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# SWRANKIN NEWS

Vol. 11, No. 02 | February 2026

The Pearl News

THE RICHLAND NEWS

THE FLORENCE NEWS

## Siemens Energy adding \$300M Pearl facility and up to 300 new jobs

Special to The Pearl News

As part of a \$1 billion investment by Siemens Energy in its U.S. manufacturing operations, the company is investing up to \$300 million and creating up to three hundred new advanced manufacturing jobs to through an expansion in Rankin County. Siemens Energy is a global energy technology leader that operates across the full energy landscape.

The company is constructing a new manufacturing facility at the West Rankin Industrial Park in Pearl to produce electrical grid components, increasing its existing production capacity in Rankin County. Siemens Energy's new facility will be its second in Rankin County; its Richland location began operations in 1973.

"Siemens Energy's decision to expand in Rankin County reflects the confidence global energy leaders have in the state," said Governor Tate Reeves. "Companies continue to choose Mississippi because projects get done - from site readiness and infrastructure to timelines they can rely on. This \$300 million investment will bring almost three hundred new jobs to Rankin County, expand the local industrial base and keep Mississippi competitive in a rapidly evolving global energy market. I appreciate Siemens Energy's continued investment and its role in building momentum into 2026."

"The equipment that Siemens Energy makes in Mis-



Special to SW Rankin News

Siemens Energy, which is planning to build a new manufacturing facility in Pearl, is a global energy technology leader that operates across the full energy landscape.

sissippi is in high demand throughout the United States as we build out the electrical grid to deliver more power to homes and business that need it," said Matt Neal, President of North America, Siemens Energy. "Siemens Energy is going to manufacture more high-voltage switchgear here, and our continued success in this state will require hiring and training more workers."

The Mississippi Development Authority is providing assistance through the Mississippi Flexible Tax Incentive, or MFLEX, program. MDA also is providing assistance for infrastructure improvements. The City of Pearl, Rankin County, Rankin First Economic Development Authority, Entergy and AccelerateMS, in part-

nership with Hinds Community College, are assisting with the project, as well.

"Today marks a transformative milestone for the City of Pearl and the hardworking families of Rankin County and across central Mississippi," said Pearl Mayor Jake Windham. "By choosing the West Rankin Industrial Park for their newest state-of-the-art facility, Siemens Energy is investing in our community's future. Siemens Energy has been a critical member of Rankin County for over fifty years, and this investment further expands that partnership into the City of Pearl."

"This project stands as one of the largest job creation announcements in our county's history, bringing hundreds of highly skilled manufacturing roles to our community," continued Reeves. "We are proud to support the global energy leader right here in Pearl, proving that our workforce is ready to power the next generation of American infrastructure."

Siemens Energy's history in the United States dates back to the 1880s, when the company began early electrification activities and opened its first U.S. manufacturing site in Pittsburgh in 1887. Siemens Energy was spun off to become a separately listed energy technology company from Siemens AG in 2020 and now operates as fully independent.

For more information about the company, visit [siemens-energy.com](http://siemens-energy.com).

## The Center for Violence Prevention recognizes Angel Award Winners

Special to The Pearl News

Mississippi's Center for Violence Prevention (MCPV) is now in its thirty-fifth year working on behalf of victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and/or human trafficking. Each year since 2011, The Center has presented awards to the people who have gone above and beyond to meet the primary goals of the agency: victim safety, offender accountability and public awareness. Seventeen were awarded in 2026, including Heather Collins, John Burt, Tim Sarrett and Trey Spillman of Rankin County.

"Our agency is truly a community agency, and we're grateful beyond measure for the commitment these individuals have demonstrated to the victims we serve," said Center Director Sandy Middleton. "The good people of Mississippi expect justice for victims of crime, and it takes all of us to make that happen. While our focus is taking care of victims, we love and appreciate that each of these individuals do their part."

Special Agent Heather Collins, a native of Pearl, has served in law enforcement since 2015. She originally joined the Special Victims Unit as an analyst who was essential in helping locate and recover child victims, as well as help gather evidence to convict traffickers. Collins currently serves the State of Mississippi as a human



Photo by Susie A. Wolfe

Mississippi's Center for Violence Prevention (MCPV) works on behalf of victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or human trafficking. On January 21, 2026, they recognized seventeen "angels" at the State Capitol, including Heather Collins, John Burt, Tim Sarrett, and Trey Spillman of Rankin County.

trafficking investigator with the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation's Special Victim's Unit. She is a passionate advocate for missing and exploited children.

Assistant Chief of Criminal Investigations John Burt began serving law enforcement as a reserve officer for the Pearl Police Department, later a patrol officer. Eventually, Burt joined investigations, where he specialized in felony domestic violence and sex-

ual assault crimes. He joined the Rankin County Sheriff's Office in 2021, where he focused on investigating crimes against children. In 2024, Burt was appointed to the Sexual Assault Evidence Accountability Task Force by the Mississippi Sheriff's Association. His passion and commitment to justice for victims of interpersonal violence is invaluable to the citizens of Rankin County and CVP.

Tim Sarrett, director of security at the Outlets of Mississippi, has served in public safety for more than forty-one years. He is a veteran of the Mississippi National Guard and the Pearl Police Department. He has facilitated CVP's Batterer Intervention Program for more than sixteen years. His steadfast commitment to changing the lives of families impacted by domestic violence is unmatched.

Trey Spillman serves as the Rankin County Prosecuting Attorney. He has served as Rankin County's child support attorney. He was recently asked to serve as a member of the statewide Mississippi Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team. His work is critical to the collaborative efforts of advocates, law enforcement and the service providers who work daily to support victims and families.

For more information, follow The Center for Violence Prevention on Facebook, or Twitter and Instagram @ msc4vp, and on their website at [www.msc4vp.org](http://www.msc4vp.org).



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## Richland Rec Center hosts Great Southern Gun and Knife Show

By Susie A. Wolfe

The Great Southern Gun and Knife Show (GSG) was held February 7-8 at the Richland Parks and Recreation Center.

"We are honored that Shawn Bean, Great Southern Gun and Knife Show show director, choose the City of Richland as their home for hosting this grand event," said Kristina Jordan, who serves as operations manager for Richland Parks and Recreation.

"We are beyond excited to have the GSG coming to Richland," said Jordan. "GSG, LLC has been in business for over forty years and has become a time-honored tradition for many gun owners in the metro area. This event provides the perfect opportuni-



Special to The Richland News

Great Southern Gun and Knife Shows have been in business for over forty years and have recently begun using the Richland Parks and Recreation Center as the location for their shows.

ty for local residents and individuals from surrounding areas to come buy, sell or trade firearms in a safe, secure environment."

