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# SWRANKIN NEWS

## Good News You Can Use

Vol. 9, No. 2 | February 2024

The Pearl News

THE NEWS RICHLAND

THE FLORENCE NEWS

# Pearl teacher wins \$25K Milken Educator Award

By James Osborne

A Pearl Upper Elementary School teacher had a surprise recently, when she was awarded a national educator award and given a \$25,000 cash prize.

Fifth-grade science teacher Jennifer Hite was awarded the Milken Educator Award, which honors excellence and innovation in the classroom.

On January 10, students, faculty and local City leaders gathered together for what they thought was going to be just a presentation by Superintendent Dr. Ray Morgigno, congratulating the school on their A rating. Dr. Morgigno was there and congratulated the students and teachers on their hard work - but a guest speaker also took the stage that morning.

Milken Educator Awards Vice President Stephanie Bishop, who is also a previous educator and award recipient, fired up the young student audience with a presentation about the importance of education and the important work that their teachers do. She then explained that a teacher from their school was selected to receive a surprise award.

Bishop then announced that Hite had been named a winner of the Milken Educator Award. Hite was given hugs and cheers by her peers and applause from the students before she walked up to receive her certificate and huge check.



Photo courtesy of Milken Family Foundation

From left, Mississippi Interim State Superintendent of Education Dr. Raymond C. Morgigno; Stephanie Bishop, vice president of the Milken Educator Awards; Pearl Public School District Superintendent Chris Chism; recipient Jennifer Hite (MS '23); Pearl Upper Elementary Principal Gavin Gill; and Mississippi Department of Education Office of Teaching and Learning Education Specialist Sandra Hilliard.

"Today we celebrate Jennifer for her outstanding dedication to her students, her school and her community," said Bishop.

The Milken Family Foundation will honor up to seventy-five recipients across the country in 2023 and 2024. There have been over seventy-eight recipients in Mississippi over the years since the foundation's start in 1987.

Hite and other honorees across the country are also eligible to attend an all-expenses-paid Milken Educator

Awards Forum in Los Angeles this June, where they will network with other education leaders and discuss how to broaden their impact on kindergarten through twelfth-grade education. The \$25,000 cash award is unrestricted and can be used in whatever way the recipient chooses.

Candidates for the Milken Educator Award are sourced through a confidential selection process and then reviewed by blue ribbon panels appointed by state departments of education. Those deemed the most exceptional are recommended for the award, with final approval by the Milken Family Foundation.

While speaking with the media after the event, Hite said she was very surprised and honored. She said her focus with teaching is not just about grades.

"It's about seeing how they are doing when they walk into the classroom in the morning and loving on them and finding out what you need to do to help them throughout the day," said Hite, "so that you can help them be successful not just in the classroom, but in school and in life."

"The Mississippi Department of Education congratulates Jennifer Hite for earning this national award due to her exceptional dedication transforming the learning landscape of her science classroom at Pearl Upper Elementary," said Dr. Morgigno. "Her commitment to her students and profession is extraordinary, and we celebrate her well-earned achievement."

# Pearl Public School District hires new head football coach

Special to The Pearl News

Patrick Schoolar has been named the Pearl High School head football coach, beginning in the 2024-2025 school year.

With a twenty-year coaching career, Schoolar brings a wealth of experience and a proven track record to the Pearl community. His coaching journey includes serving as an assistant coach at Noxapater, Aberdeen and Amory, and as the head coach at Hatley. For the last eight years, Schoolar has been the head coach at Neshoba Central.

Schoolar counts among his career highlights his cherished time leading Hatley, his alma mater, to its first-ever playoff appearance. He says that some of his proudest moments include being part of the coaching staff when Aberdeen had two State Championship appearances, as well as achieving North half appearances at Neshoba Central.

A graduate of Hatley High School and



Special to The Pearl News

Pictured are new Pearl High School Head Football Coach Patrick Schoolar, along with his wife, Mary Leigh Schoolar, and his children, Talan and Piper.



Delta State University, Schoolar has been married to Mary Leigh Schoolar for fourteen years. They have two children, Piper, 13, and Talan, 10.

"I'm extremely excited about the opportunity to work for the Pearl Public School District and to lead the football program," said Schoolar. "I believe this is one of the best districts to work in. The rich history and support are hard to match anywhere across the state."

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## Richland's newest Little Free Library comes to Eastside Park

*The Richland News*

Richland residents can enjoy the opportunity to select a free book at the city's newest Little Free Library, located at Eastside Park at 100 Furr Drive.

Little Free Library is a nonprofit organization with a mission for building community, inspiring readers and expanding book access for all through a global network of volunteer-led Little Free Library book exchange boxes.

The concept of a Little Free Library allows residents of a community to take a book that they'd like to read, for free. Some books may include a note about who gave it or who has read it. When finished with the book, the reader is encouraged to pass it along to a friend or return it to the original or another Little Free Library.

Residents are also encouraged to add their used books to any Little Free Library. Especially desired are books a resident would recommend to a friend, childhood favorites, and books that teach and spark conversation. Books for all ages may be donated or taken from Little Free Libraries.

The organization says that millions of books are exchanged each year through Little Free Library book exchanges, increasing access to books for readers of all ages and backgrounds.



The first Little Free Library book-sharing box was built in 2009 in Wisconsin. There are now more than 150,000 registered, volunteer-led Little Free Libraries around the world.

Richland also has another Little Free Library at Westside Park at 160 Brandon Avenue.



*Photos special to The Richland News*

*Pictured at the ribbon cutline for Richland's second Little Free Library at Eastside Park at 100 Furr Drive are (l to r) Scot and Susan Mancil, Stephanie Ward and Alderwoman Beth Sanford.*

## City of Richland to hold election for new mayor

*By James Osborne*

The City of Richland is set to have a special election for mayor on Tuesday, February 13, at the Richland Community Center.

Four candidates have qualified and will have their name on the ballot for the mayoral position. They are Gus Black, Clay Burns, Scot Mancil and Beth Sanford.

Former Richland City Mayor Pat Sullivan resigned effective December 31, 2023, citing health reasons. By law, a special election must happen in no less than thirty days and no more than forty-five days after the Board of Aldermen officially declares that there is a vacancy.

The current mayor pro-temp is Alderwoman Beth Sanford, who is also still conducting her duties as alderwoman.

The deadline for qualification to run in the special election was January 24 at 5 p.m. A candidate for mayor has to have been a Richland resident for at least two years and be a registered voter. Interested candidates had to pick up a packet at City



Hall, fill out all of the information, get at least fifty signatures from Richland registered voters and return the packet to City Hall. The information and signatures then had to be checked and confirmed by the City Clerk.

A winning candidate must get at least fifty percent of the vote plus one to win the election. There are 7,137 residents in Richland, but the number of registered voters is only around 4,100.

On February 13, the polls will close at 7 p.m., and the votes will be tallied that day.

