

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

enHance Member Profile: Rankin County School District- pg. 4

Hunters offered raffle chance for Chronic Wasting Disease samples - pg. 12

SWRANKIN NEWS

Good News You Can Use

Vol. 7, No. 1 | January 2022

The Pearl News

THE NEWS
RICHLAND

THE FLORENCE NEWS

Pearl selects 2021-2022 Teacher of the Year

Special to The Pearl News

Pearl Public School District (PPSD) recently announced that Melissa Parks, a Northside Elementary School (PNE) teacher, has been selected as the 2021-2022 Teacher of the Year.

Annually, PPSD participates in the Teacher of the Year program sponsored by the Mississippi Department of Education. This program honors the outstanding accomplishments of public school teachers across the state.

Five educators representing each school in the district are selected as "best-of-the-best." In 2021, the list included: Pearl Lower Elementary Teacher of the Year Leslie Poe; Pearl Upper Elementary Teacher of the Year Shannon Traweek; Pearl Junior High School Teacher of the Year Ginny Hobby; and

Northside Elementary Teacher of the Year Melissa Parks.

From those five, the 2021-2022 PPSD Teacher of the Year was selected by a panel consisting of educators and lay people from outside the district who evaluate each teachers' application packets and conduct personal interviews.

Parks is a third-grade math teacher at PNE in her ninth year of teaching. She has a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Elementary Education from Mississippi State University. Parks says that, "Being a teacher, to me, is not just about teaching. It's about making connections with children and giving them a reason to want to come to school and learn."

When asked to describe Parks, Dr. Nikki Graham, PNE principal, said, "Melissa Parks loves teaching! When you walk into her room, it is evident that teaching



Special to The Pearl News

Pictured (l to r) are Cedric Graham, PPSD Assistant Superintendent; Dr. Kim LaFontaine, PPSD Assistant Superintendent; Dr. Nikki Graham, Northside Principal; Melissa Parks; Dr. Raymond Morgigno, PPSD Superintendent; Dr. Laurin Bailey, Northside Assistant Principal; and Melissa Lewis, Northside Assistant Principal.

is her calling and that no amount of testing will ever take that love away. Her students are always engaged in whatever the lesson is. Her students are learning and having fun while doing so. Melissa

Parks is a blessing to PPSD and to the Northside family."

Parks will go on to represent PPSD in the Mississippi Teacher of the Year Program.

Barbie Bassett to speak at Pearl Senior Center in January

Special to The Pearl News

To usher in the new year, Pearl Senior Services (PSS) is offering many exciting activities and events for residents, ages fifty-five and up, in the month of January. Most notably is the **guest speaker** of the month, Barbie Bassett, who is scheduled to appear at the Pearl Senior Center on Tuesday, January 18, at 11:30 a.m.

Originally from Marks, Mississippi, Bassett was reared on a farm as the last of four children. Bassett graduated from Mississippi College with a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Mass Communications. She received a Master's of Science Degree from Mississippi State University with a concentration in Broadcast Meteorology. Bassett owns Cloud 9 Clothiers, an online women's boutique which can be found on Facebook and Instagram, as well as a biotech franchise. She has written two best sellers: *Forecast and Faith: 5 Keys to Weathering the Storms of Life* and *Carry an Umbrella When There's No Rain in the Forecast*. She is currently working

on a third book. In her spare time, she enjoys storm chasing, collecting Barbie dolls, spending time on the family farm, and homeschooling her children Grace, Will Christian and Lilly Faith.

Tickets for the guest speaker event are currently available at \$6 per person, and space is limited. There will be no holds.

Also on the agenda for Thursday, January 13, at 10 a.m. PSS is a **Valentine's Clothespin Wreath** activity. The cost is \$5 per person. Pre-registration is a must and the craft fee is due at sign-up.

PSS will then host a **Penny Auction** the following Thursday, January 20, at 1 p.m. The auction event includes bidding in increments of pennies. Pennies will be provided. Pre-registration is required, space is limited.

Birthday Bingo returns to the Pearl Senior Center on Tuesday, January 25 at

1 p.m. All participants must sign-up in advance.

This month PSS also welcomes the newest addition to their team, Danny Neal, the sports activity coordinator. Neal will host **Bowling** at Fannin Lane

on the first and third Tuesdays of the month at 1 p.m. The cost is \$5 for two games, per person. There is a \$4 shoe rental fee, or participants may provide their own pair of tennis shoes.

On the second and fourth Tuesdays in January, Neal will host a **Golf** activity at the Pearl Municipal Golf Course at 10:30 a.m. Participants must sign up in advance and be an active member of Pearl Senior

Center. The cost is \$8 per nine holes.

Neal will also hold **Sports Activity Day** on Fridays at 10 a.m. The offerings include: table tennis, corn hole, foosball, putting station and an assortment of table games.



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Barbie Bassett

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State Powerlifting Champ Ivan Thames receives championship ring

Special to Richland News

Richland High School (RHS) recently welcomed the 2021 Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA) State Powerlifting Champion Ivan Thames home to officially receive his championship ring and to show how much they value his contributions to RHS.

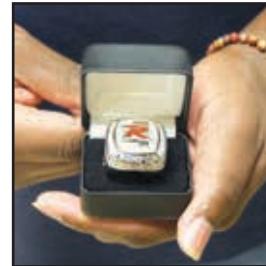
Thames was named 4A South State Powerlifting Champion in the 308-weight class in the spring of 2021. He scored the following in competition: 700 lb. squat, 350 lb. bench press, and a 635 lb. deadlift, for a combined total of 1,685 lbs.