Show organizers said they welcomed both long-term supporters and new attendees to the new venue and said the City of Richland local officials and facility staff were welcoming, supportive and enthusiastic about hosting.

Great Southern Gun and Knife Shows invite the public to bring their gun and trade for the gun they've always wanted, offering tables of new and old guns, knives, ammo, gun parts, reloading supplies, holsters and other related products. The Show advocates high ethical standards of firearms.



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## Florence Police Department to receive \$500,000 in technology funds

Special to The Florence News

U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith recently announced the benefits for Mississippi included in the FY2026 Commerce, Justice, and Science (CJS) Appropriations Bill, which was passed by the Senate on Thursday, January 15. The bill now heads to President Trump for his consideration.

Hyde-Smith, who serves on the Senate Appropriations Committee, said the CJS funding bill will support law enforcement, economic development, scientific research and other national priorities. The City of Florence Public Safety Technology and Equipment Upgrades in the amount of \$500,000 were included in the line items. They plan to purchase new body cameras and body armor, as well as car radar and car computers.

"We filed a compelling proposal to the office of Senator Hyde-Smith to address these needed additions and upgrades to the department," said Florence Alderman Mason Herrin.

"Senator Hyde-Smith was successful in includ-



Photo by Susie A. Wolfe

*Florence Police Chief Brad Burns said his police department is excited about getting new body cameras and body armor, as well as car radar and car computers in the next near future.*

ing our request as part of the FY2026 CJS appropriations bill. I am pleased to announce that,

as of this afternoon [January 15], the Senate has passed this legislation with overwhelming support."

A release on the bill stated that the enactment of this three-bill package will mean Congress has approved six of the twelve annual appropriations bills for FY2026. HR.6938 spends \$10 billion less than if these agencies were funded under a continuing resolution. Congress had until January 30 to act on the remaining FY2026 funding bills before the current resolution expires.

"As a result, the City of Florence Police Department will soon receive \$500,000 in federal funding to support these technology and equipment upgrades," Herrin said. "It is important to note that this grant is a 0% match, meaning the City of Florence does not have to exhaust any general funds associated with the receipt of these grant funds."

Florence Mayor Trey Gunn said that his office received notification in late January that they will be getting funds starting in four to six weeks. The money will be spent on body and car cameras, radar, and computers for police cars.

## Spartan Homes talks with Board of Aldermen about opening in Florence

By Susie A. Wolfe

Spartan Homes CEO Charles Stricklin met with the Florence Board of Aldermen in January to discuss possibly opening its headquarters and a dealership in Florence. They are looking at the property next to A-1 Gears & Audio on Highway 49, according to Florence Mayor Trey Gunn.

"The \$10 million expected investment would be a big boost to Florence," said the Mayor. "Though nothing is signed, they were talking about moving by July 2026."

Spartan Homes currently has locations in Summerville, Alabama, and Meridian and Gulfport, Mississippi, where they sell manufactured and modular homes. They also do business in



Special to The Florence News

*Spartan Homes is planning to open its headquarters and a dealership on Highway 49 in Florence this summer. The Board would welcome the \$10 million expected investment to the area.*

Florida and Louisiana.

Meridian General Manager Brant McCrory said that Florence is a good community that is growing in the right direction and would be a good fit for the Spartan business. After meeting the Florence Board, he said he feels they would be great to work with.



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# Your Capitol update: Key bills advancing in the 2026 session



By Senator Brian Rhodes, State Senator, Mississippi District 36

The legislative session is moving at a steady pace, and several bills have now cleared committee and are awaiting consideration by the full Senate. With the committee deadline of February 3 approaching [as of press time], lawmakers are continuing to work through hundreds of proposals. The following are a few measures that may be of particular interest to the public.

One bill, **SB 2259**, would require local governments to livestream their public meetings. This proposal is intended to improve transparency and provide citizens with greater access to local decision-making, even when they are unable to attend meetings in person.

Another measure, **SB 2613**, would create a Tier 5 Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) Fund within the Mississippi Public Employees' Retirement System. The purpose of this fund is to help the state plan ahead for future COLA payments for Tier 5 employees.

Agriculture and forestry are also addressed in **SB 2272**, which would eliminate the current 1.5% sales tax on large agricultural and logging equipment, reducing the rate to zero. Supporters

note that this change would bring Mississippi in line with most other states and provide financial relief to farmers and loggers who depend on high-cost equipment to operate.

Several education-related bills are also advancing. **SB 2099** would require public school districts to adopt policies limiting or prohibiting student cell phone use during the school day, with the goal of reducing classroom distractions and improving learning environments. **SB 2292** would ensure that students receive civics instruction as part of a course before graduation, helping prepare them for informed citizenship.

At the postsecondary level, **SB 2344** would require a financial literacy course for college graduation, aiming to better equip young adults with practical money management skills.

In the area of local governance, **SB 2071** would authorize school boards to vote on whether to provide health insurance for board members using local funds.

Public safety is addressed in **SB 2126**, which

would prohibit individuals convicted of violent or sexual crimes from legally changing their names.

Another proposal receiving attention is **SB 2614**, commonly referred to as the sheriff's radar bill. This legislation would allow counties to use radar for speed enforcement based on a population-based scale. Counties with populations over 110,000 could operate up to five radar devices with a unanimous vote of the board of supervisors. The bill expressly prohibits ticket quotas, and any revenue from speeding citations would be directed to driver's education funds rather than a county's general fund.



These measures represent only a small portion of the legislation currently under consideration. With many more committee meetings scheduled before the February 3 deadline, this remains a busy and productive session at the Capitol.

It is truly an honor to serve the people of District 36. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to represent you. I am working hard each day to reflect your views and priorities as these, and many other issues come before the Legislature.

## SWRANKIN NEWS

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## SENIOR SPOTLIGHT Deb Addington



By Guest Columnist Stacy Smith,  
Director, Pearl Senior Center

Deb Addington is a powerful example of how senior adults continue to lead, serve and make a meaningful impact in their communities. As a senior adult herself, Deb demonstrates daily that purpose, engagement and passion do not fade with age — they flourish.

Since joining the Pearl Senior Center team in 2020 as program coordinator, Deb has helped shape programs that enrich quality of life for fellow seniors. She coordinates speakers for monthly luncheons, Brunch and Learns, and Lunch and Learns; secures sponsors for Bingo and special activities such as Gobble Wobbles and the Mayor's Wellness Field Day; and leads popular programs like Armchair Travel, where seniors "visit" other countries and explore different cultures together. She also organizes a monthly craft that encourages creativity, connection and fun.

