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SWRANKIN NEWS

Vol. 11, No. 06 | June 2026

The Pearl News

THE NEWS
RICHLAND

THE FLORENCE
NEWS

State Senator Dean Kirby of Pearl will not seek re-election

By Frank Corder

Senate President Pro Tempore Dean Kirby (R) has announced that he will not be seeking re-election to the Mississippi Senate in 2027.

Senator Kirby has served in the Mississippi Senate since 1992. He will not seek a tenth term next year. Kirby, who turns eighty this year, has served in the state Senate since 1992. He represents Senate District 30 and has been the chamber's Pro Tem since 2020.

As the chamber's Pro Tem elected by the members, Kirby oversees the operations of the Senate and chairs the Rules Committee. He is also the vice chair of the Interstate and Federal Cooperation Committee and currently serves on Senate committees for Corrections, Drug Policy, Finance, Insurance, Judi-

ciary A, Medicaid, and Municipalities.

Kirby has been actively involved in Republican Party politics since the late 1970s, when he chaired the Rankin County Republican Executive Committee. His election to the Mississippi Senate came after redistricting following the 1990 Census. In 1991, Kirby ousted then incumbent State Senator Barbara Blanton, despite being outspent by a five-to-one margin.

Well-wishers poured across social media after the announcement, with former state Senator-turned-Secretary of State Michael Watson leading the pack, saying Kirby "is a good friend who always poured into me."

"He's done it the right way and has been a wonderful public servant," Watson said.

As for who will run to fill the Senate



Special to The Pearl News

Senate President Pro Tempore Dean Kirby has announced that he will not seek a tenth term next year.

District 30 seat, State Rep. Lee Yancey (R) declared his intention to run for the open seat. He said Kirby has faithfully served the district in the State Senate, and he is grateful for Kirby's decades of leadership.

"With Senator Kirby's recent announcement that he will not seek re-election, I am announcing my candidacy today in Senate District 30, because I believe it is the best way for me to do more for Rankin County," Yancey said.

Other candidates will likely enter the Senate race, now that Kirby's intentions have been made public. Qualifying for the 2027 legislative and statewide races will open in January.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Article courtesy The Magnolia Tribune.

Summer Library Program to "Unearth a Story" June 1-30

The Pearl News

The Pearl, Richland and Florence libraries, part of the Central Mississippi Regional Library System (CMRLS), have announced that their 2026 Summer Library Program, "Unearth a Story," will take place from June 1 to June 30. Readers of all ages are invited to dig into exciting stories, participate in engaging activities and discover new adventures throughout the month.

The Summer Library Program encourages children, teens and adults to continue reading and learning during the summer while enjoying fun, educational events designed for the entire community. Local libraries will offer themed programs, crafts, games, special performances, reading challenges and opportunities to win prizes. Events and activities, which will also include weekly story time opportunities, family events and age-specific activities,



Special to The Pearl News

The 2026 Summer Library Program, "Unearth a Story," will be at local libraries from June 1-30.

are free and open to the public.

"Unearth a Story" celebrates imagination, exploration and discovery through books and hands-on experiences. The program is designed to inspire a lifelong love of reading while bringing families and community members together at the library.

Community members are encouraged to visit their local library throughout June to participate in the many activities planned as part of this

year's summer celebration. Participants are encouraged to read throughout the month for the "Read Every Day Challenge," track their progress and earn changes to win prizes at their local branch, with the opportunity to qualify for the system-wide grand prize (five total) – an iPad, with one awarded to each age group. Participants must read every day in June to qualify for the iPad drawing.

The Challenge is open to all ages with a CMRLS card, pre-K through

adult. Age groups will be Pre-school, K-4th, Tweens, Teens, and Adults. One prize entry is awarded for every three days of reading. Reading logs can be tracked manually or online, and reading includes books, audiobooks, e-books, magazines, etc. Reading to children counts.

To register for the program, which is required in order to be eligible for prizes, visit a local CMRLS branch or visit www.cmrls.lib.ms.us/summer-library-program-2026/ for instructions on how to register online.

Reading logs must be submitted by July 3. Logs can be tracked online using the beanstack app or can be tracked manually.

For more information about the "Unearth a Story" Summer Library Program, including schedules and registration details, contact a CMRLS library, or visit cmrls.lib.ms.us.

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Keep Richland Beautiful awarded for beautification efforts

By Susie A. Wolfe

Keeping Richland Beautiful is a group effort, and the group's work was recognized by Keep Mississippi Beautiful (KMB) at its thirty-third KMB awards luncheon held at the Jackson Country Club on April 30.

Kelly Wedgeworth, the Keep Richland Beautiful coordinator, said, "Last Spring, and again this year, we planted a small wildflower/butterfly garden in the corner of Eastside Park beside the softball fields. Our field maintenance supervisor, Jonathan Johnson, sprayed Roundup and marked the area for planting. Alderman Beth Sanford and her husband, Dana Sanford, tilled the area, and Tom's Fried Pies donated our 'Butterfly Garden' sign."

Wedgeworth planted the seeds provided by Keep Mississippi Beautiful through a USDA Wildflower Trails of Mississippi program. They did the same



Special to The Richland News

This is the second year that Keep Richland Beautiful planted a Butterfly Wildflower Garden in the corner of Eastside Park beside the softball fields. It was recognized recently by the USDA Wildflower Trails of Mississippi at the April 30 Keep Mississippi Awards Luncheon.

process again this year but increased the size of the garden.

Other activities of Keep Richland Beautiful include Richland Cleanup

Day and Cleanup Week that they do annually. This year, on Richland Cleanup Day, they had fifty volunteers, including some from businesses such as

APAC and Plainview Assisted Living. They collected one hundred bags of litter from the streets of Richland this year on that day.

Cleanup Week is another project held annually that allows Richland residents and businesses to bring large items to the city dump all week. This year, one hundred and fifty-five individuals took advantage of cleanup week and filled four large dumpsters with a total of nearly two tons of garbage.

Also, trees were planted next to the Richland Recreation Center by the Public Works Department. In March 2026, Keep Richland Beautiful received ten fifteen-gallon trees, five Magnolia and five Red Maple, from a grant through Keep Mississippi Beautiful and the Mississippi Forestry Commission.

Keep Richland Beautiful meets quarterly and is always looking for new members. Call 601-420-3400 for more information.

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State and local groups express sympathy for the passing of Buddy Cooper

Special to The Florence News

A celebration of life service was held Saturday, May 25, 2026, at First Baptist Church in Florence for Alex "Buddy" Cooper, a Rankin County school bus driver and beloved "Santa" figure, who died May 16.