If the election goes into a runoff, then the possible runoff election date will be March 5.

The new mayor will continue former Mayor Sullivan's term, which will go through June 30, 2025.



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## New food pantry ministry available every other Friday

By James Osborne

Families in need now have another helping hand for food in the Florence and Richland area. Jesus Name Tabernacle Church (JNTC) has a food pantry service for those in need. Every other Friday afternoon, families can stop at JNTC for a box of free food for their family.

The church has named their food pantry “FLS Food Pantry,” after the pastor’s wife, Peggy Smith, whom the congregation has nicknamed “First Lady Smith.” It has been her vision for many years to have a food pantry for the community.

“We do this, not expecting anything of anyone, but we want to be a help to a troubled world,” said JNTC Pastor Max Smith. “It means a way for our church to give back to the community. Many people are struggling. Often some can have huge financial burdens with providing for their household.”

Pastor Smith said that the food pantry had never come to fruition in the past,

because the church does not have the storage space for the food.

“Now it has worked out for the food to flow into the church and out to where it needs to go on the same day,” said Smith.

A truck load of food comes in, and a team from the church will box everything up and get ready to hand it out. One box of food per family contains enough food for at least three meals.

JNTC works closely with the addiction and recovery community in the area, as well, providing meals to some recovery homes that the church works with.

“The food and meals are part of the healing process,” said Smith.

Casey Johnese is the outreach director for JNTC and works closely with the Friends of Alcoholics group to help those in addiction and recovery.

“It has always been a vision of Sister Peggy for us to have a food pantry for our community,” said Johnese. “And God started to open doors for that to happen this past November.”



Special to The Florence News

A free food pantry ministry is offered every other Friday at Jesus Name Tabernacle Church, located at 1944 Highway 49 South in Florence.

While working with the Friends of Al-

coholics group, Johnese met Terry Cunningham, who oversees the food donations for the group.

“We connected with him; and, the next thing we knew, we opened the fellowship hall, and there was food everywhere! He has been a tremendous blessing.”

The FLS Food Pantry is open every other Friday, and anyone can stop by. Those who would like a food box are asked to sign in and wait in line. The church starts giving away boxes at 3 p.m., and they continue until everything is gone. Inside the boxes are non-perishable items, but also breads, flour and meat.

For more information about when donations will take place, follow JNTChurch on Facebook, visit their website at JNTChurch.org, or contact Casey Johnese at 601-213-8150. The church is located at 1944 Highway 49 South in Florence.

“We are not doing this to grow the church, but to serve the community,” said Smith. “But everyone is always welcome to come fellowship with us.”

## Florence voters approve resort area status, liquor by the glass

By James Osborne

In a special election held on December 12, Florence voters went to the polls and voted in favor of a change to city liquor laws - to allow liquor to be sold by the glass in businesses in the city, like restaurants and hotels. The business must also provide food at the establishment, not just alcohol. Prior to the change, restaurants could sell beer, but not liquor.

City officials explain that the change only impacts businesses’ ability to sell liquor by the glass and does not authorize the opening of liquor stores. Proceeds of the taxes on the liquor sales will be allocated to the City’s parks and recreation department.

In the special election, Florence residents were able to vote for or against the proposal of establishing a qualified resort area for the City of Florence, which determines whether or not liquor can be sold by the glass within qualified businesses. Vote totals were 83 votes in favor of the resort status, and 21 votes were counted against the resort status.

Florence Mayor Bob Morris said that the referendum was proposed in the hopes of bringing in more business into the city limits of Florence. Some restaurants and establishments have been recruited in the past to locate in



Special to The Florence News

Florence, but they said they were disappointed to learn that liquor was not allowed to be sold by the glass within the city limits.

“We decided that one of the best ways to get more restaurants and businesses in Florence - and to raise tax revenue - is to be able to sell alcohol,” said Morris. “Some of the restaurants that did want to come down

here in the past chose not to, because they couldn’t sell alcohol. And that is how some restaurants make most of their money - through liquor sales.”

Liquor was sold at some restaurants in Florence before, under certain conditions. Prior to the special election, Doe’s Eat Place was able to sell liquor because they maintained an 8,000-square-foot area to provide culinary school classes. Two Mexican restaurants followed suit and were also authorized to sell liquor.

“Another thing holding us back from more business, and we are about to correct that, is adding a sewer line all the way down [Highway] 49,” said Morris.

The City is in the process now of working to place a sewer line all the way through Highway 49 on the north and south end of the city limits.

“That is going to attract a lot of businesses, also,” said Morris. “Businesses have to have access to sewage and water, and serving alcohol is only a plus. So, I look forward to us to really start growing soon.”

Some of the businesses coming soon to Florence will be a new bank and a new car wash, though Morris says the names of the businesses can’t be released just yet. He said City officials are actively pursuing attracting more businesses to move to Florence.

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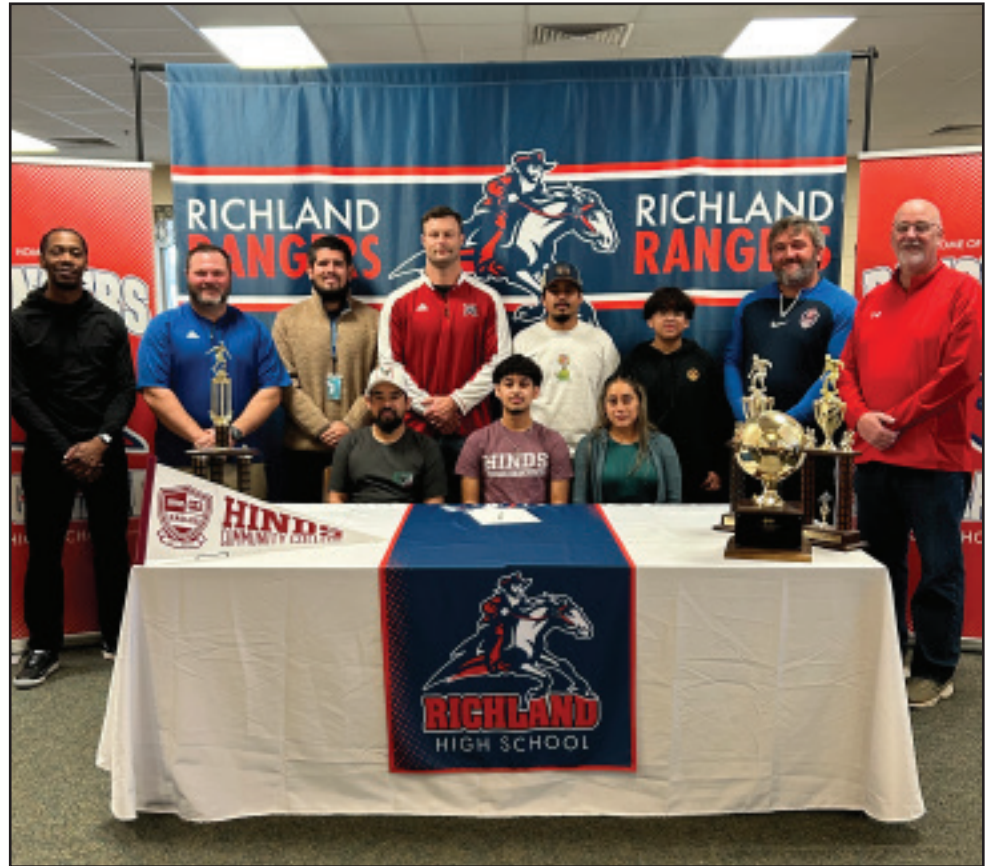
# Florence Elementary students participate in spelling bee



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Justus Wedgeworth (left) and Kaitlyn Fillpot (right) recently represented Florence Elementary School at the Rankin County School District's spelling bee.