Deb's approach to her work is inspired by Psalm 92:14, which reminds us that "even in old age, we can still bear fruit and stay fresh and green." As a senior adult herself, Deb enjoys planning programs that reflect this promise — helping seniors remain active, en-



Special to SW Rankin News

Deb Addington enjoys planning programs that encourage creativity, connection and fun. Through her service, she continues to enhance quality of life at the Pearl Senior Center and proves that impact doesn't stop with age — it grows stronger.

gaged and joyful. Through her service, she continues to enhance the quality of life at the Pearl Senior Center and proves that impact doesn't stop with age — it grows stronger.

For more information about these or other events curated by Pearl Senior Services, contact Senior Services Director Stacy Smith at 601-863-3229, or visit the Pearl Senior Center at 110 Valentour Road in Pearl.

# Middleton named Pearl Police Officer of the Month

Special to SW Rankin News

Officer Charles "Hayden" Middleton was selected as the Pearl Police Department (PPD) Officer of the Month for January. Middleton began his service with Pearl PD in September 2024 and successfully graduated from Mississippi Law Enforcement Officers Training Academy on December 19, 2024.

"In just a short time, he has already demonstrated exceptional dedication, initiative and attention to detail," said Police Chief Nick McLendon. "Officer Middleton is being recognized for his outstanding work on a suspicious person call that could have been easily overlooked. Instead of just taking the call at face value, Officer Middleton took the initiative to investigate further, applying sound judgement and strong investigative instincts. His actions ultimately led to the discov-



Special to SW Rankin News

*Officer Hayden Middleton was recognized for "outstanding work on a suspicious person call that could have been easily overlooked. Instead of just taking the call at face value, Officer Middleton took the initiative to investigate further, applying sound judgement and strong investigative instincts." His actions ultimately led to the discovery of criminal activity that expanded into a multi-million-dollar case at the federal level.*

ery of criminal activity that expanded into a multi-million-dollar case at the federal level. The outcome reflects Officer Middleton's commitment to thorough police work and his understanding of the broader impact local law enforcement can have."

"Officer Middleton's professionalism, work ethic and willingness to go above and beyond expectations make him a valuable asset to the PPD and a deserving recipient of the Officer of the Month award," continued McLendon.

Outside of his professional achievements, Middleton is also preparing for an important milestone in his personal life, as he will be getting married in March and is purchasing his first home.

The Pearl Chamber of Commerce recognized Officer Middleton with a certificate and a number of gifts and gift cards.

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## Old Truths for Today

J. T. Morgan



**The View of Athens by Paul**  
Text: Acts 17:16-34

Nearly every day the news networks are involved in showing the troubles that many of our cities are having. Stores have been looted, cars burned and many times the law enforcement stands by and watches. There are battles between protesters and Federal law enforcement while the leaders of the states and cities lend no helping hand. Perhaps it would be good to look at a city through the eyes of Paul.

Jews from Thessalonica had followed Paul to Berea and stirred up the people against Paul. He fled from Berea and went to Athens. Here he was waiting for Silas and Timothy. In Acts 17:16-17 we see the city of Athens as viewed by Paul.

He saw a city without God, but not without gods. They were given over to idolatry. This is true in many of our schools today. God has been rejected not only in schools but in religion as a whole. While men may not build idols like those in Athens, they have made gods of their own. The question in Athens is not whether they would have a god, but whether they would have the true and living God, or substitute a god of their own making. Many today are faced with the same question. Many think that we have outgrown the old-fashioned idea of needing the God of the Bible. Paul finds the city of Athens full of idolatry. Any city will be full of something. If it is not filled with the fulness of God it will be filled with all kinds of substitutes for God. The problem is idols cannot satisfy. Just look at the cities where the problems exist and you can see and feel the emptiness that exists. We see cities filled with prosperity and poverty at the same time along with corruption by the leaders and streets filled with crime.

Paul saw a city of intellectual learning and culture. While no longer had its notables such as Socrates and Plato, it still had its intellectuals. But with all the culture and learning, it had its idols and one to "an unknown god". Athens was very religious, but it was an agnostic religion. Their religion was the "God is dead" kind. Their intellectual learning and culture had carried them only to a dead end.

Paul saw a city in need of a divine revelation. Because Paul was an inspired man, with an inspired revelation, he could declare unto them the God that they needed (Acts 17:23,30). Paul was able to start where all the intellectuals of Athens had to stop. This was because Paul could offer to them the true and living God that came only through revelation. All the learning of Athens had not been able to find the one true God that Paul knew and preached. What was true of Athens then is true of our cities today where multitudes are trying to rid of our one means of knowing God. The intellectuals of our day try to discredit the Bible and the result is what we see on the news feeds of our day.

Here is the heart of our problem today: men reject the Bible, God and Christ because they do not want to submit to the moral pressure exerted in the Bible. Today we find watered down preaching, Bible perversions, and religion that is no more than a social club. The progress of our day has simply carried us back to Athens, a city of learning and ignorance.

Florence church of Christ-220 White Street -Florence, MS 39073  
Mailing Address: 219 Morrison Road  
You are invited to come worship with us.



# From the Pearl Boardroom: January Business

SW Rankin News

The Pearl Board of Aldermen met twice in January. The January 20 meeting included the naming of two City employees who were honored for their good work: Employee of the Month Hunter Stewart, who works at the golf course, and Police Officer of the Month Charles "Hayden" Middleton.

The Board of Aldermen approved the Consent Agenda, with all items under the heading considered to be approved with one motion and one vote. If further discussion is desired on any item on the Consent Agenda, it is automatically be removed from the Consent Agenda and will be considered as a general business item.

The meeting's Consent Agenda included approval/corrections of Minutes of the Regular Meeting, January 6, 2026, approval of the claims docket for January 6 to January 20, 2026, approval of applications, and approval of authorization to travel.

The Board also approved authorization of the Annual Software Maintenance Agreement for 2026, in the amount of \$15,985, between the City of Pearl and BBI, Inc.

The Board accepted the proposal of Community Bank for the term of four years for the for The City of Pearl Wa-

ter and Sewer Fund, The City of Pearl Water & Sewer Fund #2 and The City of Pearl Customer Meter Refund. Aldermen also accepted the proposal of Priority One Bank for the term of four years as the city depository for all other accounts that are currently on deposit with Priority One Bank.

Aldermen authorized payment to Axon Enterprises in the amount of \$79,266 for four LPR cameras for the intersection of El Dorado and East Metro Parkway, as well as payment to Suncoast Infrastructure in the amount of \$25,254.44 for the Citywide Sewer project and final payment to Suncoast Construction in the amount of \$181,042.68 for the Citywide Sewer project.

