID may show "unknown" or "blocked." Parents are asked to ensure their child is available during this time. Eligible participants are Pearl residents ages ten and under.

The deadline to sign up is Monday, December 14. Contact the City of Pearl for further information at 601-932-2262 or city@cityofpearl.com.

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601-706-9237

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Publisher

Clay Mansell
claymansell@SWRankinNews.com

Editor in Chief

Stephanie Tracy

Managing Editor

Alexa Haik
news@swrankinnews.com

Sales Representatives

Clay Mansell
claymansell@SWRankinNews.com

Graphic Designer

Katie White
designer@SWRankinNews.com

Office Manager

Doris Bynum

Distribution

Ben Barnett

For submission information, email
news@SWRankinNews.com.

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William Caten	76	Florence, MS	10/31/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Steven "Steve" Evans	67	Florence, MS	10/31/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Larry W. Lowery	64	Pearl, MS	11/2/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Lester C. Wooster, Jr.	39	Florence, MS	11/6/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Kirby M. Wilson, Sr.	77	Richland, MS	11/8/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Brian "Chris" Ray	34	Brandon, MS	11/10/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
William "Bill" Oldham, Jr	63	Richland, MS	11/12/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Richard "Rick" Kale	70	Orange Beach, AL	11/11/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Jeffery "Jeff" Traylor	60	Florence, MS	11/13/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Wayne Bynum	74	Star, MS	11/13/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Jan Harrison Loflin	84	Star, MS	11/7/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Curtis "Eddie" Peeples	86	Florence, MS	11/16/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Dr. Lewis "Dale" Holloway	88	Florence, MS	11/16/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Clyde "Melvin" Gilmore	92	Florence, MS	11/19/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Nancy Morgan	73	Florence, MS	11/19/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Jean Walton	75	Richland, MS	11/20/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Clarence A. Little	86	Florence, MS	11/20/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Patricia Nance	74	Florence, MS	11/22/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Melinda Wright Jones	38	Richland, MS	11/25/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Marion Viberg	92	Flowood, MS	11/25/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Dennis Charles Ramage, Sr.	70	Florence, MS	11/26/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home
Thomas "Neville" Williams	83	Florence, MS	11/28/2020	Chancellor Funeral Home

Old Truths for Today

By J.T. Morgan



The Joy Of Christmas

Christmas has always been a special time of year, not in a religious sense, but a time for family and friends to share special time with one another. A real joy is to see the excitement of children as they open gifts. It is not like they have not received gifts during the year, but these gifts are different and have special meaning.

It is a time to stop and consider the blessings we have received and thank of those less fortunate. I especially enjoy the time spent with loved ones as we lay aside the cares and burdens of life and enjoy the company of one another.

It is a bitter-sweet time as well, remembering those in our family of the past who are no longer with us, and enjoying the family of the present.

Christmas is a time we bring the year to a close and look forward to a New Year looking ahead to other holiday times during the year that we can share time with family and friends.

It is this time of year that thoughts of Jesus' birth are upon the minds of millions of people around the world. Did you know that there is no mention in the Bible of the date that Jesus was born? In the Bible there is no reference to Christians celebrating the birth of Jesus as an annual observance. Paul expressed concern about observing days, months and years. (Gal. 4:9-11).

The Bible gives us information concerning the birth of Christ, however not the date of His birth. Note the following:

1. Birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:25; Lk. 2:1-7)
2. Visit of Shepherds... the same night (Lk. 2:8-20). It is evident it was not in the winter.
3. Jesus circumcision... 8 days old (Lk. 2:21)
4. Jesus' presentation (at least 40 days after birth) Lev. 12:2-6; Lk. 2:22-38)
5. Visit of the wise men (Matt. 2:1-12). Scripture does not tell us how many wise men there were.
6. Journey to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-15)
7. Male children killed by Herod (Matt. 2:16-18)
8. Return to Nazareth (Lk. 2:39; Matt. 2:19-23)

In place of a memorial set aside for honoring the birth of Jesus, God gave a memorial that we are to observe weekly as the Lord's Supper. In Revelation 1:10 it was observed on "the Lord's Day". The Bible (Acts 20:7) gives an example that on this day the early Christians came together to partake of the Lord's Supper. It was to be eaten by the Christians each first day of the week and should be so today. (See. 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Matt. 26:26-29). There are no other examples of Christians observing this supper at any other time, or on any other day.