On April 17, 2021, Thames secured the Mississippi State Championship in the 4A 308 class, beating out four of his competitors. In addition, Thames collected the following meet records:



Pictured (l to r) are RHS Coach Todd Montgomery, Ivan Thames and RHS Principal Dr. Marcus Stewart.

710, 655 DL and 1,715 total. Thames made the Super 12, walking away with the best class 308 lifter designation in



Special to The Richland News

2021 Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA) State Powerlifting Championship ring.

all classifications.

The Mississippi High School Activities Association, Inc. is a private, voluntary nonprofit organization for public, private and parochial secondary schools that choose to join and participate in the organization. The MHSAA is a self-supporting orga-

nization that does not rely on taxpayer dollars from any agency of the state or federal government and is a member in good standing with the National Federation of High Schools (NFHS). The primary function of the association is to provide leadership and coordination of interscholastic activities for its member schools.

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) consists of the fifty individual state high school athletic and/or activities associations and the association of the District of Columbia and nine Canadian organizations. These associations have united to secure the benefits of cooperative action and increased efficiency through the coordinating of ideas of all who are engaged in high school athletic and activities programs.

Start the year off right with support from RPL

Special to Richland News

Usher in the new year by paying a visit to Richland Public Library (RPL), where there are activities and hosted events designed for bibliophiles of all ages.

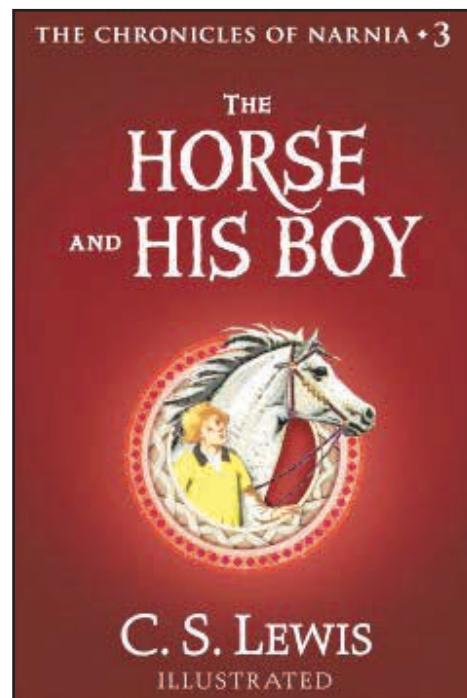
Preschool Story Time is offered every Monday at 11 a.m. for children from birth to preschool age. There will be stories, songs and crafts. January's themes include: *Snow Owls and Ground Hog Day*. Scheduled for Thursday, January 20, at 6 p.m., RPL will host **Family Craft Night**, where participants will be instructed on how to make snow globes. Space is limited, so preregistration is a must. Visit www.cmrls.evanced.info/signup to sign up in advance.

For adult and senior adult patrons, there is the **Richland Writers** group. On Monday, January 10, at 6 p.m.

members will gather to discuss the craft of writing. All skill levels are welcome to attend.

The Richland Book Club will meet on Tuesday, January 18, at 11 a.m. to discuss *The Horse and His Boy*, by C.S. Lewis. It is the fifth book in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and takes place in Calormen and Archenland, neighboring countries south of Narnia, during the reign of High King Peter, Queen Susan, King Edmund, and Queen Lucy Pevensie. According to the author, it is "...the story of an adventure that happened in Narnia and Calormen and the lands between, in the Golden Age when Peter was High King and his brother and his two sisters were King and Queens under him." Book lovers and/or fans of C.S. Lewis are welcome to attend.

RPL also offers **Rocket Languages** for those interested in learning a new



Special to The Richland News

language, including American Sign Language. To access this resource, participants must possess a library card. For more information, visit RPL's Virtual Reference Collection at www.cmrls.lib.ms.us/digital-library/virtual-reference-collection/ and click on Rocket Languages.

Finally, the **Beanstack Winter Reading Challenge** is being offered during the month of January. Register for the challenge any time before January 31, and all library fines are forgiven. Participants also have a chance to win a \$50 Visa gift card. Library patrons with no outstanding fines are also eligible to enter to win. Register by visiting www.cmrls.beanstack.org.

The Richland Public Library is located at 370 Scarbrough Street in Richland. For more information call 601-932-1846, or visit www.cmrls.lib.ms.us/cmrlsbranches/richland.

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Jana-Len Jones, first female Eagle Scout of Troop 85

By Alexa Haik

Boy Scouts of America (BSA) Scout Troop 85G of Florence recently welcomed its very first female Eagle Scout to their ranks. Jana-Len Jones completed her Eagle Board of Review on Tuesday, December 7, 2021, and was found worthy of completing all task to attain Eagle Scout rank. Jones is also the first Eagle Scout in the BSA Strong River District that represents Simpson, Rankin, Scott and Covich Counties.

A life-long resident of Florence, Jones currently attends Florence High School as a senior. Her introduction to scouts was by way of her brother, who was a member of the Cub Scout Troop 85. In the years preceding the “girl” boy scout option, she would eagerly accompany him to the meetings and scheduled activities.

Then, when BSA Scout Troop 85G was founded in February 2019 and females were given the opportunity to join BSA Scouts, she signed up. It hasn't always been an easy journey, but Jones has

forged a path for girls to follow.

When asked what was the primary attraction to the scouts, Jones said: "I personally like the camping experiences. I



Pictured (left to right) are Scoutmaster Christy Hasson, Eagle Scout Jana Len Jones and Assistant Scoutmaster Leon Jones.

did a lot of camping experiences when my brother was in Cub Scouts, so, of course, I enjoyed doing that, as well. Camping allows me to be around a lot of people, and you learn to do multiple things: keep our environment clean, cook meals for everyone, and do fun activities."

Currently, Jones is a senior patrol leader for her troop where, "[she] makes sure everyone else does their responsibilities."