The Board approved payments to the Pickering Firms for work on the Sewer Project and Sanitary of \$7,050 for the Citywide Sewer project, \$25,370 for the SE Sanitary Phase II project, \$5,445 for the Raised Medians Project, and \$12,410.63 for the Concourse Drive Extension project.

Payment to Thornton Construction in the amount of \$110,048 for the Southeast Sanitary Phase II project was also approved.

The Board authorized the application for the FY27 Police Traffic Service Grant and the FY27 Impaired Driving Grant with the Mississippi Office of

Highway Safety.

The Board approved police officers identified on the proposed part-time work schedule for January 2026, to use of the official Pearl Police Department uniform and official Pearl Police Department duty weapon.

Aldermen approved the purchase of equipment to outfit a Dodge Durango from Direct Auto in the amount of \$34,440 to be paid from Drug Seizure Funds. Two quotes were received.

The Board approved the request by Rankin First Economic Development Authority for a Dimensional Variance to allow a 125' maximum height building - instead of the allowed 35' maximum height building - on property Parcel Numbers F7-9, F7-11, F8-1, F8-3 and F8-3-20.

A Resolution was adopted to adjudicate the cost of cleaning of properties and assess the costs against said properties on the list.

A public hearing was held to consider a request by Vernon McFarland for a dimensional variance to build a 1,700 square foot house instead of the required 2,000 square feet at 255 Lagail Drive. The Board tabled McFarland's request until the next Board meeting, to give him time to update his site plan.

Brandon and Denise Cornelius asked for a conditional use permit to allow them to operate a church at 417 North

Bierdeman Road. The Board approved Fire Church's use, as long as they do not have more than three hundred people per service in 10,000 square feet, per the fire code.

Joseph McFarland sought a dimensional variance to allow a 2,054 square foot house at 622 Eldorado Road instead of the required 2,500 square feet. The Board tabled the request due to the resident still deciding what he wants to do; he may not need a variance at all.

Public hearings were also held to determine whether or not certain parcels of real property are in such a condition or state as to be unsightly and un-kept or otherwise a menace to the public health and safety of the community.

No one was present to represent 1310 Lee Street, owned by Wendy Lane Netherland. The Board agreed that the owner has 45 days to remove the trailer on the property, or it will be demolished by the City, with costs billed to the owner.

For the parcel owned by Elizabeth I. Bardwell at 171 North Foxhall Road, which is in such a condition or state as to be unsightly and un-kept or otherwise a menace to the public health and safety of the community, the Board gave the owner until February 1 to clean it up, or it will be cleaned up the next day by the City, with costs billed to the owner.



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## Stewart named Pearl's January Employee of the Month

Special to The SW Rankin News

Hunter Stewart is January's City of Pearl Employee of the Month. Stewart is the Pro Shop Manager at the Pearl Municipal Golf Course, where he has worked for four years.

"He is the first person that you see when you enter the Pro Shop, and he always has a smile. He is very knowledgeable and helpful and goes out of his way to make everyone feel welcome," said Mayor Jake Windham.

Stewart sets the tee times, oversees the scheduling, and stocks all of the supplies. Parks and Recreation Director Scooter Myers presented him with a certificate of appreciation and thanked him for his work ethic and dependability. Mayor Jake Windham complimented Stewart for his great attitude and willingness to do whatever needs to be done.

Kathy Deer with the Pearl Chamber presented him gifts from local businesses.



Special to SW Rankin News

*Hunter Stewart, Pro Shop Manager at the Pearl Municipal Golf Course, is January's City of Pearl Employee of the Month.*

## Five PPSD teachers earn National Board Certification



Special to SW Rankin News

*During the January Pearl Public School District Board meeting, five outstanding educators were recognized for earning their National Board Certification. Pictured with PPSS Superintendent Chris Chism (l to r), are: Emily Williams, Pearl Upper Elementary; Emily Brewer, Pearl Upper Elementary; Brandye Moore, Northside Elementary; Vashti Graham, Pearl Junior High School; and Jenny Shippard, Pearl High School.*



Lisa & Stanley Hayman  
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## Spelling Bee champs named



Special to SW Rankin News

The 2026 Spelling Bee winners pictured (l to r) are: Zoya Allahi of Northwest Rankin Middle School, Second Runner-Up; Brynn Stingley of McLaurin Elementary, Champion; and Malachi Jackson of Richland Upper Elementary, Runner-Up.

Special to SW Rankin News

Students from across Rankin County competed in the 2026 Rankin County Spelling Bee on Friday, January 16. Participants secured their spots by placing first or second in their school-level competition.

The Rankin County School District recognized Brynn Stingley of McLaurin Elementary as the Champion of the 2026 Rankin County Spelling Bee.

Malachi Jackson of Richland Upper Elementary was named Runner-Up, and Zoya Allahi of Northwest Rankin Middle School earned the title of Second Runner-Up.

All three Rankin County School District students will advance to the Mississippi Scripps Spelling Bee Semi-Finals.

## Obituaries

NAME	AGE	CITY	DOD	FUNERAL HOME
Angela Garriga Nicholson	55y	Jackson, MS	12/01/2025	Chancellor FH
Barbara Marie Westerfield	90y	Florence, MS	01/01/2025	Chancellor FH
Angela Dawn Walters	48y	Laurel, MS	01/02/2025	Chancellor FH
Jeanette Smith	86y	Braxton, MS	01/05/2025	Chancellor FH
Daniel R. Scallions	71y	Florence, MS	01/05/2025	Chancellor FH
Edward "Tony" Blackwell	70y	Florence, MS	01/06/2025	Chancellor FH
David Allen Mann	68y	Richland, MS	01/08/2025	Chancellor FH
Dorothy Taylor Warner	72y	Braxton, MS	01/09/2025	Chancellor FH
Major (Ret.) David Russell Peacock	86y	Florence, MS	01/13/2025	Chancellor FH
Carole Gammill Moore	82y	Byram, MS	01/15/2025	Chancellor FH
Tina Melton Price	60y	Crystal Springs, MS	01/14/2025	Chancellor FH
Dewayne Siegel	78y	Crystal Springs, MS	01/18/2025	Chancellor FH
Lalry Wayne Shelley	87y	Florence, MS	01/20/2025	Chancellor FH

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## FHS Eagle Battalion places second at Drill Competition



Special to SW Rankin News

Florence High School (FHS) Eagle Battalion finished second overall out of nineteen schools at the State All Service Drill Competition at The University of Southern Mississippi in January.