Yes, we are thankful for the birth of Jesus and rejoice in that fact that He came into the world. More importantly is what Jesus did so that we may have the hope of eternal life.

Florence Church of Christ

P.O. Box 277, 220 White Street, Florence, Ms 39073

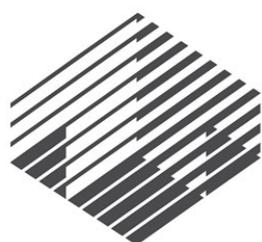
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Christmas 2020 with CMRLS

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All programs and activities scheduled with Central Mississippi Region Library System (CMRLS) this year continue online for the remainder of 2020. Programs vary between recorded materials to live online meetings and/or webinars. All programs allow opportunities to celebrate the holiday season in special ways. The online programming schedules are announced and updated regularly on CMRLS's online events calendar, Facebook page, and groups pages found at CMRLS.Libraries on Facebook. Past recorded books and activities are also available for viewing on the CMRLS Libraries YouTube Channel.

The December 2020 topics for Preschool Story Time, which is posted each Monday at 9 a.m. includes: Santa's Reindeer on December 14; Santa Claus on December 21; and Where in the World is the North Pole on December 28.

For the KiDS program, posted each Tuesday at noon, the topics include: Santa's Reindeer on December 8; Santa Claus on December 15; Where in the World is the North Pole? on December 22; and Let's Build a Snowman! on December 29.

The Teens and Tweens online programs for December include a month-long Take

and Make Craft activity. Running from December 1-31, Gingerbread House Make and Take Kits are available (as supplies last). Participants are encouraged to take the kits home, build their very own unique gingerbread house and bring a photo of the creation to a local CMRLS library location or post a picture on Facebook.

The December Adult CMRLS topics include: Christmas Snow Globe Soap Pump on December 10 and Twine Wrapped Christmas Tree Craft on December 17.



Special to SW Rankin News

Also available online via CMRLS is "Freegal Music" which provides Christmas music playlists, ranging from old standards to more contemporary favorites. Visit CMRLS.FreegalMusic.com for a complete list of holiday tunes.

All CMRLS Libraries will close at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, December 23, and remain closed Thursday and Friday, December 24 and 25, for the Christmas Holiday. Regular library hours will resume on Monday, December 28. Libraries will also close Thursday, December 31, and Friday, January 1, 2021, for the New Year's Holiday regular library hours will resume on Monday, January 4, 2021.

For more information contact Central Mississippi Regional Library System at 601-825-0100 or via Facebook.

PPSD dance teams named "Grand Champions"



Pictured (l to r) are, front row: Marah Ingram (coach), Alyssa Kate Morgigno, Ashton Spell, Emma Leighton Jones, Francesca Clark, Madison Temple and Victoria Douglas; middle row: Lindsay Butler, Zamiya Warner, Aleyah Mosley, Allyse Hayes, Saylor Foster, Katherine Roa and Rebekah Rambo; and back row: Naomi Neely, Layton Ward, Alaina Green, Charlotte Koenig (manager), Kayliegh Tarter, Jayden Neal and Kaitlyn Richardson.



Special to SW Rankin News

Pictured (l to r) are, front row: Claire Phillips, Megan Reed, Frankie Lockley, Kai Jenkins and Makayla Roberts; and back row: Destiny Harris, Anna Winston, Abby Grace Lewis, Baylee Hughes and Riley Reed.

Special to SW Rankin News

The Pearl Junior High School and Pearl High School (PHS) dance teams competed in the Deep South Spirit Blues Classic Competition on Sunday, November 15. The PJHS dance team

placed first in the Junior High Pom Division and were named the Grand Champions in Junior High Dance Overall. The PHS dance team placed first in the Varsity Pom and Gameday Divisions, and were named Grand Champions in Varsity Dance Overall.