# Richland's Guevara signs with Hinds



Special to SW Rankin News

William Guevara, a senior at Richland High School, recently signed a letter of intent to play soccer for Hinds Community College in 2024. Pictured (l to r) are, front row: Jose Guevara (dad), William Guevara and Maria Gonzalez (mom); and back row: Richland High School Principal Dr. Marcus Stewart, Athletic Director Todd Montgomery, Assistant Coach Ross Rodgers, Head Coach John Adams, Billy Guevara (brother), Christopher Guevara (brother), Assistant Coach Corey Myers and Assistant Principal Corey Yates.

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601-706-9237

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### Publisher

Clay Mansell  
claymansell@SWRankinNews.com

### Editor in Chief

Stephanie Tracy

### Writer

James Osborne

### Sales Representatives

Clay Mansell  
claymansell@SWRankinNews.com

Judy Duke  
Judy@SWRankinNews.com

### Graphic Designer

Holly Embry  
designer@SWRankinNews.com

### Office Manager

Doris Bynum

### Distribution

Ben Barnett

For submission information, email  
news@SWRankinNews.com.

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# McDaniel accepts appointment as Rankin County Youth Court Judge



Special to SW Rankin News

Judge Kent McDaniel (left), appointed by the Governor to fill the vacancy created by last year's death of County Court and Youth Court Judge Thomas Broome, was sworn into office as Rankin County Youth Court judge for a term that began on January 1, while his wife, JoAnn McDaniel (center) held the Bible. McDaniel retired in 2021, after twenty-four years of service as Rankin County Court Judge, but came out of retirement to work as a special judge hearing Rankin County Youth Court cases by appointment of the Supreme Court last spring, assisting after Broome became ill. A special election will be held on November 5, 2024; and McDaniel said he expects to serve for a year, but he will not seek election. McDaniel was sworn in by Rankin County Court Judge David Morrow (right).

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# Richland cheerleaders participate in Pearl Harbor Memorial Parade

Special to SW Rankin News

Three Richland High School senior cheerleaders, Anecia Robinson, Cierra Sheppard and Isa Alvarado, recently represented Varsity Spirit in the Pearl Harbor Memorial Parade in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Cheerleaders who are invited to perform in the Pearl Harbor Memorial Parade are part of a select group of All-Americans identified at Varsity Spirit summer camps across the country. All-Americans are chosen based on superior cheerleading as well as leadership skills at camps operated by Universal Cheerleaders Association (UCA).

The girls performed with Varsity Spirit All-Americans in the parade before thousands of fans lining the streets of Waikiki Beach. The event marked the 82nd anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. The parade theme was "remembering the past



Special to SW Rankin News

Pictured (l to r) are Anecia Robinson, Cierra Sheppard, Coach Terri Sullivan and Isa Alvarado of Richland High School, who represented Varsity Spirit at the Pearl Harbor Memorial Parade.

and celebrating our future."

Besides being able to perform for national heroes, athletes had the opportunity to meet cheer-

leaders from across the nation and enjoy a traditional Hawaiian luau and a trip to the Pearl Harbor Memorial and the USS Missouri Battleship.

# Aultman honored as teacher intern

Special to SW Rankin News

Margaret Aultman of Florence is among twelve Mississippi State University (MSU) College of Education graduates recently recognized for exceptional work as teacher interns in Mississippi and Alabama school districts.

The recipients of the Outstanding Teacher Intern Award were nominated for exceeding expectations while completing internships at public schools. The honorees were chosen for demonstrating exemplary professionalism, performance and a high level of commitment to the teaching profession.

Aultman, an English education major, taught in the Starkville Oktibbeha School District.

"I am thrilled to honor the recipients of the Outstanding Teacher Intern Award. Their exceptional performance, professionalism and dedication have distinguished them in their teaching internships," Teresa Jayroe, MSU College of Education dean, said. "They represent the bright fu-



Special to SW Rankin News

Margaret Aultman was named an MSU Outstanding Teacher Intern.

ture of the teaching profession, and we are proud to celebrate their achievements."

## Old Truths for Today

J.T. Morgan



### Traveling Down A New Road

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.

We are traveling in a new Year, 2024, and 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 2024 the best year of your life. HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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# January Students of the Month named for FMS

Special to SW Rankin News

Florence Middle School (FMS) recently named their Eagles of the Month for January. Pictured with the honorees are FMS Assistant Principal Tyler Walters, FMS Assistant Principal Kelsey Williams, FMS Principal Brock Sistrunk and Farm Bureau Insurance Agent Tanner Wilson.



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Honored as seventh-grade Student of the Month was Drew Taylor.



Liam Hollingworth was named sixth-grade Student of the Month.



Selected as Teacher of the Month was Casandra Canley.



Nichole Johnson was awarded eighth-grade Student of the Month.

# Local Garden Club comes together for February meeting

Special to SW Rankin News

The Richland-Florence Garden Club held their regular monthly meeting on Thursday, February 1, in the Richland Community Center. With so many members having had health issues in their families, this was the club's best attendance this club year; and club members said it was wonderful to be together.

Donna Yowell from the MS Urban Forest Commission served as speaker, sharing information about pollinator gardens. She also offered information about the various programs in the state that help to promote feeding hungry people and to build self-sustaining local farms and gardens.

The Mississippi Urban Forest Council's mission is to foster and promote proper management of community forests and natural resources for social, economic and environmental benefits to people through motivation, leadership, communication and educational services.



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Donna Yowell, executive director of the Mississippi Urban Forest Council, was the guest speaker.



Pictured are Richland-Florence Garden Club members at their February meeting: Rita Wigal, Susan Harrison, Teenie Boone, Sandra Hales-Boyd, Beverly Hemphill, Annajeral Knight, Lynn Wynne, speaker Donna Yowell, Linda Stringer, Glenda Scoggins, Debbie Knight, Gaynell Ainsworth, Minetta Veazey, Rowan Craft, Shirley Wilson, Cheryl Heinz, Connie Snow, Perrie Paul and Karen Cessna.