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# Richland Senior Center has activities for every senior adult



Special to SW Rankin News

The Wednesday Line Dance Class, led by volunteers Carolyn and Buddy Ham, is pictured (l to r), front row: Buddy Ham, Carolyn Ham, Darlene May, Susan LaFleur, Donna Frizzell, Shirley Wilson, Scottie Boyanton, Mary Rankin and Kathy Odom; and back row: Mickey Hampton, Jerry Sayers, Curt Thompson, Sharon Stanley, Gaylyn Pleasant, activities coordinator Amy Matthews, and director Shea Thames.



By Guest Columnist Shea Thames,  
Richland Senior Services Director

The Richland Senior Center is a senior-dedicated facility for residents aged fifty-five and older, offering a vibrant hub for social connection, health and recreation. Our purpose is to serve the senior citizens of the City of Richland and surrounding communities by providing daily activities, monthly programs, luncheons and trips designed to enhance the quality of life for seniors in a safe environment. The Richland Senior Center presently has fifteen Seniors who volunteer to lead, fostering an environment of community involvement and independence.

For anyone interested in staying moving, fit and active, we suggest Ruth's Strength and Stretch, led by

Ruth Gullette; Line Dancing, led by Carolyn and Buddy Ham; and DancerCize, led by Don Powell. If arts and crafts appeal to you, we suggest Acrylic Art Painting with Louise McLendon; Crochet led by Barbara Adams; or Coffee and Crafts, inspired by our Seniors.

For Seniors looking to deepen their spiritual walk, knowledge or healing, we suggest a Men's Breakfast, led by seven of our Senior volunteers; a Women's Brunch, led by Becky Brown; or our Grief Support Group, led by Reverend Barbara Taylor. Several other opportunities to stay engaged, active and entertained function each day, week and month. The Richland Rec Center has Senior-dedicated times each week for Senior Walk and Senior Pickleball!

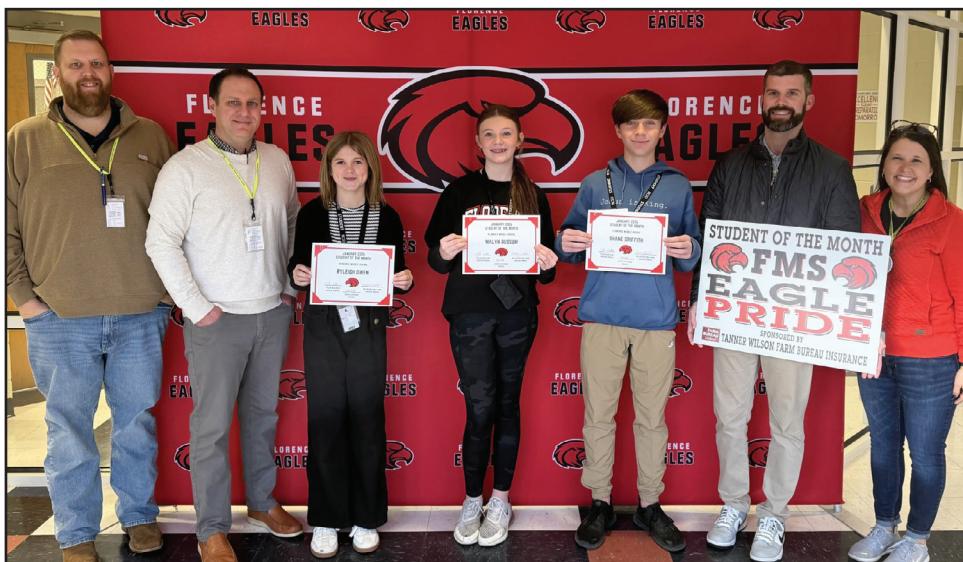
We also have groups that are open to play cards and other games each month, such as Bunco, Pokeno, and Dominoes, and every single Tuesday is Game Day, where any Senior is welcome to come and join in on

the fun. In addition, we offer, with our sponsors, informational settings including Lunch and Learns, Brunch and Learns, Information Hours and a Book Club.

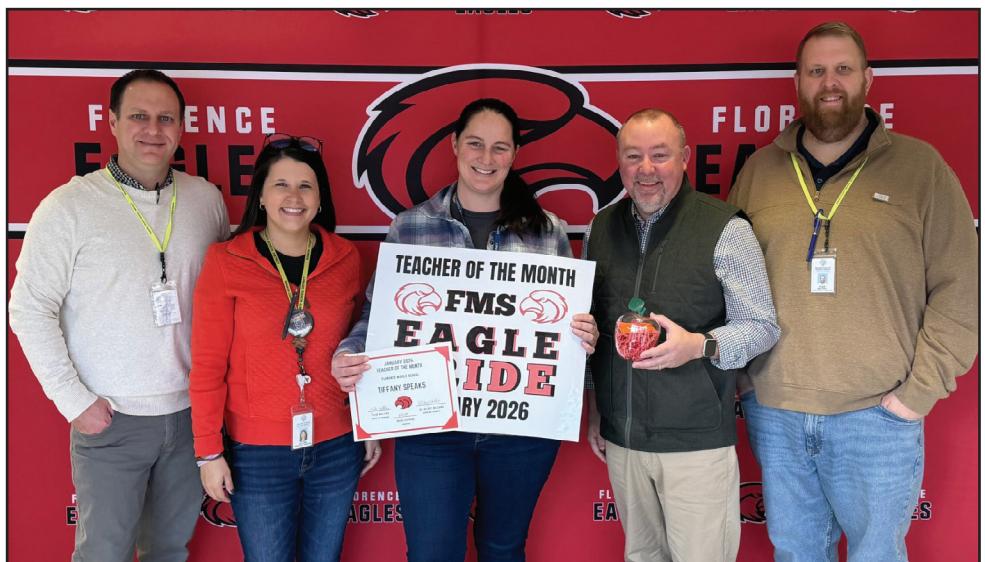
Come and see us. We would be blessed to have you and ensure we will find something for you to enjoy!

The Senior Center is located in the heart of Richland Square at 371 Scarbrough Street and is open to the public Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Day-to-day operations and activities are managed by Director Shea Thames, Activities Coordinator Amy Matthews and Administrative Receptionist Pam Gregory. The City of Richland funds the Senior program, and several local and surrounding community businesses offer support by sponsoring individual activities and programs, too. There is no cost or city residential requirement to participate in activities and events as a member of The Richland Senior Center.

## Florence Middle School names January Eagles of the Month



Florence Middle School (FMS) recently named its January Students of the Month. Pictured (l to r) are: Tyler Walters, FMS Assistant Principal; Brock Sistrunk, FMS Principal; Ryleigh Owen, Sixth Grade Student of the Month; Malyn Russum, Seventh Grade Student of the Month; Shane Griffith, Eighth Grade Student of the Month; Tanner Wilson of Farm Bureau Insurance, Student of the Month Sponsor; and Dr. Kelsey Williams, FMS Assistant Principal.