According to the church staff, pews of the church were filled with those whose lives Cooper touched for more than a decade, and the stories of his kindness were shared.

Gabe Cooper said seeing the number of lives that his father, Buddy, touched was overwhelming.

"We were so honored to be visited by Representative Lance Varner to present [us] with a special proclamation honoring my dad, mourning the loss and commemorating the life, legacy, and service and expressing deepest sympathy to his family and friends for his passing," said his son, Gabe, in posts online.

Buddy Cooper died a few days after the May 11 morning crash of his school

bus and an 18-wheeler on Highway 49 at Post Road. Though there were no students onboard, the investigation is ongoing, according to Florence Police Chief Brad Burns, who confirmed that the driver of the 18-wheeler alleged that his brakes were not working at the time of the accident coming through the intersection.

The teachers and administrators at Florence schools were upset by the news of the Rankin County School District (RCSD) wreck, and the subsequent death of their beloved bus driver.

According to Shey Patterson, RCSD transportation supervisor for the Florence Zone, "Mr. Buddy drove a school bus for the Florence school zone since 2012, so he's been driving fourteen years plus for Florence. Mr. Buddy was loved by his students and loved by his fellow coworkers. He was dependable. He was loyal. He was compassionate, and he always brought a smile to everyone's face. The community of Florence and the Florence schools will miss him greatly. He has left



Special to The Florence News

Gabe Cooper asked the community to remember his father by spending time volunteering, giving blood, giving to a charity, giving to somebody in need or doing something in the community to help others.

a void that will never be filled."

Florence Mayor Trey Gunn said, "Buddy Cooper leaves behind a legacy of service, kindness and joy that will not be forgotten. Through his years of caring for students and creating special memories for families across our community,

he made Florence a better place. His impact will be felt for generations, and we extend our deepest condolences to his family and all who loved him."

"Our condolences to the family," Richland Mayor Clay Burns said. "He was a great feature in our city and very well loved."

"He would always tell our families every year at our Christmas parties, 'My God don't make no junk,'" said Frances Patterson, Harbour Day School executive director. "He would tell our families you were specially chosen to have the gift of a child with special needs."

"Buddy had requested all donations be for our program and school," Patterson said. "Literally in the last hours of his life, Gabe said he mentioned you guys twice and how imperative it is that people give. I think that's his legacy."

His son, Gabe, said to remember his father, "Just spend some time, volunteer, give blood, give to a charity, give to somebody in need. Do something in your community to help others."

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Legislative Update: redistricting, special sessions, and the early 2027 races



By Senator Brian Rhodes,
State Senator, Mississippi
District 36

Mississippi politics continues to stay active, even though the regular legislative session has ended.

Recently, Governor Tate Reeves cancelled the special session he had previously called regarding judicial redistricting. The special session was specifically called for the purpose of redrawing Mississippi Supreme Court district maps after a lower federal court ruled changes were necessary.

However, after the recent Callais case, the lower court vacated its earlier ruling that mandated the new Supreme Court maps. With that decision no longer in place, there was no immediate legal requirement for the Legislature to meet and redraw those districts, leading the Governor to cancel the special session.

There has been a great deal of excitement and speculation from both sides of the political aisle about the possibility of congressional redistricting, as well. It is important to understand, however, that congressional redistricting was never included in the Governor's official call for the special session. Under Mississippi law, once the Legislature adjourns its regular session, lawmakers in a special session are limited strictly to the subjects the Governor places in the call.

Even though congressional redistricting was not part of the cancelled special session, discussions are continuing around the state. There is still significant debate surrounding whether changing congressional districts at this point would even be legal, since Mississippi has already conducted party primaries for the upcoming election cycle.

While no immediate action appears likely, I do expect there to be conversations next year regarding possible changes to both congressional and legislative district lines.

At the same time, statewide elections in 2027 are already drawing early attention. Governor Tate Reeves will be term limited, and several high-profile Republicans have already announced campaigns to succeed him.

Former Speaker of the House Philip Gunn and Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson were the first major candidates to officially announce their intentions to run for Governor. With several other names rumored to be considering the race, the Republican primary for Governor could become very crowded.

Commissioner Gipson's decision to seek the Governor's office would also leave the Agriculture Commissioner position open. While there has already been speculation about possible candidates, no formal announcements have been made at this time.

For Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State Michael Watson is currently the only officially announced candidate.

Meanwhile, State Auditor Shad White has publicly stated that he intends to seek another office, which opens the door for a competitive race for State Auditor. Former Representative Nick Bain and Senator Daniel Sparks have already formally announced campaigns for that position.

At this point, no candidates have officially announced for Secretary of State, and we are still waiting to see whether Attorney General Lynn Fitch will seek reelection or pursue another office. We also have not yet seen any formal announcements for Insurance Commissioner, and it remains unclear whether Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney plans to seek another term.

At this point, all indications are that State Treasurer David McRae intends to remain in the Treasurer's office for the foreseeable future, though Mississippi politics always has a way of changing quickly.

Even though the Legislature is out of session, Mississippi politics certainly is not slowing down any time soon.



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601-706-9237

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Publisher

Clay Mansell
claymansell@SWRankinNews.com

Editor in Chief

Stephanie Tracy

Managing Editor

Susie Wolfe
news@SWRankinNews.com
601-706-9327, ext. 3

Sales Representatives

Jason Greer
Jason@SWRankinNews.com
Clay Mansell
claymansell@SWRankinNews.com

Susie Wolfe
news@SWRankinNews.com
601-706-9327, ext. 3

Graphic Designer

Holly Embry
designer@SWRankinNews.com

Distribution

Martin Tucker
Martin@SWRankinNews.com

Office Manager

Doris Bynum

For submission information, email
news@SWRankinNews.com.
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Huelett, named Richland's new digital specialist



By Susie A. Wolfe

Taylor Huelett started with the City of Richland on May 27. She will serve as Mayor Clay Burn's administrative assistant and with communications and digital media. From Houston, Texas, Huelett is a graduate of Mississippi State University.

International Paper breaks ground on new \$225 million Rankin facility

By Danniell Tyson

Mississippi continued its economic development winning streak Wednesday May 26, 2026, with the groundbreaking for International Paper's (IP) \$225 million packaging facility in Rankin County.

Workers at the company's new 470,000 square-foot facility will utilize state-of-the-art innovation and lean-manufacturing technologies to produce corrugated packaging, company leaders said.

Governor Tate Reeves was on hand for the ceremony to mark the investment in Mississippi.

"Today, Mississippi continues winning," said Reeves. "When a company needs something built, and built right, they are choosing Mississippi."

Construction is expected to start in June in the East Metro Center Industrial Park on an 80-acre site in Brandon and be completed by the end of 2027.