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Troop 85 community outreach, past and present



Pictured is Maddox Spencer.



Pictured (l to r) are: Lee Hester and Jason Rideout.



Pictured (l to r) are: Maddox Spencer, Colson Spencer, Jason Rideout, Peyton Rideout, Je'Shawn Ayers and Patrick Payne.



Pictured (l to r) are: Lincoln Jones, Jana Len Jones, Davis McGehee.



Pictured (l to r) are: Erick Reyna and Ivan Reyna.



Pictured (l to r) are: Brandon Dang and Bryce Henderson.

Special to SW Rankin News

Troup 85 of Florence spreads holiday cheer through their efforts to give back to the local community. These efforts include bell ringing for The Salvation Army as well as donating food items

to local food pantries. This year, the cub scout pack delivered almost 700 food items collected for the Quest Community Church food bank in Florence. They plan on posting scouts at various locations throughout Richland and Florence during the month of December.



Pictured (l to r) are: Chandler Nash, Christopher Nash and Patin Nash.

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Pearl High swimmers win gold, silver, bronze

Special to SW Rankin News

At the State Swim Meet held recently in Tupelo, Pearl High School ninth-grader Michael Robinson won the gold medal in the fifty freestyle and the silver medal in the 100 butterfly. Eleventh-grader Matthew Robinson won the silver medal in the fifty freestyle and a bronze medal in the 100 freestyle.



Special to SW Rankin News

Pictured (l to r) are: Matthew Robinson and Michael Robinson.

Florence Dream prepares to make debut



Special to SW Rankin News

Pictured (l to r) are, front row: Shermera Mason, Taylor Thurman, Bree Leflore, Arianna Barnes, Kaleigh Chancellor; and back row: Faith Quick, Ahmya Norwood, Malayah Miller, Bria Spell, Keodriah Gore, Starr Amos. Not pictured Bailee Fuller.

By Maelee Starbuck

The Florence Lady Dream is exactly what the title claims: a dream team. The coaches push their players to not only learn and understand the game of basketball, but how to apply that same determined attitude towards their everyday life. Because of their relentless work ethic at the end of the Florence Dream's 2019-2020 season, people knew their name. They finished runner-up out of everyone in the City of Jackson Cartoon

League. This year, they plan to build a 12u and 14u team that will do nothing less.

"I'm super excited to see the continuous improvement as the girls continue to play basketball and develop a love for the game," Coach Norwood, head coach of the Florence Lady Dream, stated. The Florence Dream is getting ready to begin their new run for a championship.

For a chance to join the Florence Dream, or to submit a donation, contact Coach Norwood at the500@rcsd.ms.

LaFontaine honored as "Outstanding Administrator"

Special to SW Rankin News

Pearl Public School District (PPSD) Assistant Superintendent Kim LaFontaine was selected by Belhaven University School of Education as its 2019-2020 Outstanding Administrator awarded by the Mississippi Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. LaFontaine was honored in a virtual ceremony for her contribution to education in the state.



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Kim LaFontaine

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Annual tournament inspired by love

By Alexa Haik

Richland's "Kickin' Cancer Coed Kickball Tournament in Memory of Paige McLendon," held annually each fall, is organized by Richland High School alumni and husband/wife duo, Joseph and Virginia Miller. Planning begins each year as Virginia reaches out to the McLendon family (mainly Paige's sister Dawn McLendon-Frazier) regarding the tournament date and potential recipient; reserves the Richland Eastside Park's softball fields; and works with the city (Cole Smith, Guy Smith, Jeff Payne, Kristina Jordan, Tammy and Norm Morgan, Mr. Fred, and Terri Wood) to ensure fields are available and ready.

The promotions then begin. Virginia starts about a month before the date by posting on social media, personally messaging past participants, and encouraging all to form teams and/or to show up and join one. She then contacts Lynn Pearson in regard to concessions and her availability; she reaches out to sponsors for anything they can and are willing to contribute for the cause; she registers teams; collect rosters and entry fees (\$10 a player/\$100 a team), and distributes tournament rules. And if that is not enough, Virginia also lines up volunteers for refereeing/umpiring and for running the scoreboard, ordering trophies, scheduling games, and updating the bracket(s).