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Florence Middle School has named its Teacher of the Month for January. Pictured (l to r) are: Brock Sistrunk, FMS Principal; Dr. Kelsey Williams, FMS Assistant Principal; Tiffany Speaks, Teacher of the Month; Representative Lance Varner, Teacher/Staff Recognition Sponsor; and Tyler Walters, FMS Assistant Principal.

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## Florentine Club donates books in memory of Jeannie Pittman



Susie A. Wolfe

Members of the Morning Florentine Club in Florence pictured (l to r) are: Betty Harpe, president; Bill Pittman, husband of Jeannie Pittman; Charlotte Young; CJ Applewhite; Taralah Rios, library director; Dee Payne, Secretary/Treasurer; Judy Webb; Mary Alice Hydrick; and Dianne Roberts.

By Susie A. Wolfe

Long-time Morning Florentine Club member Jeannie Pittman passed away on August 22, 2025. Her friends in the Club decided to donate three sets of Dr. Suess' books to remember her. They made the presentation to Florence Library Director Taralah Rios on January 15, 2026, with Pittman's husband of sixty-two years, Bill, present.

The fifteen members of the Morning Florentine Club shared fond memories

of their dear friend who loved books and reading. There is also an evening Florentine Club for those who work during the day.

"She loved kids the most, having worked with the school system," said Dee Payne, the Club secretary-treasurer. "The library put a remembrance card in the front of each book that children will enjoy for years to come."

Her friends also reported they had great memories of Pittman's chicken and dumplings and Italian Cream Cake.

## PJHS Beta and Technology students hand out Hero Bags



Special to SW Rankin News

The Pearl Junior High School (PJHS) Beta Club and Technology Student Association members spent the month of December collecting supplies and assembling Holiday Hero Bags to show appreciation for Pearl first responders. Each bag included hot chocolate, candy canes, a thank-you note and an ornament. Before their holiday break, members of the leadership team helped deliver the bags to the Pearl fire stations and police department.

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NEWS

# Plants with colorful leaves make gardens always shine



By Guest Columnist  
Eddie Smith, MSU  
Extension Service

I love reminding gardeners that flowers aren't the only way to add color to the landscape. Some of the most dependable color comes from plants with bold, beautiful foliage.

Whether you're gardening in full sun, deep shade, or somewhere in between, colorful leaves can make your garden shine all year long.

Let's start with Syngonium Neon, often called the pink arrowhead plant.

This gorgeous plant brings a soft, rosy glow wherever I use it. Its bright pink leaves have a subtle metallic sheen that catches the eye.

I've had great success growing Syngonium Neon in bright, indirect light, but it also performs well in lower-light areas, making it ideal for porches, patios and indoor garden spaces. Outdoors, place it in filtered shade where it is protected from harsh afternoon sun.

Syngonium prefers well-drained

potting mix and evenly moist soil, but

not soggy roots. Water when the top

inch of soil begins to dry. During the



growing season, feed it lightly with a balanced, water-soluble fertilizer every few weeks.

This plant appreciates humidity, which makes it especially happy in our Southern climate or when grown near other plants. If stems start to stretch, simply pinch it back to encourage a fuller, more compact shape.

If I'm looking to brighten a shady area, the Blondie fern is hard to beat.

Fern fronds emerge a brilliant golden yellow and hold their color beautifully, especially in filtered shade or morning sun. Too much direct afternoon sun can scorch the foliage, so always give this fern some protection.

Blondie fern thrives in moist, well-

drained soil rich in organic matter. Consistent moisture is key, as ferns don't like to dry out completely. Mulch around the base helps retain soil moisture and keeps the roots cool, especially during hot Southern summers.

This fern benefits from regular watering and occasional feeding with a gentle, slow-release fertilizer.

The soft texture and glowing color of the Blondie fern make it a standout in woodland gardens, shaded beds and containers.

For sunny landscapes, Duranta



Photos by MSU Extension/Eddie Smith

erecta Golden Edge delivers bold, long-lasting color.

Its leaves are edged in chartreuse to golden yellow, creating a vivid contrast against the deep green centers. Full sun really brings out the

brightest color and keeps the plant compact and dense.

Golden Edge duranta thrives in well-drained soil and is surprisingly tough once established. It appreciates regular watering during its first growing season and then becomes quite drought-tolerant over time.

Prune it occasionally to maintain its shape and encourage fresh, colorful growth. Golden Edge duranta responds well to light fertilization during the growing season. In our Southern heat, it shines as a hedge, accent shrub or large container plant, and it holds up beautifully through summer.

As you consider plants to add to your garden spaces, consider plants that shine with their foliage. Long after the flowers have faded, these plants with colorful leaves continue to carry the landscape, adding beauty, texture and personality through every season.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Dr. Eddie Smith is a gardening specialist and Pearl River County coordinator with the Mississippi State University Extension Service. He is also host of the popular "Southern Gardening" television program.



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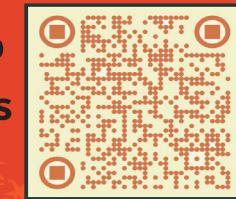
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# Florence Elementary named a PBIS Model Site School



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Florence Elementary is now a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Tier 1 (PBIS) Model Site School. Through PBIS, the Rankin County School Board school will proactively teach, model and reinforce positive behaviors, helping reduce discipline issues and improve student success. The Florence District says it is proud of the Florence Elementary community for making positive behavior and student growth a top priority. Eleven other RCSD schools are designated as PBIS schools. The district operates twenty-eight schools in total, meaning nearly forty percent of campuses have reached this distinction. Richland HS is a designated MDE School of Innovation and serves as one of the eleven model sites.

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## Distinguished Young Women named for Rankin and Copiah counties

Special to The SW Rankin News

High school junior girls from across Rankin County joined together in Flowood for the Distinguished Young Women of Rankin County program on Saturday, January 31, 2026, at Jackson Prep, along with the Hinds County and Madison County DYW programs. Participants competed for college scholarships and the opportunity to represent Rankin County at the Distinguished Young Women of Mississippi program. The title for



Mary Grace Tomlinson of Florence High School was named Rankin County's 2027 Distinguished Young Woman.

2026-27 was conferred upon Mary Grace Tomlinson, a student at Florence High School.