When the plant is fully operational, it will use



Special to SW Rankin News

Employees from IP's Richland plant will transition to the new IP facility. Keith Townsend, IP's vice president and general manager for North America Packaging Solutions East division, said the company has strong ties to Mississippi, noting IP has had a presence in the Magnolia State for nearly half a century and still operates three mills in Mississippi.

the most advanced technology and modern safety standards, International Paper's officials told a crowd of about seventy-five gathered for groundbreaking.

Keith Townsend, IP's vice president and general manager for North America Packaging Solutions East division, said the company has strong ties to Mississippi, noting IP has had a presence in the Magnolia State for nearly half a century and still operates three mills in Mississippi.

The new facility is intended to better meet customers' demand while improving efficiency. It will also support strategic growth and long-term investment in Mississippi.

The investment is providing approximately one hundred fifty jobs, careers officials said are "high paying." Employees from IP's Richland plant will transition to the new facility.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Article courtesy The Magnolia Tribune.





FBC RICHLAND
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Old Truths for Today

J.T. Morgan



A Look At "The Sinner's Prayer" In History

"What must I do to be saved", is the most essential question anyone could ask. There is an increasing number of people relying on the "sinner's prayer" as the basis of accepting Jesus and being saved. Does the Bible teach that one can be saved by saying or praying the sinner's prayer?

In taking a close look in the New Testament, there is not one word about the sinner's prayer. In fact "the sinner's prayer" is not found! Not one person is told in the New Testament to pray to receive salvation. So where did this concept come from?

During the Reformation a great many changes in the religious scene were made and during this time a number of denominations were founded. By the 1600's these new denominations abounded in traditions and the early zeal of faith began to wane. The majority of people still held to the Catholic idea of infant baptism. Preachers in the various denominations began to minimize the importance of such baptisms and baptism in general.

During the 1700's there came an era of strong preaching. It created an environment where people felt the need to respond to the message preached. During this time it was concluded that the point of faith was more important than obedience. It was during this time that Huldrych Zwingli, a leader in the Reformation movement in Switzerland, put into words the famous statement that "baptism was only an outward sign of an inward grace". In the 1700's prayer was loosely associated with conversion. By the 1800's it was standard practice to pray to "receive Christ".

During the early 1900's a baseball player, Billy Sunday, was converted and eventually began to preach. He called his meetings crusades and was the first to mix the ideas of entertainment with teaching. After a thunderous sermon that contained heavy moralistic messages with political overtones and humor, called outlandish behavior by some, salvation was offered to the audience often associated with prayer which Sunday called "the sinner's prayer" and told they were saved if they simply walked down the aisle. Billy Graham was converted during one of Sunday's crusades in 1936. Graham's crusades were similar to those mentioned above, but he added respectability to his crusades. By the 1950's Graham's counselors were using a prayer from his book "Four Steps to Peach with God".

With such a long history it is no wonder people think that this is the way to be saved. (To be continued)

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Pearl and Richland honored at 33rd KMB Awards Luncheon

Special to the SW Rankin News

Rankin County groups and residents were award winners at the thirty-third annual Keep Mississippi Beautiful (KMB) Awards Luncheon held on April 30 at the Jackson Country Club.

Not only was Springlake Garden Club of Pearl recognized for their efforts in beautifying our state, but club member Betty Newman was presented with the Barbara Door Green Hero Reward for her years of dedication to beautification, gardening education, and environmental stewardship in the Pearl community.

Also, Pearl Mayor Jake Windham was recognized under the mayor's division, and the City of Pearl was awarded under city governments of 15,000 and above.

Keep Richland Beautiful received a plaque from the Wildflower Trails of Mississippi



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Betty Newman (right) was awarded the Keep Mississippi Beautiful Barbara Door Green Hero Award for her work with the Springlake Garden Club, which she started in 2009, and other projects. Pictured with Newman is Sandy Powlett of Entergy (left), who presented the awards as the Chair of the Board of Directors for KMB.

beautification category for projects like the Butterfly Garden at Eastside Park.

The Brandon Garden Club was recognized for its work with the Mississippi Agriculture Museum, and the Mills family re-



The Mayor of the City of Pearl, Jake Windham (right), was awarded the 2026 KMB Mayor of the Year award for cities of 25,000, and the City of Pearl was recognized for KMB efforts to create a beautiful state where people will want to come and visit. Stacy Smith, the KMB coordinator for Pearl, accepted the city award. Pictured with Windham is Sandy Powlett with KMB.

ceived a volunteer award for work on behalf of the Reservoir Beautification Project.

Rep. Clay Mansell, District 56 state representative and publisher of the Pearl, Richland, and Florence newspapers, was a speaker,



The City of Richland received recognition in the Wildflower Trails category for Mississippi beautification projects at the KMB Awards luncheon at the Jackson Country Club. Pictured are Richland Mayor Clay Burns (left) and Kelly Wedgeworth (right), Richland's Community Involvement Coordinator, who manages the Richland beautification projects.

as was MDOT Central Mississippi Commissioner Willie Simmons. Sandy Powlett of Entergy presented awards as the Chair of the Board of Directors for Keep Mississippi Beautiful, an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful.

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From the Florence Boardroom: vote to be held on selling medical cannabis

SW Rankin News



The City of Florence Mayor and Board of Aldermen met in their regularly scheduled meeting set for the first and third Tuesday each month at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall located at 203 College Street in Florence.

Present on April 21 were Mayor Pro-Tem Brian Grantham and Aldermen John Banks, Mason Herrin, Kyle Martin and Brent Sistrunk. Mayor Trey Gunn was absent.

The Board's business included voting to send Chief Burns to the Mississippi Association of Police Summer conference in Biloxi June 16-19, 2026; to send Public Works Operator Billy Russell and Maintenance worker Ethan Peden to the Rural Water Association, Inc. 2026 Backflow Prevention Certification class in Pearl on August 17-20, 2026; and to send Public Works Operator Billy Russell to 2026 MSRWA Annual Management & Technical Conference in Biloxi, May 26-29, 2026.

Upon recommendation of Community Development Director Joel Sims, a motion was made to approve signage for Peak Therapy located at 2990 Highway 49 South Florence; to approve



By Susie A. Wolfe

signage for Outlaw Customs, LLC located at 2893 Highway 49 South Florence; to send Mayor Assistant/Police Officer Richard Thomas to the 2026 Summer MACE Educational Conference August 11-14, 2026 in Biloxi; to send Community Development Director Joel Sims to the 2026 Summer MACE Conference August 11-14, 2026 in Biloxi; and to authorize Mayor Gunn to sign the CE&I Contract with Engineering Service for the New Water Well Project.