Her husband and children also lend a hand in almost every aspect of the McLendon tournament. They are not only responsible for ensuring that the WAKA kickballs are in good condition and purchase new ones if need be, they also handle the purchase and procurement of tournament trophies.

But it doesn't stop there, on the day of the event, the Miller family are on site to set up; direct teams to registration; collect registration fees and communicate any important information...the list goes on. As Virginia explains, "It's a family

affair, for sure."

The idea of a kickball tournament originated from benefit kickball tournaments Virginia and her friends had participated in the past.

"We so enjoyed the experience, especially knowing we were helping raise money for various causes. Unfortunately, the causes we used to support ended, but we started thinking why not bring it home. With the help of volunteer referees/umpires, the balls, the cost of trophies, and the support of the city, we thought the tournament would be relatively inexpensive to host, and with all proceeds going to a cause - why not?"

Unfortunately, the idea literally hit home in a way they never imagined after Richland High School alumnae and friend, Paige McLendon, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2014. She was a mother of two, Taylor and Abbie Keith, as well as a Richland High School alumna.

"Of course, we did not hesitate to do what we could to help her and her family raise as much as possible to help alleviate some of the burden so many face in regard to treatment, medical bills, and other expenses," explains Virginia. McLendon and her family helped encourage others to take part. Virginia adds that "though I'm sure it was hard for her, she never showed it, not even when she would make an appearance to thank those participating in the first few tournaments we hosted in her honor."

McLendon courageously fought the good fight but sadly lost her battle against cancer December 1, 2015.

Because so many were inspired by her story and the tournament continued to draw teams eager to participate, the event organizers decided, with the family's blessing, to continue the Kickin' Cancer Coed Kickball Tournament in Memory of Paige McLendon to raise funds for other families fighting their own battles.

The tournament continues to grow -



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Paige McLendon

the seventh annual tournament was just recently held, and many of the players return year after year. Many who started in the youth division now form their own teams in the adult division. The "Costumes for a Cause" contest was later added to the tournament, allowing each team to participate in a team costume contest.

"From the ever-committed GI Joes (Captain Joe Wood) to the true in blue and multi-year reigning champions the Rubber Busters (Captains Christian Whitfield and Marshall Kranz), we love the dynamic that brings to the tournament, especially for those that get really creative. The winning team is always awarded with a certificate and usually some type of sponsor-related treat," says Virginia.

The tournament benefits not only Richland but the surrounding areas. Teams have come from all over Rankin County and even beyond. They have hosted youth, teen, and adult divisions,

as all ages are welcome. Local sponsors are dedicated to helping the cause each year with donations and gift certificates for volunteers and winners. Volunteer Lynn Pearson runs concessions for the tournament, with the help of some of her friends. There are committed volunteer referees/umpires like David McGowan, who selflessly gives of his time each year. The tournament also offer students community service hours for helping out by making runs to the sponsors, setting up tents, and various other opportunities such as running the scoreboard alongside volunteer Kristi Robinson. Monies raised from each event goes to a person, hand selected by the McLendon family, on the need and willingness to accept the funds.

Anyone who is fighting his or her own battle against cancer is eligible to receive funds from this annual event. From fellow church members to patients in and around the community, several have been selected and offered the contributions.

The tournament is typically held during 49 Fest, which allows a larger draw for participation, bringing more awareness to the community, more business to local vendors, and more opportunities to get involved. Unfortunately, this year with restrictions imposed by COVID-19, and the cancellation of 49 Fest and other things "2020," the tournament continued on as planned, as a reminder "that there are still those fighting their own battles against cancer and in need of support."