Jones' leadership skills have also been

mind, Jones appeared before the Florence Mayor, Bob Morris, and Board of Aldermen, requesting approval to build an octagonal table and benches at the tennis courts at Hemphill Park. She explained that her project would allow tennis players to have somewhere to sit during practices and for parents to sit during matches. Much to her surprise, Jones received approval for the project.

As far as the future, Jones plans to attend college in the northeast part of the U.S. Her preference is Rochester Institute of Technology, where she plans on majoring in hospitality and tourism management.

Jones will take the knowledge and experience gained from scouts, i.e., how to work with others, how to lead a group and how to get things done, into what looks to be a very bright future. She encourages local youth who are interested in scouts, or any other challenging and character-building endeavor, "if you really want to try something, you should definitely try it. You never know what type of opportunity will open up for you."

Florence's MGMS returns with annual show

Special to The Florence News

The 2022 Gem, Mineral, Fossil and Jewelry Show will once again be held at the TradeMart in Jackson after a year hiatus. Beginning on Friday, February 26, and running through Sunday, February 28, the family-friendly event promises to provide something for every interest. Hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday, February 27, and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday, February 28. Admission is \$6 for adults and \$3 for students. Scouts and Scout leaders in uniform get \$2 admission. Children ages five and younger get in free.

In the past, the show has featured museum displays, hands-on crafts and learning activities for children. Vendors from around the country will sell



fossils, gems and jewelry for those who want to take home a piece of the past or shop for sparkle. The large market offers for sale fossils, gems, geodes and minerals ranging from tiny fish fossils to cathedral amethyst. A broad

range of jewelry, from fine jewelry to children's trinkets, will be offered. Lapidary enthusiasts and jewelry artisans can find gems, beads, cabs, slabs, stones, specimens, carvings, books and tools.

Jewelry artists will demonstrate techniques in beading, wire wrapping, gem faceting, cabochon making and other stone work throughout the show.

The Mississippi Gem and Mineral Society (MGMS) was originally chartered in 1958 as a non-profit, educational organization to promote the knowledge and the enjoyment of activities related to the earth sciences. Their activities focus on rocks, minerals, fossils, jewelry making and lapidary arts.

For more information about this event, or to submit a vendor application, visit <https://missgems.org/>.

MGMS is located at 176 Tazan Avenue in Florence.



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enHance Member Profile: Rankin County School District

Special to SW Rankin News

The Rankin County School District (RCSD) joined Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality's (MDEQ) enHance voluntary stewardship program as a new member in 2020. They are the first school district to be accepted as a member.

enHance is a voluntary stewardship program that recognizes committed environmental leaders who accomplish goals beyond their legal requirements. Participating organizations make a commitment to address and achieve ongoing environmental improvements.

The following is an interview with Rusty Ponder, the Energy Management Coordinator for the district about their joining enHance.

Why did you choose to apply to the enHance program? After talking with MDEQ's Khairy Abu-Salah and some of my other colleagues in the Mississippi Energy Coordinators Association (MECA), I had a lot of interest in the program and believe all the things this group is striving for are some of the same things the Rankin County School District is working for, also.

What benefits do you see the program providing for you? I like hearing from other like-minded professionals to

see what is working for their companies and just being a part of a group that is working to save energy and cut down on greenhouse gas emissions.

What have you learned from other members? Since we have just joined and have only been to two meetings, I can only say I am impressed with many of the projects I have heard about and look forward to following up on these. For RCSD, our goal is to be good stewards of the taxpayers' money, so we are always looking for new or better ways to save energy and cut back on greenhouse emissions. I like to see what these other members have already implemented and see if that is something we may try here at RCSD.

Would you recommend enHance to other school districts or anyone else?

Yes, I would definitely recommend the enHance program to others and have already mentioned it to a couple of friends.

How are you involved in your local community?

The Rankin County School District is the third largest school district in the state and employs over 3,000 people. We have twenty-eight schools in eight different school zones that serve over 19,500 students. Being in the schools and working with the principals and staff is very rewarding. You know some of the energy saving projects in the elementary schools are working, because the parents and grandparents are calling the school

equipment when they leave their rooms.

We are not only reaching the students, but their extended families in the community, also.

What projects have you implemented to apply for enHance? In 2011, we were the first in the State of Mississippi to have an Energy Star School, and we had four earn the award that year! Each year, we apply for the Energy Star Award for each of our twenty-eight schools, and all of them have earned it at least one year, with some earning it multiple years in a row. For 2020, we had seventeen schools earn the prestigious Energy Star Award. An Energy Star facility meets strict performance standards set by the EPA and uses less energy, is less expensive to operate, and causes fewer greenhouse gas emissions than its peers. Khairy and the staff were very helpful getting us started in 2010. They assisted with setting up the Portfolio Manager and data input, which led to us becoming the first in the state to have an Energy Star school.

enHance is open to facilities, cities, counties, and other entities who are interested in the program, and applicants can choose from three tiers: Leader, Steward, or Associate. For more information, contact MDEQ at 601-961-5000, or visit www.mdeq.ms.gov.



Images special to SW Rankin News

and asking about what we are teaching their children, because they have seen the kids turning off lights and other

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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

City Beat Writer

Kerri Roberts

kerri@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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FPD honors officer and recent graduate



Special to SW Rankin News

The Florence Police Department (FPD) recently congratulated Officer Michael Rayborn for his graduation from the University of Southern Mississippi Public Safety Institute Law Enforcement Academy. Pictured (l to r) are Lieutenant Jonathan McCardle, Officer Rayborn and Chief Dan McClendon.