The Board also approved the claim's docket and minutes of the previous meeting. The Board went into executive session to discuss

a personnel matter in the Fire Department involving the position of fire fighter. Upon recommendation of Fire Chief Richard Wilson, the group agreed to hire KeAndre R. Woods as a part-time fire fighter at \$17 per hour starting April 22, 2026, and to hire Andrew B. Craft as a parttime fire fighter at \$17 per hour starting May 6, 2026.

At the May 5, 2026, meeting, present were Mayor Gunn, Aldermen Banks, Grantham, Herrin, Martin and Sistrunk.

Public hearings were held in closed session for a Special Exception to allow Manufactured and Modular Home sales in C-3 Zoning District. Brent McCrory, president of Spartan Housing, LLC, presented his facts, as did Community Development Director, Joel Sims and City Engineer Tim Parker. It was approved with a unanimous vote.

Another public hearing was held to provide reasonable regulation regarding the use of medical cannabis in Florence. It will be voted on at the June 2 Board Meeting.

The Board voted to obtain an appraisal for a proposed land acquisition.

A motion was made in executive session to allow dismissal of the Humble Annexation, and to direct City Attorney Bobby Lingold to take no action concerning Monterey Annexation.

Wolf announces candidacy for Chancery Court Judge

By Michael Wolf



Michael Wolf is pleased to announce his candidacy for Rankin County Chancery Court Judge, offering more than three decades of legal experience, a record of public service, and a steadfast commitment to integrity, impartiality, and faithful adherence to the law.

A longtime resident of Rankin County, Michael has built his life around family, faith, and community. He holds the unwavering belief that faithfully following the law protects those values. He and his wife Rebecca, a teacher, are committed to strengthening those same values that make Rankin County a place that families are proud to call home.

While the scope of the Chancery is broad, it does serve as the Court where issues of Family are considered. Faith and Family define Michael Wolf. His faith was tested in 2021 when he and his children suffered the sudden loss of Stacy, an amazing wife and mother. Luckily their lives were already well rooted in Christ, and this experience did not undue that faith but strengthened in them the knowledge that God is love, even in our pain.

With this faith, Michael has since been blessed beyond measure, finding love again and marrying Rebecca. They have blended

their two families, with four adult children, of which three are teachers and one a minister in the making. Their home is a place of love and laughter.

Michael has served the youth in this community as a Sunday school teacher, and by coaching soccer, football, and mock trial teams.

For over 33 years, Michael has practiced law across multiple jurisdictions with extensive experience in trial courts, appellate courts, and public service. His legal career has included appearances before state and federal courts, including the Mississippi Supreme Court, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, as well as writing briefs before the United States Supreme Court.

Michael's professional experience has prepared him for the job of Chancery Court Judge. He has served as a certified mediator, hearing officer, former senior deputy city attorney, and a managing partner. Those roles required thoughtful decision-making, fairness, careful evaluation of evidence, and respect for the rule of law, which have absolutely prepared him for the job of judge.

Michael Wolf seeks the opportunity to serve Rankin County with independence, integrity, humility, and an unwavering commitment to fairness in the law.



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From the Pearl Boardroom: Board denies variance for new subdivision



SW Rankin News

Present for the May 5 and May 19 Board Meetings at Pearl City Hall were Alderman-at-Large David Stovall; Alderman, Ward 1 Sammy Williams; Alderman, Ward 2 Keith Dennis; Alderman, Ward 3 Gary Broadwater; Alderman, Ward 4 Casey Foy; Alderman, Ward 5 Dwight Knight;

Alderman, Ward 6 Kyle Foster; and Mayor Jake Windham.

After the prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance, the Board acknowledged the Keep MS Beautiful (KMB) awards received. Mayor Jake Windham received the 2026 Mayor of The Year Keep MS Beautiful (KMB), and Betty Miles Newman was recognized for receiving the KMB 2026 Barbara Dorr Green "Hero Award." PHS Art Instructor Felicia Lee, staff and students were at the meeting to present one of the completed murals for Art Alley.

After the Consent Agenda, Minutes, Claims Docket were approved, the Board authorized the Modification Request for the FY26 Impaired Driving Grant with the MS Office of Highway Safety in the amount of \$10,000; approved Palo Alto Cortex Annual Renewal in the amount of \$13,052 to Pileum Corp, Metrix Solutions; and approved a CoP time block of twenty hours for engineering services in the amount of \$2,900 payable to Pileum Corp.

The Board approved an order to adopt an Ordinance of Annexation and extension of municipal boundaries.

They also approved Facilities Use Agreements for The Pearson Foundation; approved and accepted the RFP bid from Evolution Technologies for additions to existing Genetec door access and camera system in the amount of \$332,960. This is a budgeted item, with the total cost shared between IT and Communications, Public Works and Parks & Recreation departments.

The request by Mercy House for a conditional use permit was denied. It would have allowed them to move their current thrift store to a new location at 3201 Highway 80 East. The vote was Alderman Knight and Alderman Foy voting for, and Alderman Stovall, Alderman Williams, Alderman Dennis, Alderman Broadwater and Alderman Foster voting against.

In General Business, the Board voted to adopt Section 2-24 and 2-25 of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Pearl.

A public hearing was set for May 19, 2026, but was moved to June 2, to determine whether or not a conditional use permit should be approved to allow Frank Phann to renovate the property at 418 North Bierdeman Road and use it for apartments.

Another public hearing was set for May 19, to determine whether or not a variance should be granted to The Waltwood Group, LLC. to allow them to develop lots at the corner of Boston Road and Old Whitfield Road. The Waltwood Group, LLC asked for lots one through six with a 70-foot-wide lot width instead of the required 80 feet, to develop lots eleven through fifteen where the lot widths and setbacks are measured where lots open up instead of at road right of way, and to build 1,500 square-foot homes instead of the required 2,000 square feet. The vote was five to two denying the variance.

A public hearing was conducted to determine whether or not a conditional use permit should be granted to Hook Seafood, LLC, to allow them to operate a restaurant at 127 South Pearson Road. It was approved.

At the May 19 Public Hearing, the Board sought to determine whether or not property owned by Team Davis Holdings located at 805 George Kersh Drive, Pearl, is in such a condition or state as to be unsightly and un-kept or otherwise a menace to the to the community. The manager spoke, but it was agreed that the owner would work with the property owner over the next sixty days.

RFGC names new officers



Special to SW Rankin News

The new officers of the Richland-Florence Garden Club pictured (l to r) are: Becky Holley, Minetta Veazey, Debbie Knight and Annajeral Knight. Not pictured is Susan Mancil.