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## Richland Library February book report: *Her Royal Spyness* by Rhys Bowen

A book report by Beth Woodmansee for *The Friends of the Richland Library*

In 2008, author Rhys Bowen began a new series featuring a most unusual heroine, a poor young woman, second cousin to King George VI. It is 1932 in Scotland, and the Honorable Lady Victoria Georgiana Charlotte Eugenie of Glen Garry and Rannock is better known as Georgianna or Georgie.

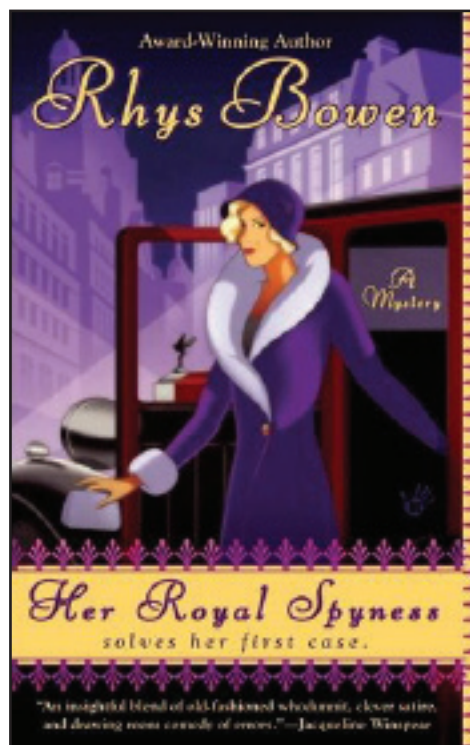
When their father died, her brother, Hamish, Duke of Rannock, a.k.a. "Binky," inherited the title and Castle Rannock, situated on a lonely crag somewhere in Scotland; but there was little money for the upkeep. Her sister-in-law, Hilda, Duchess of Rannock, is known as "Fig."

Georgie spent the previous season "coming out" in London. Family and close friends helped, wanting her to find a suitable husband. At the end of her season, she returned to Castle Rannock with no prospects. A few young men were interested, but she had no money.

One day, Georgie realized she had her own small amount of money, and she told Binky and Fig she was going to London to stay at Rannock House and find a job. They couldn't stop her.

Arriving at Rannock House in London, she realized she didn't even know how to lay a fire in the fireplace or brew tea. A chance meeting with an old school chum, who had started a fashion designing business, convinced her that she, too, could earn her own money. Her first job was at the cosmetics counter of the store where her mother, celebrated actress and the former Duchess of Rannock, who was currently married to a wealthy German industrialist, saw Georgiana and unwittingly caused her to be fired. She did meet an interesting man, however - the Irish Lord Darcy O'Mara, son of the 16th Baron Kilhenny. O'Mara, too, was penniless. There was something mysterious about him, and Georgie wondered if he really was a gentleman or an Irish rouge. Just how did he support himself?

The next day, Georgina took the few shillings she had and ordered a cup of tea and a scone in a dreary tea room. Walking by the establishment, Darcy O'Mara spotted her in the window, went inside, sat down and began talking with her. He refreshed her memory, saying that he had danced with her at several balls during her



Palace to visit her cousin, Her Majesty Queen Mary, who shared her concerns about her son, David, the Prince of Wales, and his dubious attachment to the American divorcee, Wallis Simpson. The Queen suggested that Mrs. Simpson be asked to stay at Castle Rannock during the summer, not too far from Balmoral, and asked Georgie to keep an eye on her cousin David, letting Queen Mary know if "that woman" became worrisome. Thus, Georgie became "her Royal Spyness" for Queen Mary.

Georgie learns more about the mysterious Darcy O'Mara as they work together solving the crime of a man drowned in Georgie's bathtub who may have wanted to murder Georgie. They rescued her brother Binky from the clutches of the police, who arrested him for that murder and located the blackmailer. Someone tried to drown her in the Thames River; Darcy jumped in to rescue her. Not every old school chum was who they seemed to be.

There are sixteen additional titles in Rhys Bowen's cozy *Her Royal Spyness* series, available at your favorite library. Each one is interesting and fun to read.

season. He enticed her to join him in attending a wedding reception at Grosvenor's, where she reluctantly joined him in gate-crashing the event. Dressed in posh clothing, they were admitted without question and enjoyed an evening of eating plenty of food. She was summoned to Buckingham



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# Braves announce departure from Pearl after 20 years

By James Osborne

The MS Braves have announced that this, their twentieth year in Pearl at Trustmark Park, will be their last season in Mississippi, and that the Atlanta Braves will be moving the team to Columbus, Georgia.

The announcement was made on Tuesday evening, January 29, in a post on social media to the MS Braves fans.

“To our incredible fans- 2024 will be the M-Braves’ final season in Pearl, Mississippi. The Double-A affiliate of the Atlanta Braves will be relocating to Columbus, Georgia, as of the start of the 2025 season. We want to thank Pearl, the surrounding Jackson community and the state of Mississippi for the incredible support for the franchise over the past nineteen years. We have loved creating memories with you at Trustmark Park, and we look forward to bringing you an amazing 2024 season. The M-Braves will be commemorating the 20th season at Trustmark Park throughout the sixty-nine-game home schedule in 2024, beginning with Opening Day on Tuesday, April 9, vs. Biloxi. We are hopeful that this is not the end of professional baseball in Pearl, and our organization will support any efforts to bring a team to Trustmark Park in the future.”

The City of Pearl has said that collaborative efforts were made this past year by the City government, County, and state officials to keep the team in Pearl. Legislation was passed to help create a favorable environment for the Brave’s ownership, Diamond Baseball Holdings. Officials said that the collaboration sought to enhance the local community, foster economic growth and solidify the team’s presence in Mississippi.

“We worked diligently with Spectrum Capital, State and County leaders, as well as Diamond Baseball Holdings, to come to an agreement,” expressed Pearl Mayor Jake Windham. “It is truly unfortunate that, despite our best efforts, the Braves have chosen to take this route.”

“The City of Pearl and its dedicated leaders express their disappointment at the decision made by Diamond Baseball Holdings to relocate the Mississippi Braves. The departure will undoubtedly leave a void in the hearts of local fans, who have supported the team throughout its tenure in Pearl.”

Kathy Deer, executive director of the Pearl Chamber of commerce, said, “We are very sad to see the Mississippi Braves leave Pearl. Over the last twenty years, they have been a huge attraction,



Before the start of the upcoming season, the College Baseball Series from Spectrum events will return to Trustmark Park. The college games will start on March 5 and feature Mississippi State University (MSU) versus the University of Southern Mississippi (USM). March 19 will showcase USM vs. Ole Miss. Then, May 1 will be the Governor’s Cup, Ole Miss vs. MSU. Tickets for these games are on sale now, as are the regular Braves season tickets.