Knight to continue hoops career with Old Dominion

By Datti Jinkiri

Former Pearl High School women's basketball standout Olivia Knight signed with Division I Old Dominion University to continue her hoops career. Knight currently plays with nationally-ranked Jones College.

Old Dominion is coached by DeLisha Milton-Jones, a three-time WNBA All-Star. The Monarchs have qualified for twenty-five NCAA Tournaments and have made the Final Four three times. They currently have a 7-2 record this season.

Knight had a storied high school career with the Pi-

rates, winning thirty-one games and an MHSAA Class 6A State Championship in her senior season. After playing one season at North Alabama, she transferred to Jones.



Special to SW Rankin News

Olivia Knight

Knight has helped the Bobcats to a 5-0 start this season. The guard has started all five games and is averaging 13.4 points and 6.8 assists. Her assists per game average is currently the seventh-highest in the country.

She is shooting a shade over thirty percent from three-point range, which is third-best on the team. This was exemplified in her clutch, go-ahead trey in the Bobcats' 74-70 win over Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Richland announces Top Rangers and Character Trait recipients



The Top Ranger Award is given to students who have shown exemplary behavior in and out of the classroom. Students receiving this award have been standout students and have continually worked hard at their coursework. Richland Junior High School's November 2021 Top Rangers are pictured (l to r), front row: Rihanna Harris, Elizabeth Babb, Lucy Byrd, Makinlee Fallin, Tabitha Bigby, Shontrese Cage, Ivonne Rocha, Hannah Newman and Madison Gibson; and back row: Isaiah Martin, Brandon Hodges, Jesus Bolanos, Anderson Minor, Ezekiel Chancellor, Liam Smith, Nicholas Harris and Caleb Snyder. Not pictured is Casey Trent.



Shanailora McKnight is Richland High School's (RHS) September Character Trait Student of the Month. The character trait for the month was initiative. McKnight recognized that another student was upset, so she took the initiative to get help. Pictured are McKnight (left) and RHS Head Principal Dr. Marcus Stewart (right).



Seventh-grader Tristan Carpenter is RHS's October Character Trait Student of the Month. The character trait for the month was individuality.



Photos special to SW Rankin News

November's Character Trait Student of the Month is Aliya Harris, a sophomore at Richland High School. The character trait for the month was contentment.



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Obituaries

NAME	AGE	CITY	DOD	Funeral Home
Margaret "Evelyn" Paul	86	Jackson, MS	11/28/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Gloria Yelverton	77	Pearl, MS	11/26/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
John "David" Cooper	56	Florence, MS	12/4/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
James "Jim" E. Hudson	83	Braxton, MS	12/7/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Stephen "Steve" Bewley	65	Meadville, MS	12/7/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Luca Mason Sandifer	8 Wks.	Florence, MS	12/7/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Paula Jean Lambert	59	Pearl, MS	12/12/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Michael "Mike" T. Walters	67	Simpson County	12/15/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Dorothy Mae Harper Harrison	93	Rankin County	12/15/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Ronnie DeWitt Graham	54	Stone County	12/18/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Mary Ann Dale	76	Clinton, MS	12/20/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Dorothy "Ellen" Sullivan	79	Richland, MS	12/26/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Payton Kristyn Day	9 Days	Brandon, MS	12/27/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Carolyn Mary Rehm	89	Brandon, MS	12/28/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Wendy Day Bunch	44	Florence, MS	12/29/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home
Allen Adams Ward	82	Harrisville, MS	12/31/2021	Chancellor Funeral Home

Richland basketball clinches district championship



Special to SW Rankin News

The Richland Junior High School basketball teams recently clinched the district championship. Pictured (l to r) are, front row: Demontavious Jackson, Lewis Jones, Darius Thames, Christian Anderson, Ethan Franklin, Isaiah Green and Isidro Vieyra; and back row: LaChristian Patrick, Everett Arthur, Cameron Gaddis, Jayden Houseton, DeAngelo Griffin, Kingsley Gibbs, Blaise Goodman and Coach Thad Bridges.

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Old Truths for Today

You Have Not Been This Way Before

J.T. Morgan



In 1519 the Spanish explore Hernando Cortes led an expedition of 600 men to conquer southern Mexico. One by one he had his eleven ships scuttled and sunk, till only one was left. When his men found out they loudly upbraided Cortes. He asked his men what kind of man would need the ships, except cowards. If any man was so cowardly, he could board the last ship and leave. Cheers drowned the complaints, and he then suggested that they sink the last ship. By that single action he committed himself and his force to either succeed or die trying for they had nothing to go back to.

By the time you read this 2021 is behind you – there is nothing to go back to. You cannot undo a single action or take back a single word. Before you lies a new year – full of hope and promise if you so desire.

"I am the New Year. I am an unspoiled page in your book of time. I am your next chance at the art of living.

"I am your opportunity to practice what you have learned during the last year about life.

"All that you sought the past year and failed to find is hidden in me; I'm waiting for you to search it out again and with more determination.

"All the good that you tried to do for others and didn't achieve last year is mine to grant – providing you have fewer selfish and conflicting desires.

"In me lies the potential of all that you dreamed but didn't dare to do, all that you hoped but didn't perform, all you prayed for but did not experience.

"These dreams slumber lightly, waiting to be awakened by the touch of an enduring purpose."

"I am the New Year!" (Author unknown).

We are entering a New Year – We have not passed this way before. Let's keep our eye on God and His word. We don't know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future. Life is uncertain as James mentions. (James 4:13-16). Moses taught his people to number their days. (Psa. 90:1-12).

If you ask a ship captain what his next destination is, he will tell you in one sentence. He knows where he is going, how to get there, and how long it will take. We need to set goals so that we know where we are going in life. Our long-range goal is heaven. How are we going to get there? (Phil. 3:12-14; Heb. 12:1-2). God's word is that roadmap to reach that ultimate goal if we will only follow the directions He has given us.