Virginia, speaking about previous year fund recipients, provided this update:

"Florence native Josh Sexton was "kickin'" cancer. He was the first recipient after Paige and her family; Josh may have lost his arm to cancer but never his amazing spirit. He is in remission last I heard and living in Dallas, Georgia, with his parents Wil and Alishia and big brother Caden. Richland High School

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Annual tournament inspired by love

continued from page 7

graduate and prom queen Tara Williams was another recipient; again, good news . . . she is in remission, has a seventeen-month-old son named Brayden and is in her second semester of nursing school at Hinds Community College. Tommy Hudson's family was the recipient in; he passed not too long after the tournament, but his family was very appreciative for all those who reached out and helped in every way. Though Brandy Hudson says, 'It's still hard at times,' she added, 'they are doing good for the most part.' Richland Elementary School teacher Mrs. Elizabeth Allen was last year's recipient; she was genuinely grateful and says she's been doing well and added, "I am proud to say that I have paid [it] forward several times and will continue, and that really is what it is all about and all I could ever hope for the future of the tournament. This year's recipient was seven-year-old June Goodson of Florence. This sweet girl is fighting cancer for the second time; she recently had a couple hospital stays for chemo for a couple of weeks. It was difficult for her, but she is feeling a lot better. Her counts are extremely low right

now and could possibly drop more but she was at least at home and feeling well this past week."

Virginia ends with this thought: "We hope to continue to see the tournament grow. It's a great opportunity for people of all ages to come together for a good cause not only to raise a little money for someone fighting their own battle against cancer - something that if it doesn't affect us directly, we all know of someone it has - but it hopefully helps all involved realize the importance of 'paying it forward' and knowing how truly blessed so many of us are to be healthy enough to have the opportunity."

For anyone interested in being a potential recipient or who may know of someone who could benefit from this annual fundraising event, he or she may email m1llerfundraising@yahoo.com and/or reach out to a member of the McLendon or Frazier family for consideration.

For more information, visit Kickin' Cancer Coed Kickball Tournament in Memory of Paige McLendon on Facebook at or on Instagram at [kickincancercoedkickball4paige](https://www.facebook.com/kickincancercoedkickball4paige) or email m1llerfundraising@yahoo.com.

MBS requests plasma donations

Special to SW Rankin News

Starting in spring 2020, Mississippi Blood Services (MBS) began collecting convalescent plasma from recovered COVID-19 donors to be used in the potential treatment of seriously ill patients. COVID-19 Convalescent Plasma (CCP) is plasma from donors who have fully recovered from COVID-19 and possibly have antibodies in their plasma that can attack the virus. CCP is being used as a treatment option for patients with serious COVID-19 symptoms.

To provide convalescent plasma, donors must be eligible to donate blood and meet the criteria below:

Prior diagnosis of COVID-19, doc-

umented by a laboratory test or positive antibody test; symptom-free for fourteen days prior to donation and if female, either no history of pregnancy or negative for HLA (human leukocyte antigen) antibodies.

The tests are performed by MBS at no charge. Once approved for CCP

donations, Mississippi Blood Services will contact donors to schedule their donations. Donations can only be made

at the specified CCP donation facility in Flowood.

Potential donors may contact Noreen Haley at (601)368-2692 or by emailing nhaley@msblood.com.

Mississippi Blood Services is NOT testing for COVID-19.



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4th Annual "Kick or Treat" Soccer Tournament winners announced



U16 11v11 Champions: RFC Revolution and Coach Virginia Miller.



U16 3v3 Champions: Beachin' Ballers.



U16 3v3 Finalists: Orange You Jealous.



U6 Silver Finalists: FYSA MonSTARS and Coach Hebert.



U6 Future Stars - Bronze Finalists: RFC Lil' Heroes and Coaches Brooke Perkins and Kim Harrell.



U6 Gold Champions/Best Dressed Honorable Mention: NWRRA Zombies and Coaches Buford and Brooks.



U8 Silver Finalists: RFC Thunder and Coach Andy Pepper.



Best Dressed Champions: FYSA Raptors and Coach Snell.



U8 Gold Champions: FYSA and Coach Neely.



Best Trunk or Treat Champions: NWRRA Zombies. Not pictured are the U16 11v11 Finalists: Ole Brook Soccer Club and Coaches Jimbo Williams and Dustin Bairfield.