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SALUTE TO EDUCATION

SW Rankin News congratulates 2026 high school valedictorians and salutatorians



JACK DURR
Pearl High School
Class of 2026
Valedictorian



VICTORIA BROCK
Florence High School
Class of 2026
Valedictorian



MADDISON MARIE PHILLIPS
Richland High School
Class of 2026 Valedictorian



KNIGHTEN CHARLES BRIDGES
McLaurin High School
Class of 2026 Valedictorian



NATHAN KNIGHT
Discovery Christian School
Class of 2026
Valedictorian



ABBY GRACE LEWIS
Pearl High School
Class of 2026
Salutatorian



MAYLEE GILMER
Florence High School
Class of 2026
Salutatorian



IVONNE MAGDALENA ROCHA MIRANDA
Richland High School
Class of 2026 Salutatorian



ABBIE MICHELLE BRIDGE
McLaurin High School
Class of 2026 Salutatorian



GABBY SCIUMBATA
Discovery Christian School
Class of 2026
Salutatorian

Photos special to SW Rankin News

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GENE NEWMAN
Representative 61

CONGRATULATIONS
to all educators & students

SALUTE TO EDUCATION

Simran Dhaliwal receives MSU's Spirit of State award

Special to SW Rankin News

Simran Dhaliwal of Pearl, a junior in biomedical engineering at Mississippi State University (MSU), was one of twenty-four students from various majors and backgrounds who are receiving Spirit of State Awards for their exceptional personal contributions to student life.

Organized by the university's Division of Student Affairs and celebrating its twenty-first year, the award honors students who have made a positive impact on peers and the broader campus community through organization involvement, service to the institution and personal actions promoting school spirit and tradition.

"We are proud to honor these outstanding student leaders whose selflessness, service and integrity exemplify what it means to be a Bulldog," MSU Vice President for Student Affairs Regina Hyatt said.

"This recognition also extends to the families, mentors, faculty and staff who have supported and uplifted these students along the way. It truly takes a village, and it's exciting to be able to celebrate the entire community that helps shape and inspire student success at Mississippi State."

The Spirit of State Awards program is open to all students, no matter their classification, major or primary campus. Nominees must have a minimum 2.25 GPA and be in good academic and disciplinary standing.



Special to SW Rankin News

Simran Dhaliwal (center), a junior in biomedical engineering at Mississippi State University, was one of twenty-four students who received the Spirit of State Award, which honors students who have made a positive impact on peers and the broader campus community through organization involvement, service to the institution and personal actions promoting school spirit and tradition.

Chamber names Youth Leadership Class

Special to SW Rankin News

The Youth Leadership Rankin program helps young leaders develop responsible community leadership roles and impact the future of Rankin County. More than thirty-one students applied and were interviewed to be part of this group.

"After a fun kick-off retreat in August," said Rankin Chamber President Mandi Arinder. "The Youth Leadership Program consists of seven monthly full-day sessions from September-March with a graduation following in April."

Throughout the program, the students will perform community service and create connections with the people of Rankin County.

The students will familiarize themselves with community opportunities, needs, problems and resources. They will have effective dialogue, establishing friendships among participants and community leaders. The students will learn advanced leadership and management skills including goal setting, effective communication, decision-making, team building, motivation and organization, and work ethic development.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP CLASS 2026-27 includes Florence, Pearl and Richland students

FLORENCE HIGH SCHOOL
Anna Dudley, Karlie Higdon
Kendall Wilder, Mac Taylor
Taylor Gunn

PEARL HIGH SCHOOL
Campbell McHenry
JP Greer
Sophia Scutch

RICHLAND HIGH SCHOOL
Damian Bayati
Jakai Herron

MCLAURIN HIGH SCHOOL
Emma Paul
Perla Aban-Thingwold
Xavier Cameron

Pearl's Jack Durr receives NIAAA Section 8 Student Scholarship

Special to SW Rankin News

Jack Durr is the recipient of the 2026 NIAAA Section 3 Student Athlete Scholarship. He was chosen on May 17, 2026, at the annual Section 3 spring meeting held in Atlanta, Georgia. Durr will receive a plaque and a \$2,500 scholarship to assist with the cost of higher education.

Durr graduated from Pearl High School (PHS) on May 14, 2026. The athletic director at Pearl is Richard Smithhart, CAA. As Pearl's valedictorian, Durr graduated with a 4.0 GPA and is a highly decorated student. He received the Congressional Award Gold Medal, Mississippi Department of Education Gold Seal of Biliteracy (English and Spanish), Student of the Month twice, and more.

A two-sport athlete at Pearl, Durr competed in football and baseball for four years each. In football, he earned four varsity letters, received the Player of the Year Award, Offensive MVP, captained the team, and was on the Mississippi Association of Coaches All-Star South team.

In baseball, Durr gained four varsity letters, received All-District honors, and was named Pearl High School's Most Valuable Pitcher.

Durr was a committed student-leader, as well, serving as Student Body President his senior year. From freshman



Special to SW Rankin News

Jack Durr (left) was Pearl High School's valedictorian who graduated in May with a 4.0 GPA. He was also Student Body President and a two-sport athlete, competing in football and baseball for four years each. In football, he received the Player of the Year Award and Offensive MVP, and, in baseball, he was named Pearl High School's Most Valuable Pitcher.

through junior year, he was either class president or vice president and gave much of his time to the Athletics Leadership Team and Leadership Team.

In addition, Durr offered his time and efforts to his local community. He volunteered his time at Blood Service drives, the Salvation Army Red Kettle Campaign, made children's hospital blessing bags, and created hygiene kits for the homeless.

Durr also had the honor of being on the City of Pearl Mayor's Youth Council and the Mississippi Department of Education State Superintendent Student Advisory Council.



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GLEASON TIRE

Special to SW Rankin News

Sandy [Name] has served as the tire shop receptionist for Pearl City Hall for almost six years.

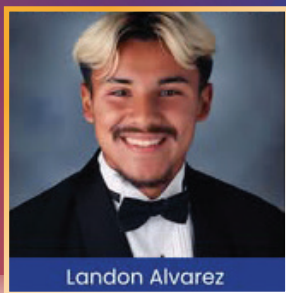
& SERVICE

Salutes All Teachers!

SALUTE TO EDUCATION

Richland High School names 2026 Hall of Fame honorees

The Richland High School 2026 Hall of Fame was selected in a rigorous, three-part process that considered not only academic achievement but also activities, community service, and leadership. The school says the thirteen students were chosen because of their outstanding work, and they are a concrete example of what it means to be a Ranger. Below each photo is the information provided by Richland High School (RHS) about the recipient.