Many people have customs for welcoming a new year. Putting away the past and starting fresh with resolutions for the New Year is a great way to start anew. The Bible encourages Christians to such renewal. (Phil. 3:13-14; 1 Tim. 4:6-9). May you make 2022 the best year of your life. **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

Florence Church of Christ, P.O. Box 277, 220 White Street
 Florence, MS 39073

Visitors are always welcome!

Mississippi Against Human Trafficking: Bridging the gap

By Alexa Haik

The origins of Mississippians Against Human Trafficking (MSAHT) begin in Florence, but MSAHT has since grown to cover the central Mississippi region, including the Florence, Jackson and Brandon areas. They are self-described as "a coalition that was formed about three years ago to bring all the [local and state government as well as law enforcement] players in the human trafficking world to the table." Collectively, this coalition realized that there were a lot of people doing things on small scale, but not a lot of people communicating and collaborating on a state level. Thus, MSAHT came into existence to facilitate this vital sharing of information. Since its inception, MSAHT has successfully bridged the communication gap, with increased education and awareness via in-person training sessions, as well as online training videos.

In addition, MSAHT also works diligently with the state legislature to get pro-victim bills passed. Most recently, they were part of the effort supporting Speaker Gunn to make charging a child under the age of eighteen with prostitution illegal. Fullen provides the following information, in summary, to assist the general public in greater awareness and understanding of all things related to human trafficking.

They are also committed to correcting misconceptions about human trafficking.

"We are trying to break the barrier of people that believe that this just doesn't happen in this state. It absolutely happens in Mississippi. The I-55 corridor that runs through Jackson where it intersects with I-20 is a huge trafficking area in the State in general. And that includes any type of trafficking...this is not something that only happens in big cities. This is not something that only happens in foreign countries. It is

happening in small towns in Mississippi," says Sarah Fullen, a representative of MSAHT. Fullen provides the following information to facilitate greater awareness and understanding of all things related to human trafficking.

Resources and education

MSAHT works hard to provide vital information to law enforcement, to attorneys, to judges, "to say, hey, this is an issue. What we call human trafficking today, ten years ago, we just called prostitution."

Fullen continues to explain that, "There's a huge misconception that

trafficking, because of that word, that a victim must cross county or state lines - they do not have to be moved at all. Trafficking happens out of the home in a lot of Mississippi cases. The actual definition of trafficking is 'any recruitment harboring, transportation provision or obtaining someone for a sex act in which that is forced on them by fraud coercion or whatever and there is an exchange of value.' The exchange of value may be financial or a service or something else entirely."

The State of Mississippi currently has five task forces who exclusively work on human trafficking cases. Over the last few years, they have made serious strides working with state and local law enforcement officers, fostering more awareness and inclusion.

Know the signs

A nuanced approach to victims is required, because they typically remain silent. Therefore, it is worthwhile for

people within the community to know the warning signs: how a person carries themselves; the kind of things that they say, or do not say; and visual clues such as certain tattoos.

MSAHT training videos have consequently been created as an important resource to address this. Available to anyone who has internet access, their website provides multiple videos geared toward different professions. The bottom line is, a child that is trafficked is going to show some signs at some point, whether it be consciously or subconsciously. There is going to be

donation, they may make contact via email at info@msht.org.

As far as resources go, MSAHT welcomes professionals who can donate time - not just for MSAHT, but for anyone in the state who is dealing with human trafficking. The women who currently participate in the rehab program through the Center for Violence Prevention are always in need of attorneys who can take on pro bono cases, as well as doctors and dentists who are willing to donate time and/or resources.

Fullen assures that "anybody who is willing to help, we will find something they can do to help."

Ongoing projects

Currently, MSAHT is preparing a shelter for the youngest segment of trafficking victims - females ages eighteen and under. To date, no shelter exists in Mississippi for them.

They hope that by opening this shelter, it will start a snowball effect, encouraging others in north Mississippi, in south Mississippi and the Delta to say 'you know, we can do this, too. We now have a model for it.'

In five to ten years, the goal is for Mississippi to have five to ten more shelters open. These shelters would cater to different segments of the population, including thirteen- to eighteen-year-old boys, and others for newborns to ten-year-olds, girls and boys.

Final thoughts

Fullen shares these final thoughts, "We hope as the right information gets out there and people become more informed that those that are out there will come forward and see that there are resources for them and that there are people who want to help. And that that would give them the strength to say something."

For more information about MSAHT, visit them on the web at www.nomorems.org, email, at info@msht.org, or follow them on Facebook.



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NEWS

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PPD announces promotions at close of 2021



Special to SW Rankin News

Pearl Police Department (PPD) recently announced the promotion of the following employees, pictured (l to r): Billy Hudson to Lieutenant over Investigations; John Applewhite to Sergeant in the Patrol Division; and Ruben Miles to Sergeant in Investigations.

Cruse wins Richland's first cookie contest



Special to SW Rankin News

Richland High School's Kaylie Cruse won the City of Richland's premier cookie contest. Cruse is a nutrition and wellness student under tutorage of Stephanie Housley.

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FES announces anti-bullying poster winners



Florence Elementary (FES) recently selected the winners for the 2021 Bullying Awareness Poster Contest. The first-place award went to Madilyn Grace Ellis.



The second-place award winner of FES's Bullying Awareness Poster Contest was Sawyer Blackwell.



Special to SW Rankin News

The third-place award for FES's Bullying Awareness Poster Contest was Kelsey Patterson. FES thanked the three contest winners "for reminding us that our words matter and that together we can make a difference."