Windham and City officials say they are hopeful for the future.

“The City of Pearl extends its gratitude to the fans, local businesses and the entire community for their unwavering support of the Mississippi Braves over the years. Despite the team’s departure, the City remains optimistic about the future and is dedicated to fostering a vibrant and thriving community for all its residents.”

Opening night for the MS Braves will be April 9, 2024, at Trustmark Park at 6:35 p.m. The Braves will face off against the Biloxi Shuckers.

making streets safer and protecting all drivers. City officials say this initiative to address the uninsured motorist problem is a modern, less punitive approach to solving a prolonged problem across the state of Mississippi.

drawing 3.4 million fans from all over the state to Pearl, Mississippi. Most of us in this area were Atlanta Braves fans long before the Mississippi Braves were here, so it was a natural fit for us. The baseball games have always been exciting and gave us a chance to watch first class baseball and watch as a total of 166 minor league players go on to the big league through the years. We will miss the economic impact that the Braves made here locally, packing our hotels, restaurants and retail businesses on game days, but we will also miss their dedication to community involvement in our city, chamber and schools. They have been like family members and for that we are very grateful.”

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In one advertisement in this issue, we’ve placed this newspaper image. **NEWS** Find it, write the advertiser’s name and the page number where you found it below, and mail this form to the indicated address. A drawing will be held to determine our winner from all correct entries received by March 1, 2024. There will be one winner per each issue in which this contest entry form appears. One entry per household per issue, please.

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# Bryant named Gatorade cross country player of the year



Special to SW Rankin News

Pearl High School's Jaquavion Bryant has been named the 2023-24 Gatorade Mississippi Boys Cross Country Player of the Year.

Special to SW Rankin News

In its thirty-ninth year of honoring the nation's most elite high school athletes, Gatorade recently named Jaquavion Bryant of Pearl High School the 2023-24 Gatorade Mississippi Boys Cross Country Player of the Year. Bryant is the first Gatorade Mississippi Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Pearl High School.

The award, which celebrates the nation's top high school athletes for excellence on the field, in the classroom and in the community, distinguishes Bryant as Mississippi's best high school boys cross country player. From CEOs and coaches to star athletes, Gatorade Player of the Year winners showcase the power of sport, touting an all-star group of alumni.

The 6-foot, 149-pound junior won the MHSAA Class 7A state meet this past season, breaking the tape in 15:41.92 and leading the Pirates to a second straight state title as a team. Bryant also clocked the state's fastest 5K by a prep boy last fall at the Jesse Owens Classic Gold Race, crossing the line as Mississippi's competitor at the event with a personal-best of 15:24.44. He won the Class 6A individual title as a sophomore. Bryant has volunteered locally at junior high track meets and by helping elderly neighbors in his community with yard work.

"Jaquavion Bryant kicked his season into high gear in October and never looked back," said Rich Gonzalez of

PrepCalTrack. "He won his state title in a meet record and turned in an impressive run at the Jesse Owens Classic."

Bryant has maintained a B average in the classroom. He will begin his senior year of high school next fall.

The Gatorade Player of the Year program annually recognizes one winner in the District of Columbia and each of the fifty states that sanction high school football, girls volleyball, boys and girls cross country, boys and girls basketball, boys and girls soccer, baseball, softball, and boys and girls track and field, and awards one National Player of the Year in each sport. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which leverages experts including coaches, scouts, media and others as sources to help evaluate and determine the state winners in each sport.

Bryant joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Sidney Stegall (2022-23, Heritage Academy), Keegan Leverett (2021-22, Saint Stanislaus College), and Christian Balcer (2020-21 and 2019-20, East Central High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

As part of Gatorade's commitment to breaking down barriers in sport, every Player of the Year also receives a grant to donate to a social impact partner. To date, Gatorade Player of the Year winners' grants have totaled more than \$4.9 million across more than 1,600 organizations.

# Obituaries

NAME	AGE	CITY	DOD	FUNERAL HOME
Cynthia Williams	65y	Florence, MS	12/28/2024	Chancellor FH
Geraldine Browning	85y	Florence, MS	01/04/2024	Chancellor FH
Robert Flanagan	64y	Florence, MS	01/04/2024	Chancellor FH
Virgil "Pat" Russell	84y	Coontown, MS	01/05/2024	Chancellor FH
Carrol Randal Walker Sr.	85y	Richland, MS	01/09/2024	Chancellor FH
Bhagvatiben Patel	67y	Hazelhurst, MS	01/17/2024	Chancellor FH
Blanche Norsworthy	94y	Florence, MS	01/17/2024	Chancellor FH
Joanne Edmiston	67y	Florence, MS	01/18/2024	Chancellor FH
Kenneth Wayne Shows	81y	Florence, MS	10/20/2024	Chancellor FH
George Wayne Redden	67y	Braxton, MS	01/23/2024	Chancellor FH
May Diann Moore	75y	Florence, MS	01/24/2024	Chancellor FH
Adam Joe Thibodeaux	91y	Florence, MS	01/26/2024	Chancellor FH
Nancy Burkett	77y	Florence, MS	01/26/2024	Chancellor FH

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# RHS names students of the month

Special to SW Rankin News

Richland High School students of the month are nominated and selected by their teachers for qualities such as dependability, attitude, leadership, attendance and class work. Selected students are awarded a certificate from the Exchange Club, a book donated to the library in honor of the senior from the Exchange Club, and a gift card.



Photos special to SW Rankin News

November students of the month are pictured with Principal Dr. Marcus Stewart and Assistant Principal Dr. Thomas Dudley. They were (l to r), front row: Miley Hutto, Samiya Burns and Makinlee Fallin; and back row: Stewart, Jaycee Black, Mattie Belle Tagert, John Shedd and Dudley.



Photos special to SW Rankin News

December students of the month are pictured with Assistant Principal Heather Bryan. They were (l to r), front row: Judith Hernandez, Preston Ivy and Lessie Broome; and back row: Bryan, Brooklyn Armstrong, Garrett Kennedy and Alesix McGowan.

# Reed named to MPB Student Council

Special to SW Rankin News

Kaitlyn Reed, a student at Richland High School, was recently named to the 2023-24 Mississippi Public Broadcasting (MPB) Student Council, a diverse group of fifteen middle and high school students from across the state who receive hands-on career training, lead civic engagement activities and serve as MPB's liaisons to their peers.

The council is an initiative of the MPB Education Department. In addition to college readiness and career training, council members are equipped with social media skills to lend their voices to discussions about Mississippi's progress. The students champion MPB projects, publish a podcast and create campaigns geared specifically to their generation, using distinct habits and expressions. Council members are responsible for sharing new knowledge



Special to SW Rankin News

MPB Student Council member Kaitlyn Reed of Richland.

from involvement in various aspects of the agency's departments, programs and services.