Landon Alvarez

Landon Alvarez represents Richland well both on the field and in the classroom, and he is viewed positively by both RHS staff and his peers.



Sarah Elizabeth Bates

Sarah Elizabeth Bates is a dependable, kind student who consistently shows quiet resilience in and out of the classroom.



Chelsey Courtney

Chelsey Courtney represents Richland with integrity and positivity from the bandstand to the House of Representatives and inspires others through her character and work ethic.



Shelby Duran

Shelby Duran brings energy and determination to everything she does, from the classroom to the field and ultimately to the community.



Madison Fortenberry

Whether Madison Fortenberry is twirling her flag with the color guard or leading a classroom discussion, she leads her peers with hard work, respect, and positivity.



Madison Gibson

Madison Gibson's drive and determination keep her going both on the basketball court and in the classroom, and she is a natural leader.



Mason Moha

Mason Moha is a respectful student-athlete who works hard and treats others well. He contributes positively through his effort and attitude.



Ivonne Rocha Miranda

Ivonne Miranda is a quiet student who consistently shows respect and responsibility. She sets a strong example through steady effort and positive influence.



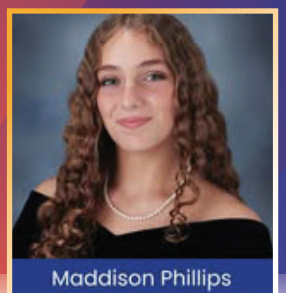
Neiko Herron

Neiko Herron demonstrates strong character and accountability. He is a quiet, but a leader who excels through focus, curiosity, and a strong work ethic.



Peyton Perkins

Peyton Perkins challenges herself in and outside of the classroom, and she shows leadership, positivity, and commitment to RHS wherever she goes.



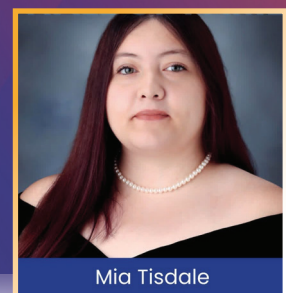
Maddison Phillips

Maddison Phillips, a smart, hardworking student-athlete, pushes herself to achieve her goals. She is a positive presence in both the classroom and athletics.



Bryce Shows

Bryce Shows shows leadership and respect both on the soccer field and in the classroom.



Mia Tisdale

Mia Tisdale excels through her initiative, strong work ethic, and willingness to support others, and she is consistently helpful, responsible, and positive.

Photos special to SW Rankin News



Congratulations to all the Teachers and Students for having a great year!

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Congratulations to all Students, Teachers, & Educators!

From the Richland Boardroom in May 2026

SW Rankin News

Each of Richland's Aldermen, as well as Mayor Clay Burns, was present at both Board Meetings on May 5 and 19.

The Board awarded the Recreation Center Parking Improvements to Thornton Construction Company for \$337,088; and awarded the Richmond Pointe Stabilization Project to Wilco Inc. for erosion control related to storm-water drainage for the contractual price of \$201,940.

The group also discussed bids received for the Detention Pond Rehabilitation Project to be paid out of the General Fund.

The Board approved the FY 2026 Principal, Interest, and Trustee Payment on the 2020 General Obligation Recreational Project Bond, due June 1, 2026, in the amount of \$305,876.85. This will be paid from the two percent Food and Beverage Fund.

The Group agreed to hire a Mayor's Administrative Assistant/Digital Content Specialist at \$38,000, effective May 13, 2026.

It was approved to allow Discovery Christian to use Field One at Eastside Park and for the Ranger Cadet Program for the 2026-27 school year, and approved donations to Rankin County School System for Teacher Appreciation Week at Richland Upper and Lower Elementary School.

At the May 19 Board Meeting, the Board approved a pay request to Hemphill Construction, Inc. in the amount of \$254,206.63, to be paid out of the M.U.T Fund, for work performed on the Old Hwy 49 & Carrier Boulevard Intersection Improvements Project; and authorized the LPA Official to reimburse MDOT for \$192,489.72.

Hearings are to be set for a Special Exception for Cleary Road Drainage Improvements; and another Special Exception Hearing to be set for Matthew Dear for a Vehicle Service Facility to be located in a Commercial District site to be located on Highway 49 South. The FY 2025 Annual Audit performed by McKenzie CPA, PLLC was accepted.

A resolution granting MCH Transportation Company an Exemption from Ad Valorem Taxes was adopted.

Alderman AJ Shields was chosen



to serve as an MML 2026 Voting Delegate for the City of Richland. Alderman Matt Quick will be the alternate.

Payment to Engineering Service for \$840 and \$17,295.58 is to be taken out of the M.U.T. Fund for CE&I work completed and as appointed by the Board on November 5, 2024, for the Intersection



Special to SW Rankin News

Richland Fireman Jonathan Hannah was presented his five-year service pin at the May 5 Board Meeting. Pictured (l to r) are Hannah with Alderman AJ Shields.

Improvements at Old Hwy 49 and Carrier Boulevard.

Nichols Lawn and Landscape is to be paid \$1,500 from the three percent Hotel/Motel Fund for dead plant replacement.

The hire of Nicholas Harris and Paul Wiltcher was approved for the Street Department.

Born Again Roofing and Remodeling was chosen for the repair, with repainting, of the Squirrel Creek Bridge for \$22,900. Two quotes were received.

The Board approved the hiring of two patrolmen effective May 20, 2026, and for both to attend a Law Enforcement Training Academy in July 2026, and an additional patrolman at Level 2/Step 9.

The Board declared a 2021 Dodge Charger and a 2018 Chevy Tahoe for sale.




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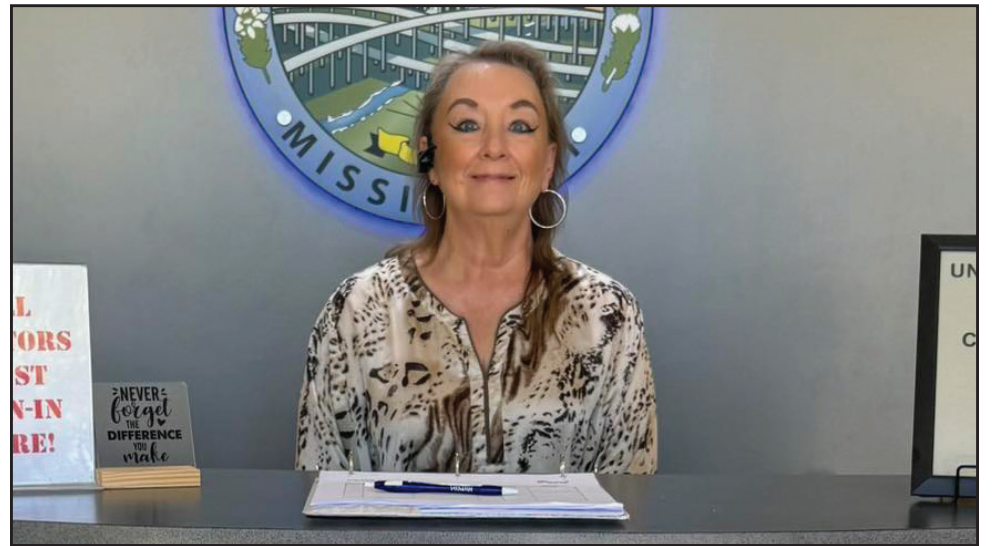
Ryals PPD officer of the month