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CMRLS partners with Region 8



Special to SW Rankin News

Pictured (l to r) are CMRLS Director Mara Villa Polk, Lequansha Adams of Region 8, Region 8 Site Coordinator Tasha Smith and CMRLS Coordinator of Programming Carrie Brown.

Special to SW Rankin News

The Central Mississippi Regional Library System (CMRLS) recently donated nine boxes of books and audiobooks to Region 8 Mental Health Services in Rankin County. These items were collected from around the

library system and will go to the further education and enjoyment of the Region 8 consumers.

"We are so happy to have partnered with Region 8 and look forward to working with them again in the future," said CMRLS Coordinator of Programming Carrie Brown.

MHS celebrates Athletes, Teacher of the Month



McLaurin High School (MHS) recently named its Athletes and Teacher of the Month. Pictured (center) is Female Athlete of the Month Erica Russell (girls basketball).



Pictured (center) is Male Athlete of the Month Will Owens (boys soccer).



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Pictured (center) is Teacher of the Month Krista Smith.

Firefighter of the Year honored in Pearl



Special to SW Rankin News

Pearl Fire Department's Firefighter of the Year for 2021 is Shawn Buchanan. The City of Pearl released the following statement via Facebook about this year's honoree: "We thank you for your continued service to our city and are proud to call you our Firefighter of the Year." Pictured are Fire Chief Brad Thornton (left) and Buchanan (right).

Hunters offered raffle chance for Chronic Wasting Disease samples

Special to SW Rankin News

Addressing conservation challenges, such as Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), requires active involvement of those with a passion for Mississippi's rich natural resources. A primary goal of CWD response and management efforts is to determine the geographic extent and prevalence of the disease. MDWFP asks hunters to aid in this effort by submitting deer for testing during the white-tailed deer hunting season. Further, hunters and landowners can help monitor for CWD by actively looking for and reporting potential diseased or sick deer.

The test used to determine the presence of CWD requires a portion of the deer's brainstem or lymph nodes. Harvested animals should remain cool until testing to reduce decomposition

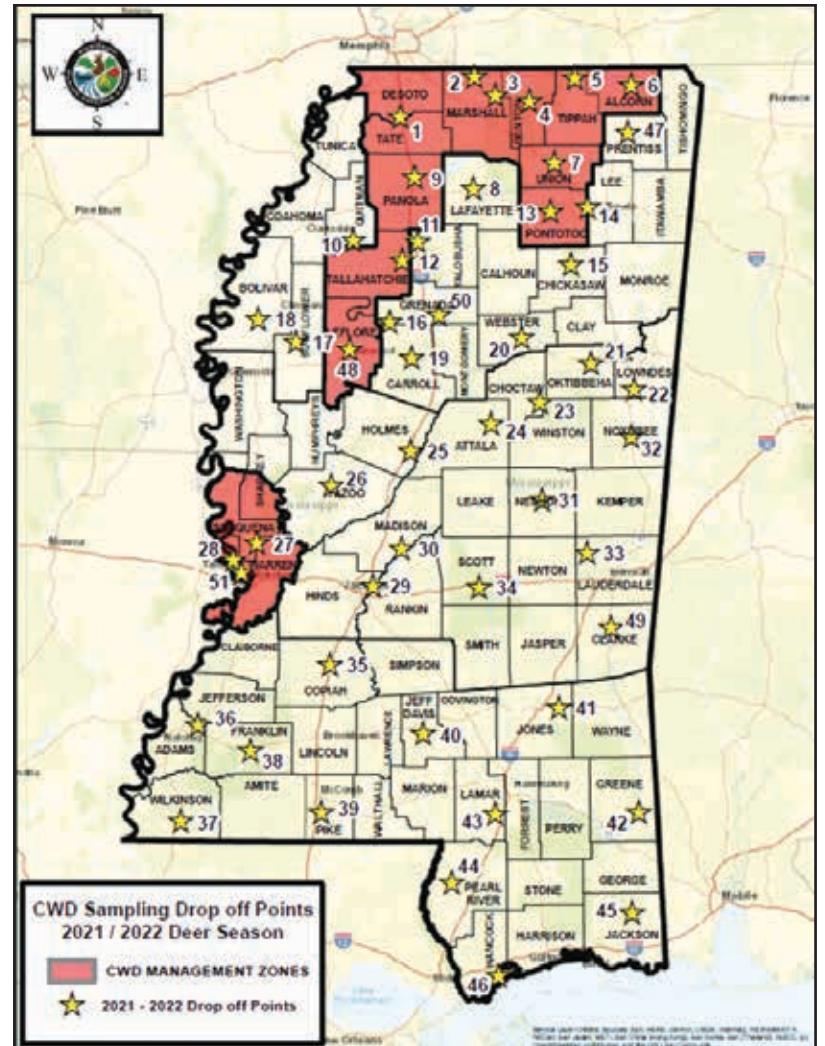
and provide accurate results.

As a way to say thank you to hunters for doing their part, the Foundation for the Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks is sponsoring a CWD Prize Raffle this hunting season.

For every sample submitted before February 15, the submitter's name will automatically be placed in the drawing for one of three cash prizes. No additional action is needed to be entered into the raffle. The first name drawn will receive \$1,000, the second and third names drawn will each receive \$500.

Each CWD sample submitted is an additional entry into the raffle. The winners will be drawn at random after February 15.

For more information about submitting, visit www.mdwfp.com/wildlife-hunting/chronic-wasting-disease/sample-collection/.



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2021 Pearl Christmas Parade in review: A Candyland Christmas



Grand Marshal Brad Givens with his wife Tiffany, and their four children, Skye, Rainer, Calder and June Brady. Givens is a member of McLaurin Heights Baptist Church, a member of the 114th MP Co. and works full time as a technician with the Mississippi National Guard. In May, Brad was diagnosed with stage IV Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma.