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# Local specialty restaurant featured on national series

By James Osborne

A well-known Richland restaurant has been getting state and even national attention lately. Tom's Fried Pies is on its way to becoming world famous.

On January 23, National Pie Day, Tom's Fried Pies was featured on WLBT. Tom's Fried Pies owner and manager Vickie Chapman stopped by the WLBT studios to talk about the restaurant, pies, and even made some fried apple pies on TV.

Then on January 26, the camera crew and hosts of the web series *America's Best Restaurants* stopped by Tom's to interview the owners, record how the fried pies are made in the kitchen, and, of course, try many different flavors of fried pies.

The restaurant was nominated on social media by loyal customers as the next business to be featured.

"We were first contacted in November, and they scheduled a time to come by and film," said Chapman, who owns and runs the pie shop with her father, Tom Cook.

When asked how it feels for the family business to get national attention, Chapman said, "It feels good! It feels like all of our hard work is paying off and getting noticed."



Special to SW Rankin News

Pictured (l to r) are Jacalyn Mains, with America's Best Restaurants, and Vickie Chapman and Tom Cook, with Tom's Fried Pies.

On their website, Cook tells the story and history of his family's fried pies.

"I started in 2011 with a recipe developed by my Mama long ago to feed me, my twelve brothers and sisters, and my coal miner daddy. There weren't many days that she wasn't up before dawn frying up fruit pies and meat pies made

from leftovers for my daddy's lunch pail to take to work in the coal mines of Kentucky. Before long, my daddy's fried pies were missing from his lunch pail at the mines. All of the men wanted Ms. Lillie's fried pies, and the only way Daddy would get his lunch was for Mama to send enough for the other miners."

The pie shop features a variety of fruit pies, cream pies and meat pies for lunch that are made to order. They even have seasonal pies.

In 2016, Cook retired, and his daughter Vickie took over the business. Cook is still at the store helping out and will challenge anyone to a competitive game of checkers.

When asked what makes their pies so unique, Chapman said, "It's the crust. We joke that we can put anything in the crust and make it delicious."

Chapman encourages those who have not been by to try their restaurant before to come by "for the delicious pies, the atmosphere, and for a game of checkers with Tom." The restaurant is located at 1201 Highway 49 South in Richland.

Cook is about to turn eighty-two and says he has no intention of being fully retired. He is making plans to expand Tom's Fried Pies with a food truck soon.

Chapman expects to be contacted by *America's Best Restaurants* later this month, after they finish editing the video from their visit. The video will most likely be posted online in March. For more information, follow Tom's Fried Pies on Facebook for more updates.



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# Youth art contest announced

Special to SW Rankin News

Students across Mississippi are invited to get outdoors and participate in the 2024 Bob Tyler Fish Hatchery Youth Art Contest, sponsored by the Foundation for Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks.

The contest is open to youth who are enrolled in public, private and parochial schools, as well as those in accredited home schools, after school programs or scouts.

To enter, each student must submit a portfolio including entry form and artwork depicting a Mississippi native fish or wildlife species. Artwork must be the original work of the student and may be any medium or mixture of medium. Chalk and lead creations must be sealed with adhesive.

Entries must be sent or delivered to the Visitor Education Center (VEC) in Enid, Mississippi, by May 10 and are limited to one piece per youth.

Winners in four age categories will have their work published in the *Mississippi Outdoors* magazine and will receive a complimentary copy of the magazine displaying their work. First, second and third place winners will be chosen. Winners will also receive gift cards and have their work posted on the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks' website.

For more information and entry details, visit MDWFP.com, or call the VEC at 662-563-8688.



Foundation for Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries, & Parks

# Nursing student Castillo receives white coat from MC



Special to SW Rankin News

Andrea Castillo of Pearl was among Mississippi College's first-semester nursing students who participated in the school's annual Nursing Convocation and White Coat Ceremony, during which first-year nursing students at the university receive their white coats, recite the MC School of Nursing Creed, and receive a Blessing of the Hands. Pictured (l to r) are, front row: Kellie Strong of Yazoo, Allison Poole of Clinton, Avere Gooch of Morris, Alabama, Tatum Robinson of Flowood, Madeline Mullins of Magee, Emma McConnell of Mooreville, Sarah Anne Massey of Morton, Amberal Covan of Carthage, Hallie Martin of Brandon, Sophie Sudderth of Madison, Ashley Parker of Brandon, Carli Cooper of Madison and Andrea Castillo of Pearl; and back row: Karly Ivy of Ponder, Texas, Kaitlyn Wilson of Jackson, Delicia Tyler of Utica, Macie Wright of Brandon, Kimi Webb of Coldwater, Mason Morgan of Jackson, Kamaljit Kaur of Clinton, Nathaniel Parker of Ridgeland, Mercy Chebet of Clinton, Brady Ratcliff of Brookhaven, Alexandria Harris of Carthage and Arnisimus Clark of Madison.

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# WE ARE HIRING



## Park Place recognizes creative writers



Special to SW Rankin News

Park Place Christian Academy recently recognized their 2023-24 creative writing winners. Pictured (l to r) are, front row: 9th-10th grade division third place winner Laura Keegan Stegall and first place winner Makayla Neal; and back row: 6th-8th grade division third place winner Paisley Robinson, 9th-10th grade division second place winner Shelby Odom, 11th-12th grade division second place winner Evan Atkinson, 11th-12th grade division first place winner Abby Goldberg, and 6th-8th grade division second place winner Maelee Craft. Not pictured are 11th-12th grade division third place winner Keegan Cowden and 6th-8th grade first place winner Halex Hamm.

## DCS recognizes students for giving

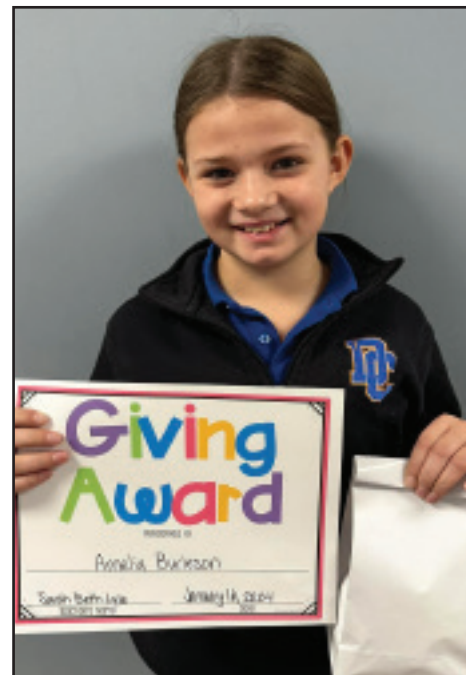
Special to SW Rankin News

Discovery Christian School recently began a character education program for students in first through fifth grades. December's trait was giving. Elementary counselor Heather Walker created a presentation about giving, and students were challenged to be giving towards others throughout the month. Several students were selected by their teachers for showing a spirit of giving throughout the month.