Maylee Gilmer from Florence High School was last year's Distinguished Young Woman of Rankin County. Through both the local and state programs, Gilmer received \$5,500 in scholarships and cash prizes. The fourteen young women competing were evaluated by a



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Pictured (l to r) are DYW Rankin award winners: Second Alternate Avery Martin (Florence High School); Rankin County's 2027 DYW, Self-Expression and Scholastic winner Mary Grace Tomlinson (Florence High School); First Alternate and Talent winner Mary Yates (Florence High School); Third Alternate and Spirit of DYW winner Laura Keegan Stegall (Park Place Christian Academy); Spirit of DYW winner Alli Webb (McLaurin High School); Essay winner Madelyn Dear (Pearl High School); Fitness winner Mary-Lynn Brannan (Richland High School); and Rankin County's 2026 DYW Maylee Gilmer (Florence High School).

panel of five judges in the following categories: Scholastics (25%), Interview (25%), Talent (20%), Fitness (15%) and Self-Expression (15%).

Tomlinson will advance to the state level at the Distinguished Young Women of Mississippi program, which will be held this summer from July 16 to 18 in Meridian, where she will join with other representatives from across Mississippi in competing for cash scholarships and the opportunity to represent the program at the Distinguished Young Woman of

America program.

Distinguished Young Women of Rankin County included the following participants: Mary-Lynn Brannan, Richland High School; Madelyn Dear, Pearl High School; Jayne Riley Edwards, Hartfield Academy; Avery Martin, Florence High School; Sarah Mukoro, homeschooled in Pearl; Elliott Neal, Pearl High School; Laura Keegan Stegall, Park Place Christian Academy; Macie Ray Tagert, Richland High School; Kiersten Thompson, Richland High School; Mary Grace Tomlinson, Florence High School;

Mary Haddox Tucker, Hartfield Academy; Mary Yates, Florence High School; and Alli Webb, McLaurin High School.

Rankin County DYW also hosted MaKinlee Fallin as an At-Large participant from Copiah County. She is a resident of Crystal Springs and attends Richland High School. The Mississippi At-Large Program supports the DYW mission by allowing participants who live in an area without a local program to join nearby programs, giving them a full DYW experience and better preparation for potential advancement to the state level.

At-Large participants are evaluated in the same way as local participants. Scores are submitted to the State Program, and Fallin qualified



MaKinlee Fallin of Crystal Springs, a student at Richland High School, will advance to the state-level competition in July. She was named DYW of Copiah County.

to advance to the state program this summer.

For more information on Distinguished Young Women of Rankin County, contact Jamie Higdon, co-chairperson, at 601-906-7534 or [rankin@distinguishedyw.org](mailto:rankin@distinguishedyw.org).

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## Pearl Community Theatre receives awards at Mississippi Theatre Festival



Special to The Pearl News

Pictured (l to r) are: Shamera Brumfield, Sarah Brumfield, Bryce Palmer-Huff, Emily Miller, Caroline Christmas, Sasha Clarke and Sydnee Tapley. Brumfield, Palmer-Huff, Miller, Clarke and Tapley serve as board members for Pearl Community Theatre. Christmas is the stage manager for Every Brilliant Thing, PCT's entry in the community theatre competition at the MTA conference.

By Susie A. Wolfe

Pearl Community Theatre (PCT) was recently recognized with awards at the Mississippi Theatre Association (MTA) Festival in January. They received Runner-up for Best Community Theatre Production for Every Brilliant Thing, their entry in the community theatre competition at the MTA conference.

The group's secretary, Monte Montgomery, also received Outstanding Achievement in Acting.

"We do not take this lightly, as Theatre in Mississippi is some of the best in the country," said Harriet Matthews, PCT founding member. "We're just very proud of our community theatre.

Last year, we won first place and went to the Southeastern Theatre Conference in Baltimore to represent our state. This year, we were runners up for the state prize. More than that, we're happy to offer quality live entertainment to Pearl and all of Rankin County and the surrounding Metro Area."

The Pearl High School Theatre Department also received second place in the secondary division.

"Many of their actors have graced PCT productions, and we are so thrilled to have the theatre in our community recognized in so many ways! Thank you to all our actors, board members, supporters and MTA for a great weekend of theatre," said Matthews.

## From the Florence Boardroom

By Florence Mayor Trey Gunn

Florence continues to move forward, and I want to take a moment to share a few updates on what's happening around our city. Everything we do is focused on taking care of our residents, planning wisely and preserving the small-town feel that makes Florence such a great place to live.

One of the biggest changes we've made is bringing our water and sewer services in-house. After nearly twelve years of contracting with M.S.I., Florence now has its own Water and Sewer Department. This allows us to be more hands-on, respond more quickly to issues and be more accountable to you. We believe this will lead to better service for our residents and savings over time.

We're also continuing to work on plans to improve infrastructure across the city. This includes expanding sewer lines in key areas and preparing to drill a new water well. These projects are important for maintaining a reliable water supply, protecting public health and making sure Florence is ready for future growth.



Public safety remains a top priority. In the coming weeks, you'll see six new police vehicles added to our fleet. These vehicles will help ensure our officers have dependable equipment and maintain a strong, visible presence in our community.

I'm grateful for the hard work of our Board of Aldermen and our City employees, who care deeply about Florence and the people who live here. As our city grows, we remain committed to smart planning, responsible spending, and keeping Florence the welcoming, close-knit community we all value.

## SWRANKIN NEWS



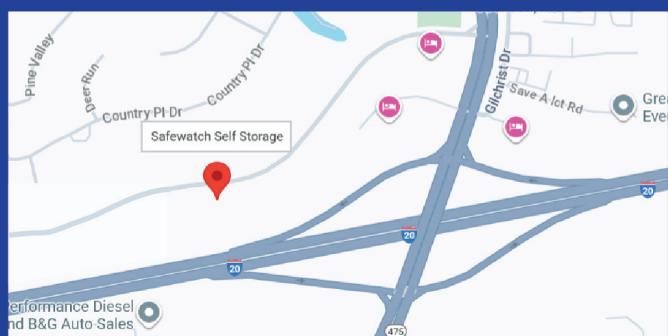
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# Paranormal investigators seek to prove ghosts inhabit a Florence house

By Susie A. Wolfe

Alice Jackson is a typical Southern woman living in a quiet neighborhood house in the outskirts of town. She noticed unusual situations as they were building the house in 1990 in the small Mississippi town of Florence, population 4,866.

Jackson still lives in the house but doesn't spend the night there. She sleeps in another part of town.

The "ghost house" in the small town is called one of the most haunted houses in America and has had two documentaries filmed about it, *The House In Between* in 2020 and *The House In Between 2* in 2022. Local TV Journalist Walt Grayson with WJTV-TV has done a segment of his series, "Look Around Mississippi," on the house that is said to have proven paranormal activity. In 2024, *Unexplained Cases* reported that the house is "very haunted."