Photos special to SW Rankin News



Pictured are the 2021 Pearl Christmas Parade celebrity judges (l to r) are: WAPT Chief Meteorologist David Hartman, WLBT Meteorologist and Pearl native Branden Walker, ESPN Radio 105.9 FM Producer and Pearl native Ben "Beaver" Martin, and ESPN Radio 105.9 FM host Jake Wimberly.



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Southwest Rankin celebrates the season



Pictures with Santa at Richland City Hall.



A successful Christmas Concert evening with Florence's Big Red Band.



McLaurin High School's Teacher Academy students created a photo booth with their classroom door.



Richland Elementary's Twelve Days of Christmas theme, "Elf Yourself."



"Our heart grew 3 sizes" at Story Time at Florence Public Library.



The Florence Elementary fifth-grade Honor Choir enjoyed spreading Christmas cheer and visiting with the residents of Villa South Assisted Living.



Christmas Gnome Craft day at the Pearl Senior Center.



Pictures with Santa at Richland City Hall.



Winter Wonderland at Northside Elementary.



Photos special to SW Rankin News Santa visits Steens Creek Elementary.

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FES celebrates Staff and Teacher of the Month



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Florence Elementary School recently recognized their Teacher of the Month for November 2020, fifth-grade ELA teacher Tiffany Gordon. Gordon is being recognized "for her creativity and innovations in the classroom."

Pictured is Staff Member of the Month for November 2020 Miranda Edmonson, who is an office staffer at Florence Elementary. She was selected "for her willingness to assist and support teachers, students, and parents."

M-Braves to join newly formed DBH



Special to SW Rankin News

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The Atlanta Braves have entered into an agreement to have the Mississippi Braves (M-Braves) become a part of Diamond Baseball Holdings (DBH), an organization dedicated to supporting, promoting, and enhancing the sport of baseball through professional management, best practices, innovation and investment. DBH is a subsidiary of Endeavor, the global sports and entertainment company. The sale of the Club remains subject to the Professional Development League (PDL) approval process.

Following the closing of the transaction (subject to PDL approval), the M-Braves will continue to be led by General Manager Pete Laven and remain an MLB affiliate of the Atlanta Braves.

"Joining DBH is a meaningful step toward furthering our commitment to contributing positively to the Jackson metro community," said Laven. "Central Mississippi deserves a next-level experience in minor league baseball, with the same ballpark traditions they've known and loved. I trust that joining DBH will serve everyone well into the future."

As part of DBH, Laven will work closely with Diamond Baseball Holdings' leadership, Pat Battle and Peter B. Freund, to realize the club's ambitions. Battle is Executive Chairman of DBH,

bringing extensive experience at the local and national level, as well as ownership interest in two PDL Clubs. He is currently Chairman of the Board of Learfield and serves as an advisor to Endeavor across multiple companies. Freund is CEO of DBH, also bringing to the plate experience as a longtime Minor League Baseball owner and operator. Freund most recently consulted with the Office of the Commissioner of Baseball on the transition of Major League Baseball's licensed affiliates while spearheading the formation of the MLB Draft League.

"Diamond Baseball Holdings will be global in our ambitions and hyper-local in our approach, and creating incredible fan experiences will remain our number one priority," said Battle and Freund. "Additionally, we look forward to providing opportunities for growth to the employees of PDL Clubs whose passion and ingenuity have built the sport through the decades."

Diamond Baseball Holdings was formed by Endeavor, the global sports and entertainment company. DBH will support the M-Braves with ticket sales, partnerships, naming rights, food and beverage, merchandise, content strategy, collectibles/authenticity/NFTs and media rights, tapping into the broader Endeavor network for expertise across the various disciplines.



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FES's Clark selected as RCSD Elementary Administrator of the Year



Students honor Principal Clark at FES.



Florence Elementary (FES) Principal Amanda Clark was recently chosen as Rankin County School District's Elementary Administrator of the Year. Clark was recognized for her dedication to FES and each student, teacher, and staff member. FES says that Clark "works tirelessly to make sure they have whatever they need every day to succeed. Florence Elementary loves Mrs. Clark and appreciates all that she does for us!"

Photos special to SW Rankin News

OBITUARY

Susie Brunson Morris Pearl

Susie Brunson Morris, 69, of Pearl, Mississippi, gained her heavenly wings on Friday, December 24, 2021. A funeral service was held at 11 a.m. Wednesday, December 29, 2021, at Sebrell Funeral Home in Ridgeland, with graveside services following in Natchez Trace Memorial Park. Visitation began at 10 a.m. at the funeral home.

Susie was the strongest, loving Godly woman our family has ever known. She was the longtime owner of the Pearl Café and, upon retirement, was the manager of Kroger Deli. She was an amazing GanGan to Fisher and taught her children and grandchild the values of relationship with God, family and friends.

She is survived by her children: Jenny

(Paul) Kennon and Samatha (James) Burkes; grandson, Fisher Liles; brothers, Bob Ray (Sue) Brunson of Leland, Mississippi, and Charlie (Barbara) Brunson of Phillip, and William (Barbara) Brunson of Grenada; her twin sister, Sally (Wesley) Rodgers of Charleston, Mississippi; sister, Mary Ann Litten of Canton, Georgia; sister, Judy (Rodney) Mainelli of McCarley, Mississippi; sister, Marsha Wallesch of Allen, Texas; and a host of nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Rueben Brunson and Daisy Brunson Davis; mother- and father-in-law, Hosey B. and Clara Becnel Morris; husband, Jimmy Wayne Morris; grandchildren, Hunter Liles and Jacob Elliott; sisters, Charline B. Akins and Denice Muller; brothers, Ralph Brunson; Jimmy Warden and RL Brunson.