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Pictured (l to r) are, front row: first grader Johannes Brandt, second grader Langley Jernigan, second grader Grace Ladner and third grader Aubree Brewer; and back row: fourth grader Kelsey Mays, fifth grader Parker Sanders and fifth grader Nikki Westmoreland.



Fourth grader Amelia Bureson



Third grader Olivia Shows



### Word Seed

**"So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, 2 and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. 3 Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. 4 When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless, at Your word I will let down the net." 6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking."** (Luke 5:1-6)

Notice verse 6: **"And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking"**. I believe God wants to give His people a "net breaking blessing"!! So, the question is: What Are You Believing God For?

First of all, **we must seek the Blesser more than the blessing**. God told Abraham, **"I AM thy shield and great reward"**. HE...the Lord Himself is our great reward. He....Jesus, God's Son, is our Savior, our Healer, our Helper, our Strong Tower, our constant Companion. Indeed, He is our great Reward! Acts 3:26 says, **"To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning you from your iniquities"**. Jesus has not come to hurt us - He came to help us. He didn't come to push us down—He came to lift us up. It is out of our relationship with Him and His Presence in our life that blessings flow. If we want net-breaking blessings in our life, in our home and in our ministry, we must seek the **Blesser** more than the **Blessing**. The fact is, it's one thing to seek Him...it's quite another to seek Him **first**. Priority speaks of precedence - our seeking of Him takes precedence over everything else.

Secondly, **we must surrender**. Being a fisherman, Simon's boat represented who he was, what He did, and it represented his income. In surrendering his boat, Simon surrendered all it represented to Jesus. We must surrender our all. All we are—our past, our future, our family, Our finances, our relationships. The question is are we "all in? Being "all in" leaves nothing out. The reality is we do not set the terms of our surrender to the Lord. Jesus has already done that. In Luke 11:23, Jesus said: **You are either for me or against me. You see, with God there is no middle ground.**

So, what's going on in your life right now? Where is it that you need an incredible, uncontainable, net-breaking, life changing blessing? Perhaps you are weary from striving and straining. In faith we seek God and surrender all to Him. One moment with the Master changes everything.

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# Support requested for "Purple Alert" establishment in Mississippi

By Guest Columnist Mika Hartman

As a parent, we fear so many things while raising our children. We understand the underlying risks in most of our daily adventures. We all do our best to teach our children to be safe in a world where bad and danger exists; it comes with the parental roles: protect, teach, nurture, love and support.

When your child has a disability or multiple disabilities, the fear grows. A nonvocal and/or nonverbal child, for example, can't always share needed information to locate a family, and they can't yell "help." They may not even understand that help is needed. When a child or an adult with a cognitive disability is lost or wanders too far, even if verbal and/or vocal, they may not be able to share needed information.

Children and adults with special needs, especially those with Down syndrome or autism, have a high risk of wandering or elopement, sometimes referred to as bolting, particularly if a dual diagnosis of both Down syndrome and autism exists together.

Hudson has been dual diagnosed with both.

Half of children with autism are wanderers. Noise levels can be triggering, and the child may try to get away from it. It could be that they see something, and they are determined to get closer. No matter the reason, half of children with autism can easily become lost.

Hudson is a runner - really a bolter - and a seeker of water. He is also nonverbal. When a child becomes lost, the risk of severe danger is great: drowning, running into a busy street, unable to hydrate, weather elements, and/or possible encounters with strangers or animals. If you live in areas with snakes, that's a risk, too.

Every second matters.

As Hudson's mom, it is my job to be as prepared as possible. Our home is safe, and we have alarms and locks on every door. Our neighbors know Hudson. I take new photos almost daily. I work with him on swimming, but I'm unsure how he would be without me there. Even with all of these measures in place at home, they don't apply in public spaces or even at friends' homes. Daily living and travel bring new levels of fear.

Many families use GPS trackers to provide a sense of peace over their runners, but even GPS trackers in shoes won't work if different shoes - or no shoes - are worn. Some use bracelets, but kids with sensory issues may not be able to tolerate wearing them.

Recently, Kayla, a seventeen-year-old in Pennsylvania, was dropped at school by her special needs bus... and the school was closed due to a smell reported the day before. Kayla was missing for over eight hours. Kayla even went in convenience stores, and surveillance cameras re-

veal that no help was offered. She was found in downtown Pittsburg in cold temperatures, but she was reported to be okay.

Yesterday, I was sent an article about a four-year-old with autism who went missing on January 12. Phenix was missing for more than twenty-four hours. He was found because of over one hundred volunteers who wouldn't stop looking. The public knowing was everything in this search.

I have a friend here locally who has several locks on their doors at home, but her son still gets out and has been found several miles from home, multiple times. She has locks high up, but he gets a chair or a broom handle. She has GPS trackers, but he has to be wearing his belt or shoes. Her constant fear is heavy.

At dinner the other evening, a stranger shared that his best friend's son always gets away at Cruising the Coast. He knows several people and always finds a face that can help. What if he didn't? There are 100,000 faces. However, he loves going and should be able to have fun. It is such a balance; that is why we - all families like mine - weigh the risk-benefit in everything we do.

Sadly, a buddy up north was found drowned in a pond. He was at his grandfather's house, and no alarms told them he went outside. When they realized a back glass door was slimly open, they ran to find him. It was a family Christmas gathering a few years ago.

Over and over, this happens often. Seventy to ninety percent of tragic deaths are caused by drowning when a special needs child wanders away.

If you see us out, you'll often see Hudson in his wheelchair. He can walk really well, but it is for his protection in public places. He doesn't really walk; he runs. He does not look back to see if you're with him. He won't turn to his name being called. He is fast, and he loves water. I know I am repeating myself, but it is important that you know many of our loved ones with Down syndrome, autism or who are dual diagnosed are very similar in their love of water!

I share all of this, and I could share hundreds of stories, to say that there is something we can do to help families like mine. It is called a "Purple Alert." You know about the "Amber," the "Silver," and even the "Blue;" now, it's time to add the "Purple."

Florida already has the "Purple Alert," and it is written like this: Purple: For adults with mental or cognitive disabilities.

I want to take Mississippi's "Purple Alert" to the next level: as both a single alert or one that can be in combination with "Amber" or "Silver."

I have proudly teamed up with District 56 Representative Clay Mansell to author House Bill 873 to add this "Purple Alert" to our alert system here in the great state of Mississippi. Ours simply states: "Purple Alert: Establish an additional means to aid in the search of persons with cognitive disabilities."

When time matters, information received is everything. Cognitive disabilities affect newborns to elders, and this alert should be used to provide law enforcement and the public with needed vital information in the quickest manner. Saving our loved ones from the tragic outcomes comes down to time... and not much of it.