There is a lot of interest in paranormal and ghosts, said Jackson, which is why she says she partnered with paranormal investigator Brad Cooney, who has helped set up cameras and other devices like ground penetrating radar to catch and measure paranormal activity twenty-four hours a day. He also arranges tours of the "Haunted House," since there is so much interest.

"We first found things missing when we were building it in 1990," said Jackson. "Before, it was just a field with wildflowers that our neighbor Erin Brown-Smith, a Rankin County history teacher, researched to find had once been a plantation, with the slave quarters where the house was built."

Once the house was finished, Jackson said the whispers, voices, footsteps, lights going on and off, loud sounds, balls rolling down the stairs, music coming from the piano with no one there, and the chandelier turning sideways began, all unexpected and unexplained.

So Jackson let the psychics and paranormal experts examine the house, and they heard and taped these things happening in her house.

Cooney said the house has a different energy.

"There is something there."

John Bullard has worked with Jackson for eighteen years since 2008, utilizing his equipment to capture voices of adults and children. They determined that there were indeed once slave quarters behind the house where people may have died and been buried.

The investigators tried to communicate with the "spirits" or "energies" and have had documented results. They ask: "Do you want to be found?" They report that all seem friendly except the "fierce" man in the back bedroom. The researchers found he likes to intimidate guests. They said that a man and woman seem to always be there, but others seem to come and go.

Jackson doesn't stay at the house anymore, saying



Photos by Susie A. Wolfe

The "ghost house" on White Road in Florence is called one of the most haunted houses in America, and two documentaries, as well as television segments, have been filmed about the normal-looking home.



there are too many odd things that were just too upsetting and frightening - strange light anomalies mostly, back then. She says one that "was just the last straw looked like a bright column of light that you could see through, but, at the same time, it didn't illuminate the dark room around it."

"I do think it's the land and not the house itself," said Bullard. "But there are definitely some intelligent spirits here, for sure."

Bullard says he uses the term "intelligent" because he's been able to suggest things to be done, and, sooner or later, those things happen - like moving objects or dolls falling over. He says most of the movements happen when nobody is there in the middle of the night. Bullard said it is one of the most active houses he's ever investigated anywhere.

"Basically, if I want to come out and test new technology, this is the location I come to do it at," said Bullard.

Things have changed over the last thirty-six years. The house has become well known nationally in paranormal circles, and Alice Jackson is still seeking answers about the spirits there and how to communicate with them. The more famous the house has become, the more she knows there are answers to be found there.



There is a lot of interest in paranormal and ghosts, said house owner Alice Jackson, which is why she partnered with paranormal investigators Brad Cooney and John Bullard, who set up cameras and other devices to catch and measure paranormal activity on the stairs and around the house twenty-four hours a day. Pictured are John Bullard (front) and Brad Cooney and Alice Jackson (back).

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## Reed named MHS Artist of the Month



Special to SW Rankin News

Kaydann Reed was named McLaurin High School (MHS) Art Department's Artist of the Month for December. Mrs. Heard said that Reed arrives early ready to work, works to her full potential, and even has time to be a peer tutor to her surrounding classmates. She is a member of MHS' volleyball, basketball, softball, track, and ROAR media. Her artist statement says she enjoys art because it allows her to show her creative side and be able to show a colorful side. It also allows her to meet new people and see a different side of them. Reed received art supplies, candy, and, in May, she will have the opportunity to win "The Golden Paintbrush Award."

## Richland-Florence GC makes fairy gardens



Special to SW Rankin News

Pictured (l to r), are: January speaker Donna Beliech and Richland-Florence Garden Club Vice President Gaynell Ainsworth, standing in front of the display of multiple examples of fairy container gardens. The Club will be making their own fairy garden soon.

## Sills provides tables



Special to SW Rankin News

Florence High School junior Riley Sills recently completed an Eagle Scout project with Group 85, mostly consisting of Florence High School students and his dad, Kevin Sills. Together, they installed four new picnic tables and refurbished five tables near the concession stand at Eagle's Stadium. School officials say that Sills also serves as a "versatile offensive lineman [who] excels in football and powerlifting."

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## RUE students win Spelling Bee for their grade level



Special to SW Rankin News

The Richland Upper Elementary (RUE) Spelling Bee winners for their grade pictured (l to r) are: Jordan Zainz, third grade; Brileigh Doster, fourth grade; Yaz Al Ziyadi, fifth grade; and Malachi Jackson, sixth grade; with RUE Librarian Amanda Wooton. Brileigh Doster and Malachi Jackson went on to compete at the district level, with Jackson winning second place at the district level.

## South Rankin Rotary Club recognizes Grimes contribution



Special to SW Rankin News

The South Rankin Rotary Club presented Eddie and Sherri Grimes with the PolioPlus Society pin and certificate, recognizing their dedicated support of Rotary's top humanitarian priority: the global eradication of polio. The PolioPlus Society celebrates Rotarians and friends of The Rotary Foundation who commit to contributing a minimum of \$100 annually to the PolioPlus Fund until the world is certified polio-free. Club leaders say the Grimes' commitment exemplifies Rotary's core value of Service Above Self. Pictured (l to r) are: Sherri Grimes, secretary; Eddie Grimes, club service chair; and Bradley Bianca, club president.

## OhhMy! Gifts and Things celebrates sixteen years with community event

By Susie A. Wolfe

OhhMy! Gifts and Things, LLC, a locally-owned boutique in downtown Florence, celebrated its sixteenth anniversary on Saturday, February 7, 2026, with a "Sweet Sixteen" community appreciation event.

The come-and-go open house began at 10 a.m. and was open to the public. The celebration focused on faith, gratitude and community — values that the owners say have guided the boutique since opening its doors sixteen years ago.

Guests were invited to enjoy light refreshments, enter a special anniversary giveaway and participate in a memory wall sharing notes and well-wishes for the next sixteen years. A brief kickoff with prayer was held in the morning, followed by a cake-cutting.

Owner Karen Forkin says the milestone is less about the number of years and more about the people who made them possible.

"Sixteen years in business is a blessing," Forkin said. "This store has always been about relationships, community and supporting one another. We wanted to take time to say thank you."

OhhMy! Gifts and Things, LLC, spe-



Special to SW Rankin News

OhhMy! Gifts and Things celebrated its sixteenth anniversary on Saturday, February 7.

cializes in unique gifts, women's apparel and locally-made items, while also supporting area artisans and small businesses.

For more information, visit the store in Florence at 103 East Main Street, or follow OhhMy! Gifts and Things on social media.



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