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FRL reports on O'Brien's *Wesley the Owl*

By Beth Woodmansee for *The Friends of the Richland Library*

In 1985, Stacy O'Brien, a lifelong animal lover recently graduated from Occidental College with a BA in biology is continuing her education at the California Institute of Technology (Cal-Tech) in the owl department, where she studies and takes care of wild owls.

One day, she is called to the office of Dr. Ronan Penfield, one of the scientists, who asks her if she would take on a longtime assignment to "adopt" a four-day-old barn owl with nerve damage in one of its wings. The owl could never be released into the wild.

At this time, "Wesley," as she named the owl, has hardly any feathers, and its eyes are still shut. As Dr. Penfield says, if she takes the bird home with her to take care of for as many years as the owl will live, he will imprint on her, if she is the first person he sees. She will become his "Mother."

Stacy O'Brien quickly says, "yes," and so begins her nineteen-year adventure in living with a wild owl.

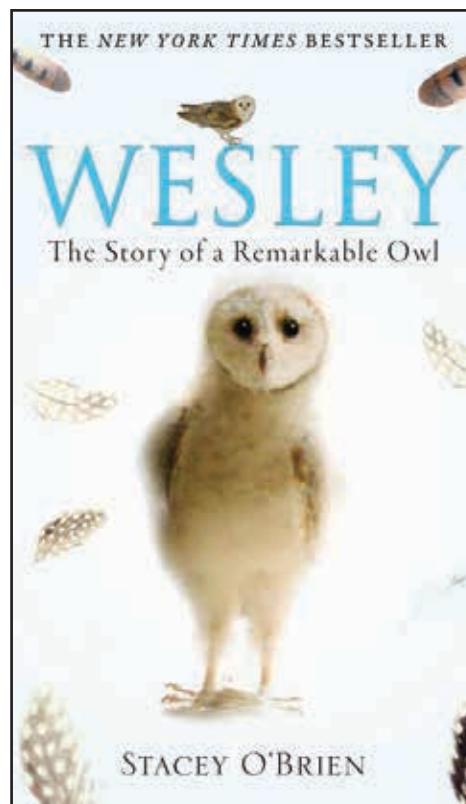
O'Brien is a scientist; but her writ-

ing style is an easygoing narrative. She explains science in such a way that the reader is never lost but feels like a fellow scientist at Cal-Tech. She writes with wit and warmth and assists the reader in coming to understand the deep emotional level of her relationship with Wesley.

One of the most engaging facts about barn owls is that they have an intoxicating smell—rather like maple syrup—and the owl scientists at Cal-Tech enjoy burying their noses in the barn owl feathers.

Feeding an owlet is not easy. Barn owls live almost entirely on mice, because their bodies have evolved to get all of their nutritional needs, including water, by eating mice - a whole, complete mouse.

A nestling owl is fed infant-owl-sized mice pieces by its father at least five times a day and also during the night. The father owl hunts five mice for each baby owl in the nest, three mice for the mother owl, who remains with her brood until they begin to leave the nest, as well as feeding himself. Adult barn owls require five mice each day; if the barn owl does not get his five



Special to SW Rankin News

time hunger screeching, Stacy wakes up, goes to the kitchen, takes out a packet of frozen mice bits from the freezer, pops them into the microwave, manipulates the pieces with her fingers and takes them to Wesley in his nest box, where he swallows each piece until he is full. She goes back to sleep until the next hunger screech.

One of the scientific terms the reader becomes familiar with is "poop." That's the term scientists use to identify what the owl excretes after the mouse has been digested. It is a compact, dry packet containing the complete skeleton of the mouse's body. Students use these in their studies of mice.

Stacy O'Brien's book is funny in places, because Wesley the barn owl is funny and very appealing. The book is also uplifting in other places, a sensitive tale of how Wesley the barn owl and Stacy O'Brien, the human girl, came to love and understand one another completely. After Wesley's death at age nineteen, Stacy continued with her study of barn owls and other birds. If she writes another book about her further adventures with birds, I will eagerly borrow it from my local library.

mice, he can become ill and die very quickly.

When she first hears Wesley's night-

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Pearl cheer squads secure championships



The Pearl High School cheer squad won the 2021 MHSAA State Championship in the co-ed division. Pictured (l to r) are, front row: Gracie Fagan, Kendall Jones, Kayli Statum, Mikayla Sills and Damien Smith; middle row: Hannah Smith-Lyon, Tamia Miller, Aliyah Chapman, Kylee McDowell, Emma Patrick, Kirsten Davis, Raelyn McHenry, Malarie Jones and Kristin Saxon; and back row: Lemichal Drake, Steven Barrett, Saylor Foster, Ayanna Watkins, Madison Gutierrez, Skye Givens, Merkeiya Wiltshire and Hartley Poe.



Photos special to SW Rankin News

The Pearl Junior High School cheerleaders were named the Middle School Non-Tumble Division State Champions at the MHSAA Cheer Championship. Pictured (l to r) are, front row: Bailey Chism, Allie Jackson, Kayla Long, Maggie Sherwood, Aubree McLendon, Bryahna Floyd, Abigail Gordon and Aubrey Risher; and back row: Coach Kari Gatlin, Laken Hester, Aleena Cira, Alexandria Carpenter, Kiersten Luckett, Breanna Burks, Katelyn Miller and Mykenzie Hines.

Steens Creek Elementary announces Teacher of the Year



Special to SW Rankin News

Steens Creek Elementary (SCE) first-grade team member Morgan DuBose was recently selected as SCE New Teacher of the Year for 2021.

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