Special to SW Rankin News

The Pearl Police Department (PPD) Officer of the Month is Matthew Ryals. He graduated from the Mississippi Law Enforcement Officers Training Academy in 2024 and worked for the Flowood Police Department before coming to work at the Pearl Police Department in 2025. According to Police Chief Nick McLendon, Officer Ryals has quickly made his mark at PPD by his unwavering dedication and professionalism. He recently responded to a call along with Pearl Fire Department and immediately sensed that there was a much bigger issue going on in the dwelling. Through keen observation, attention to detail, and steadfast commitment to the mission, Officer Ryals' actions ultimately led to the discovery of what is believed to be a labor trafficking operation.

Palmer, Employee of the Month



Special to SW Rankin News

Sandy Palmer has served as the front desk receptionist for Pearl City Hall for almost six years.

Special to SW Rankin News

Sandy Palmer was selected as the City of Pearl Employee of the Month for May. Palmer is the front desk receptionist at Pearl City Hall, where she has worked for almost six years.

Palmer directs all phone calls and assists those that are visiting City Hall. She is also responsible for scheduling all of the events in the Pearl Community Room.

Palmer lives in Pearl with her hus-

band, Lane. Mayor Jake Windham thanked her for being such a dedicated employee and presented her with a certificate of appreciation. The Pearl Chamber presented her with a \$100 Sam's Club gift card, a gift bag, t-shirt and jewelry from Boudreaux's. The Pearl Municipal Federal Credit Union donated a \$25 Visa gift card, and Revell Ace Hardware-Pearl donated a stainless steel tumbler.

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Pearl's Top Cop is Kyle Camardelle



Special to SW Rankin News

Each year, law enforcement agencies from across the state come together for a special luncheon to honor those who have gone above and beyond in their service. This year, in addition to naming Marshal Steen (right) the 2026 Top Cop, the 20th Circuit Court District Attorney's Office nominated Chief of Investigations for the Pearl Police Department, Kyle Camardelle (left), as their Top Cop for 2026.

Perfect Standard Time

By Guest Columnist Becky Brown

Verse One

It is not for you to know
the times or the seasons so
Just trust me for I know
you can't expect to see
the purpose that would be
for tomorrow but I see
the view from the wilderness
can be a picture of hopelessness
the signs of the times
can be so frightening
A painful plan unfolding
When waiting is worse than knowing
Contentment is found in
walking and letting me lead

Chorus

On Perfect Standard Time
There's grace to help in time of need
On Perfect Standard Time
Your times are in My hands
I'm a stronghold in times of trouble
I will never let you down
Long ago I planned for you to be
A child of Mine
on Perfect Standard Time

Verse Two

You will never be alone
You'll be at home
wherever you go
I've already come
And no place is too far
That I can't be where you are
Just look around you
I'm right there in your heart
The loneliness fear and hurt
Disappear with a prayer yet heard
The strength of My Word
Will be your portion
One day you will sing a
victory song of remembering
Watching and waiting
walking and working and worship
(Repeat Chorus)



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Mississippi Spay and Neuter holds The Big Fix event in April

Special to SW Rankin News

Mississippi Spay and Neuter on Highway 49 South in Richland recently hosted “The Big Fix 3-Day Spay and Neuter Blitz,” a large-scale effort aimed at reducing pet overpopulation across Central Mississippi. The event was funded by the Banfield Foundation and co-hosted by the Mississippi Animal Rescue League, where the mobile spay-and-neuter units provided by the Humane Society of Tulsa were stationed.

Held April 9, 10, and 11, the event resulted in three hundred seventy-three cats and dogs being spayed and neutered in just three days. The surgeries included two hundred and twelve cats and one hundred sixty-one dogs, providing affordable services to pet owners throughout the community.

Months of planning and coordination went into making the event possible. Sharon Garner, executive director of Mississippi Spay and Neuter, worked closely with Lacey Frame, RVT, Community and Field Clinic Programs Manager with the Banfield Foundation, to organize the project,



Photos special to SW Rankin News

The “Big Fix 3-Day Spay and Neuter Blitz” was a large-scale effort aimed at reducing pet overpopulation across Central Mississippi.



The April event resulted in three hundred seventy-three cats and dogs being spayed and neutered in just three days. The surgeries included two hundred and twelve cats and one hundred sixty-one dogs, providing affordable services to pet owners throughout the community.

alongside multiple partner organizations, veterinarians, volunteers and support staff.

The community response highlighted the tremendous need for affordable spay and neuter services in Mississippi. Within just three hours of posting about the event on Facebook, Mississippi Spay and Neuter's post had reached more than 50,000 views (at press time, view counts were over 275,000). The biggest surprise was that, in just a few days, Mississippi Spay and Neuter received more than twelve hundred contacts from pet owners seeking appointments and assistance.

“This event showed just how great the need is for affordable spay and neuter services in Mississippi,” said Garner. “The response from the community was overwhelming, and we are incredibly thankful to everyone who helped make this happen.”

Spay and neuter programs help reduce unwanted litters, lower shelter intake numbers, and improve the overall health and quality of life for pets throughout the region. To donate, visit <https://givebutter.com/msspan>.

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Rotary Club of South Rankin awards scholarships to SW Rankin students

George Merrill celebrates 27 years at Walmart



Photos special to SW Rankin News



Madison Fortenberry was honored as the Richland High School STAR Student. Pictured (l to r) are: Eddie Grimes, The Rotary's Executive Secretary; Fortenberry.



Special to SW Rankin News

Kenzie Hearn was honored as the Florence High School Star Student. Pictured (l to r) are: Eddie Grimes, The Rotary's Executive Secretary; Hearn; and Bradley Bianca, Rotary Club of South Rankin President.

George Merrill, Assistant Pharmacy Manager at Walmart Richland, recently celebrated twenty-seven years with Walmart. Twelve years were spent at Walmart Ridgeland and fifteen years at Walmart Richland.