These are all very hard conversations, but a "Purple Alert" is easy. It's not re-inventing the wheel; it's adding a needed color to the wheel to provide information to help if needed. Pennsylvania is trying to get this alert now, after what happened to Kayla. We should not wait for something to happen, because it already happens daily; you just don't know about it.

Mississippi is a wonderful and safe home for all, and this simple change will bring some relief for families - and it could save lives.

This addition is a beautiful step to protecting our citizens, being a voice for those with no voice and protecting those who cannot understand the dangers out there.

Please join me in getting the "Purple Alert" added to our Mississippi Alert System; we can easily add in protections like this to make Mississippi the gold standard for our loved ones and neighbors with cognitive disabilities. Call your local legislators, and ask them to say "Yes!"



## PURPLE ALERT FOR MISSISSIPPIANS

Establish as additional means to aid search of missing persons with cognitive disabilities

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# 7 Brew opens location in Pearl Donald recognized for gratitude



7 Brew, a drive-thru coffee stand offering over 20,000 unique drink combinations, in partnership with the Pearl Chamber of Commerce, recently held a ribbon cutting for its newest stand in Pearl at 5746 US-80. The 7 Brew stand is expected to add over fifty jobs to the Pearl area. At the ribbon-cutting event, 7 Brew also joined Children's of Mississippi representatives to present a \$1,000 donation to support regional pediatric healthcare. The location is the second in the metro area, with the first opening in Flowood late last year.



Photos special to SW Rankin News



Special to SW Rankin News

Hunter Donald was recognized as Richland High School's November Character Trait Student of the Month. The character trait for the month was gratitude. Donald, a senior, is known for always letting his teachers know how much they have helped him.

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8:30AM – 5:00PM

# Pearl Pre-K program opens screening signup for 2024-25

Special to SW Rankin News

The Pearl Public School District's Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC) is accepting names for a waiting list for their Pre-K/four-year-old program for the 2024-25 school year.

To qualify to register for the Pre-K program, which is free, a child must be four years old on or before September 1, 2024; reside within the Pearl Public School District; and be fully toilet-trained.

The program, which is a full school day program, does not include bus transportation. School hours are located in the Student/Parent Handbook at [www.PearlK12.com](http://www.PearlK12.com) under the "Parents" tab. Pirate Care, an afterschool program for students, is available for Pre-K students at ECEC; but space is limited. There is a registration fee and tuition fee to attend Pirate Care, and more information is available by email-



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ing [JIshee@PearlK12.com](mailto:JIshee@PearlK12.com) if a child is accepted into the Pre-K program.

To determine eligibility for the Pre-K program, which is funded with Title I funds, each child must be screened. Children are placed in the program from those demonstrating the great-

est need to those demonstrating the least need, based on the results of the screener, and applying does not guarantee acceptance. Space in the program is limited to one hundred students per school year. Having a sibling who previously participated in the program is

not a qualifying component.

At the screening appointment, which takes between ten and fifteen minutes, parents/guardians must provide required proofs of residence, the child's certified birth certificate and social security card, immunization documents, and custody or guardianship documents (if applicable).

Parents or caregivers who wish to place their child's name on the waiting list are asked to complete the ECEC screening signup form by 3 p.m. on March 1.

Notifications of acceptance into the program will be emailed and mailed by March 18. Children who are not accepted can be placed on a waiting list for open slots that may come available during the school year.

For more information and to complete the screening signup form, visit [www.PearlK12.com/Page/618](http://www.PearlK12.com/Page/618).



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# Florence student pages in MS House Coley visits MS Supreme Court



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Layton Varner of Florence recently served as a page for the Mississippi House of Representatives. Pages generally run errands for officials and House staff. Varner, a junior at Florence High School, is the daughter of newly-elected Representative Lance Varner and his wife, Lacy. She was sponsored by Tammy Cowart, the executive assistant to Speaker Jason White. When asked about her time at the Capitol, Varner said, "I am beyond thankful to have been able to serve as a page in the Mississippi House of Representatives. Thank you to Ms. Tammy for this amazing opportunity. I loved every second of this week, and I am looking forward to coming back next year."



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Senate pages from across the state visited the Mississippi Supreme Court recently during a break from their legislative duties. Senate page Ava Coley of Richland (left) is pictured with Presiding Justice Jim Kitchens (right) during her visit.

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# Safe Haven Baby Box placed in nearby Simpson County

Special to SW Rankin News

Late last month, the first-ever Safe Haven Baby Box to be placed at a Mississippi hospital was placed at Simpson General Hospital in Mendenhall. The hospital is in Simpson County, which is a neighboring county to Rankin. The Baby Box is the first of its kind to be located at an emergency services hospital and health care facility in the state. Currently, the only other Baby Box in Mississippi is located at Central Fire Station in Long Beach, on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

“This is the second such box instituted in Mississippi, but the first of its kind at a hospital,” said Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson. “To date, forty babies have been surrendered to Safe Haven Baby Boxes across the U.S., and this additional Baby Box located in our own backyard is a positive step in the right direction for Mississippians. This unique initiative legally permits a mother in crisis to safely, securely and anonymously surrender their newborn if they are unable to care for them. I pray this Baby Box will be used in a mighty way, and that many lives will be rescued.”

The Safe Haven Baby Box at Simpson General Hospital will be available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Prior to serving as Agriculture Commissioner, in 2018, then-State Representative Gipson served as the Committee Chairman who handled and passed House Bill 1510 resulting in the United States Supreme Court’s *Dobbs* decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*. The *Dobbs*



Pictured (l to r) are Kaitlyn Kelly, Mississippi R.N. and activist; Melissa Sullivan, executive director of the Simpson County Center for Pregnancy Choices; Commissioner Andy Gipson; and Gregg Gibbs, CEO and administrator of Simpson General Hospital.

decision rendered by the court in 2022 has resulted in ending abortion on demand in Mississippi and many other states nationwide.

“We welcome and cherish every baby born,” said Gipson. “We want the mothers to know they have an option to bring their child here, where they will be cared for, loved and placed in a loving home.”

Safe Haven Baby Boxes were started by Monica Kelsey in 2016 as an initiative to allow for the legal, safe surrender of a baby with complete anonymity for care and eventual adoption. Accord-

ing to the Safe Haven Baby Box Organization, if a woman chooses to surrender her infant via the Baby Box, the door locks when the mother closes the box. Alarms alert the location that a baby has been surrendered, and personnel will retrieve the infant within five minutes. The infant will immediately be taken for medical evaluation and eventually placed with an adoptive family. Families seeking to adopt a Safe Haven baby should reach out to their local Department of Family Services to register for foster care with intention to adopt.

For more information about Safe Haven Baby Boxes, visit SHBB.org.

The toll-free 24-hour hotline for mothers in crisis is 866-99BABY1 (866-992-2291).



Photos special to SW Rankin News

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