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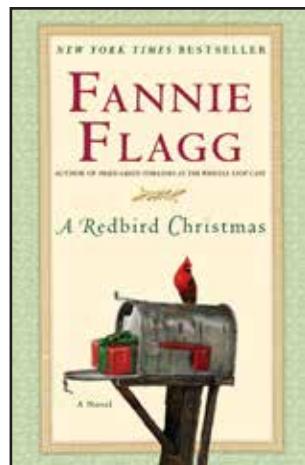
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December book report from Friends of the Richland Library

By Beth Woodmansee

Fannie Flagg's little book, *A Redbird Christmas*, is a story about second chances and to fully understand, we have to begin in Chicago in a doctor's office on a cold, blustery day in November. Fifty-one year old Oswald T. Campbell has just had his physical, and the doctor is giving him bad news. His lungs are in bad shape, and he has only a few months to live. If he can move to a warmer climate, he might be able to last another year—possibly two. The doctor gives him an old brochure on a health resort in south Alabama, a place called Lost River. When Oswald arrives at his tiny apartment, he reads the brochure and makes a few calls. An orphan and divorced with no children, he thinks no one will care one way or another, and Lost River seems as good a place as any to die. Oswald arrives in Lost River a week later and rents a room with three meals a day from Betty Kitchens.



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Oswald meets his new neighbors: Mildred in her lime-green pantsuit and her sister, Frances Clevendon, who brings him a large welcome basket filled with delicious home-made foods. There's the post-mistress, Dottie Nivens, who learns the only mail Oswald gets is one disability check each month. He becomes friends with Claude Underwood, a master fisherman who is out on the river every day. Oswald goes along with him at times and develops an interest in bird watching.

The book is also about a small town,

a little girl and a redbird. That's where Roy Grimmet comes in. He owns Grimmet's Grocery, the only nearby grocery store. Two years earlier, he rescued a baby redbird and raised it after some boys from the backwoods shot it out of the nest. He named the bird, "Jack," and taught him to do tricks. Even though Jack's injured wing kept him from flying more than a few feet, Jack thrived in Roy's care and became the "Star" of the store.

One day, Roy spotted a little girl peeking through a window watching Jack. She came every day but ran away if she saw Roy watching her. In time, Roy managed to entice her into the store, and, from that day on, the little girl, who said her name was "Patsy" spent hours in the store playing with Jack. However, something was wrong with Patsy; her little body was twisted, and one leg dragged behind her and she looked as if no cared for her.

The folks of Lost River raised money

so Patsy could have three surgeries to correct her physical deformities, but Patsy had a setback in her physical therapy and returned to Lost River. All Christmas Day, Oswald's second Christmas in Lost River, Patsy was hopelessly sad because she believed Jack had flown away and she'd never see him again; but, on the morning of December 26, Patsy and everyone else woke up to see snow falling. Now, snow in Lost River is really unusual; however, hundreds of redbirds also flew down into the town and stayed all day! One redbird landed outside Patsy's window ledge, and he winked at her! She was wildly happy, because she believed Jack had come back just to see her. No longer grieving for Jack, Patsy went back to the hospital, had her final surgery and worked hard on her therapy. There are other second chances in *A Redbird Christmas*. Request a copy at your local library, and enjoy every word for yourself. Merry Christmas and Merry Readings!

MSSPAN Feral Cat Fund in need of donations

Special to SW Rankin News

Mississippi Spay and Neuter's (MSSPAN) Feral Cat Fund assists Good Samaritans who capture feral (wild, un-socialized) cats and deliver them to the Big Fix Clinic in Richland for spay or neuter. Each cat also receives a rabies vaccine for \$10 and an ear-tip to signify that they have been altered. Because the cost of surgery can be a financial hurdle for caregivers of feral cats in addition to the cost of food, shelter and other health expenses, the surgery is offered for \$10. Some caregivers have literally brought in hundreds of cats throughout the years. Without financial assistance, they would never be able to make such a huge impact in the lives of feral cats and the state of animal homelessness in the local community.

Each year, the Big Fix Clinic sees more than 1,300 feral cats and spends over

\$58,000 to spay and neuter them. Though this price tag may seem steep, the impact is huge—spay/neuter is the most affordable and humane way to control the homeless cat population.

In fact, Mississippi Spay and Neuter was founded in 2005 because feral cats were considered unadoptable and were often euthanized.