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Laster named new DCS principal



Special to SW Rankin News

Ryan Laster became the new principal of Discovery Christian School in May. School officials say Laster will lead with his broad background and experience in educational leadership.

Special to SW Rankin News

Ryan Laster has been named the new principal of Discovery Christian School (DCS). He joined the school community beginning in May. School officials say, with his broad background and experience in educational leadership, he will be combining the responsibilities of two current principal roles into a single position under his direction.

Laster is a native of Batesville and a

graduate of South Panola High School. He earned his bachelor's degree from Delta State University in 2004 and a Master of Education from Delta State in 2005. In 2015, he completed the MAIS Leadership Institute.

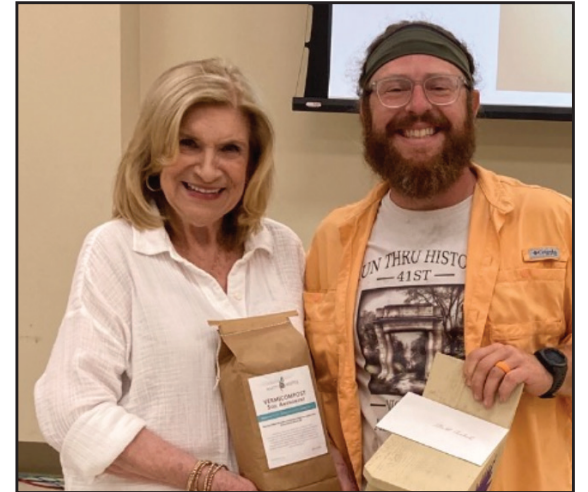
Laster and his wife of twenty years, Misty, have one son, Taylor, who is currently a college student. His favorite quote is, "Either write something worth reading, or do something worth writing."
— Benjamin Franklin

Spring Lake Garden Club learns about composting

Special to SW Rankin News

Spring Lake Garden Club had their final meeting of the year on May 14. The new year starts in September.

Matt Casteel gave a very informative talk on composting. He has a local business called WuRM WoRKS. If anyone is interested in finding out more information about



Springlake Garden Club President Brenda Vernamonti with is shown with Matt Casteel, the May guest speaker.

composting, you can find him every Saturday morning at the Farmer's Market off High Street with some of his products.

Although this was the last meeting of the club for the calendar year, members are still out and about all around Pearl tending to flower beds and other various projects. Those interested in joining the Springlake Garden Club are encouraged to contact a club member.



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Pictured (l to r) are Janette Brewer, Sandra Gilbert and Sissie Haynie, who served refreshments with a patriotic theme at the May meeting.



PUBLIC NOTICE-FORMER PEARL PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT STUDENTS WHO RECEIVED SPECIAL EDUCATION AND THEIR PARENTS

The Peal Public School District will destroy selected records pertaining to special education beginning July 31, 2026. These records pertain to students who were eligible for Special Services and exited (due to graduation, moving, refusal of services, testing out, etc.) during the 2020-2021 school year.

Parents and students may need these records in the future for other purposes, i.e., social security benefits, Vocational Rehabilitation eligibility purposes, etc.

These records are available until June 30, 2026 (one month prior to the above destruction date) to parents of students eighteen (18) years of age or older with proper identification. Call (601-932-7965) if you are interested in obtaining these records, if you are not sure if you or your child received services during this time period, please call and we can help you with this information.

PUBLIC NOTICE-IDEA PART B APPLICATION



The Pearl Public School District is applying for federal funding under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Park B for the 2026-2027 school year. This includes funding for services to students with disabilities ages 3-21.

The proposed budget will be available for public review and comment from 06/08/2026-06/19/2026 at

3375 HWY 80 East, Pearl, MS 39028.

A meeting will be held in the Pearl Public School District Central Office Boardroom on June 8, 2026 at 5:30 PM.

Parents of children with disabilities, individuals with disabilities, and the public are invited to review the application and provide comments. For more information or to submit feedback, please contact:

Ashley Chism, Special Services Director
Email: achism@pearlk12.com

Richland Seniors celebrate Annual Mother's Day Luncheon



By Guest Columnist
Shea Thames, Richland
Senior Services Director

The Richland Senior Center recently welcomed a wonderful gathering of ladies for our annual Mother's Day Luncheon held at the Richland Community Center, the perfect setting for an afternoon centered around encouragement and celebration.

As guests entered the Richland Community Center, they were greeted with bubbly spritzers served by Supervisor Sid Scarbrough and Representative Lance Varner. After a few sips, smiles and laughs shared among friends, guests were invited to capture special memories with Kaylina Hill Photography at one of two beautiful photo backdrops.

Upon entering the luncheon room, guests were welcomed by stunning table décor featuring elegant blue, white and yellow chinoiserie-inspired centerpieces hand-crafted by Activities Coordinator Amy Matthews and participants from The Richland Senior Center's watercolor class.

Guests then enjoyed a delicious meal prepared by Mama's Kitchen, followed by gourmet cupcakes from Ramey's.

A highlight of the luncheon was guest



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Pictured (l to r) celebrating Mother's Day at the Richland Senior Center are Mayor Clay Burns, Amy Matthews, Commissioner of Agriculture Andy Gipson, Mrs. Leslie Gipson, Representative Lance Varner, Director Shea Thames, Supervisor Sid Scarbrough and Richland Alderman Beth Sanford.



Pictured (l to r) attending the Annual Mother's Day Luncheon in Richland are Representative Lance Varner, Amy Matthews, Director Shea Thames, Jennifer King, Teri Roddy, Supervisor Sid Scarbrough, Cade Brown and Mike Davis.

speaker Leslie Gipson, who shared heartfelt stories, humor and reflections that resonated deeply with everyone in the room. Her warm and uplifting message encouraged guests to appreciate the importance of family, friendship, faith and the lasting influence mothers and women continue to have within their homes and communities.

The fun continued as guests proudly participated in the center's cherished hat tradition, one of the luncheon's most anticipated moments each year. This year, three special Hat Awards were presented. The Speaker's Choice Award was presented to Ann Reis, the Sponsors' Choice Award was awarded to Ms. Jewel, and The Richland Senior Center Choice Award was presented to Linda Young.

The Richland Senior Center extends sincere appreciation to Covenant Caregivers, Pax Hospice, Chancellor Funeral Home, Mama's Kitchen, Kaylina Hill Photography, Supervisor Sid Scarbrough, Representative Lance Varner, and the City of Richland for their sponsorship and contributions to the event.

The annual Mother's Day Luncheon continues to be one of the center's most anticipated traditions, bringing together generations of women for an afternoon filled with laughter, meaningful conversation and treasured memories.

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