MSSPAN's late founder, Elaine Adair, worked with Lockheed Martin's Hurricane Hunters on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. One day, she found a feral cat and a litter of kittens in an airplane hanger. She trapped them and did what she thought one was supposed to do with stray animals - she brought them to the



Special to SW Rankin News

local animal shelter so they could be adopted. Later on, she called the shelter to see how they were doing. To her horror, she discovered that they had all been eu-

thvanized because they were feral.

Addair realized that there had to be a better way to solve animal homelessness. She made it her life's mission to save animals through prevention. She took an early retirement from her job and dove into spay/neuter head first. Her passion for spay/neuter and her experience with feral cats propelled Mississippi Spay and Neuter forward. To date, the organization has fixed and subsidized over 90,000 cats and dogs in Mississippi, preventing mil-

lions of homeless, suffering animals in our state.

Adult feral cats are rarely able to be socialized, so their chances of being happy in a home are slim. The best option we can give feral cats is to ensure their health and safety, provide them with food, and spay/neuter to prevent more homeless cats in the future.

Mississippi Spay and Neuter's goal this holiday season is to raise \$5,000- enough to fix around 100 feral cats and prevent the births of countless more.

In addition to monetary donations, local residents can provide assistance by: posting photos and stories about the feral cats they care for and/or trap the feral cats in their community and schedule an appointment to have them spayed or neutered.

Call MSSPAN's clinic at 601-420-2438 for further information.





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FHS students awarded High School Heisman



Kayla Allen



Jarren Sanford

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Two students from Florence High School were awarded the High School Heisman for the 2020-21 school year. Each year, the Heisman Foundation honors students that excel academically, in their chosen athletic fields, and establish themselves as community leaders.

Kayla Allen, a senior member of the Florence Varsity Dance Team, is the daughter of Richie and Joy Allen. Allen has been involved in competitive dance since a young age and has spent several years as a member of the Collaborates Competition Team at Studio Sole Dance. She has been with the varsity squad at Florence High for four years. In this time, she was elected as a co-captain in her sophomore year and served as captain for her junior and senior years. She has been named an All-American by the Universal Dance Association (UDA) for three consecutive years as well as received special awards for leadership and technique from UDA. Allen has maintained a 4.0 grade point average throughout high school and has been enrolled in both advanced placement and dual-credit coursework. Allen is also a member of the Florence High School Medical Science Academy and the Beta Club.

Christian Athletes.

Jarren Sanford, a senior punter for the Florence Eagles Football Team, is the son of Todd and Denise Sanford. Sanford has competed on a state and national level through Ray Guy Kicking Camps and is ranked a 4.5 star punter. He is currently ranked nineteen nationally for high school punters. Sanford was ranked as the top punter in Mississippi's 4A division for the 2019-20 season. Sanford has maintained a 4.0 grade point average throughout high school and has been enrolled in advanced, college-preparatory course load. He is also a member of the Florence High School Fellowship of

Updates from the Richland-Florence Garden Club



Special to SW Rankin News

Some of the members at a recent Richland-Florence Garden Club meeting.

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The Richland-Florence Garden Club (RFGC) held their November meeting outside at the Probity Contracting Building in Florence. The speaker for the month was Gaynell Ainsworth, Vice President of RFGC. She spoke on her heritage garden and how many of her flowers have been passed down from generations of her family. Several members added their own stories of plants received from family and friends and how special they are.

Elizabeth Hawthorne shared her ginger plant and gave tips for its' growth and care. Teenie Boone provided a recipe to make a sycamore bark tea to prevent poison ivy rash and a recipe to help prevent seasonal flu. It consists of green

tea, honey, and lemon.

RFGC's upcoming project for December is filling "Cinderella Bags," for the Center of Violence Prevention. They will be given to victims of human trafficking and others in need of support and love.

Members present were Gaynell Ainsworth, Teenie Boone, Scottie Boyanton, Susie Gullede, Susan Harrison, Elizabeth Hawthorne, Beverly Hemphill, Debbie Knight, Shannon Lasetter, Doris McBride, Glenda Scoggins, Minetta Veazy, Shirley Wilson, and Lynn Wynne

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