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SWRANKIN NEWS

Good News You Can Use

Vol. 5, No. 8 | August 2020

The Pearl News

THE NEWS
RICHLAND

THE FLORENCE
NEWS

Alligators and the Pearl River, a symbiotic relationship

By Alexa Haik

Randy Newell joined the Pearl Police Department (PPD) in 2016. Prior to that time, he was employed by the Mississippi Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP), for approximately twenty-five years. So it stands to reason, that in addition to his regular duties as PPD patrolman, occasionally he will be asked to assist Pearl Animal Control with wild animal captures, especially those of the reptilian kind.

In fact, since his tenure with PPD, he has assisted with the capture and release of some where between twenty to twenty-five alligators. Newell explains that "when you are this close to the Pearl River and all of your creeks and tributaries, you're liable to get a call that there is a motorist on I-20, and there is an alligator crossing in the middle of the highway [or] you get a call 'hey there's an alligator laying in the middle of Highway 80; you've got to get out there pretty quick...you don't want anybody to get hurt in a situation like that.'" From his experience, alligators can and

will pop up anywhere, "I promise you, anywhere. It does not have to be on water."

The cause, Newell speculates, is at least partially due to mating season. "Larger adult alligators, males, they may be eight to twelve feet long, will actually run all of these smaller males out of the area...these younger alligators



Special to The Pearl News

Alligator captured in Pearl and relocated and released to the Pelahatchie Bay, June 25, 2020.

get out on land, or some of the tributaries and go to the nearest water hole they can find, and a lot of times [it] is usually a neighborhood pond," says Newell.

This last alligator that Newell assisted with was captured about three weeks prior to the interview. It was a little over eight feet long and located in a subdivision. The first thing that PPD will do in a situation like this is contact MDWFP. Based upon the urgency of the situation,

and the availability of MDWFP, a patrol officer on duty may end up responding. In this case, Newell was able to successfully catch, relocate and release the eight-foot one-inch alligator into the upper Pearl River.

Newell wants to reassure Pearl residents that, primarily, alligators want to be left alone. Unfortunately, with a

that it is highly illegal to feed alligators.

Newell recommends that if a Pearl resident spots an alligator that is either acting way too friendly or hanging around any public area, to first contact the MDWFP. "They are the experts, they... oversee these animals and have some very very good people that are very experienced in this matter." He says that the occasions where he is called to assist with a capture of an alligator have proven to be an opportunity for him educate the public, with a primary goal to make residents feel at ease, as well as safely catch and release the nuisance alligator.

Newell wants to be clear, "I am not talking as an expert from the MDWFP, I am a Pearl police officer now... so whatever I can do to help Pearl and make them feel better, it is what I am concerned with now." And if that involves wrangling an alligator, he will respond as a patrolman for the City of Pearl.

See page 12 for companion article "MDWFP provides insight about Mississippi's alligator population"

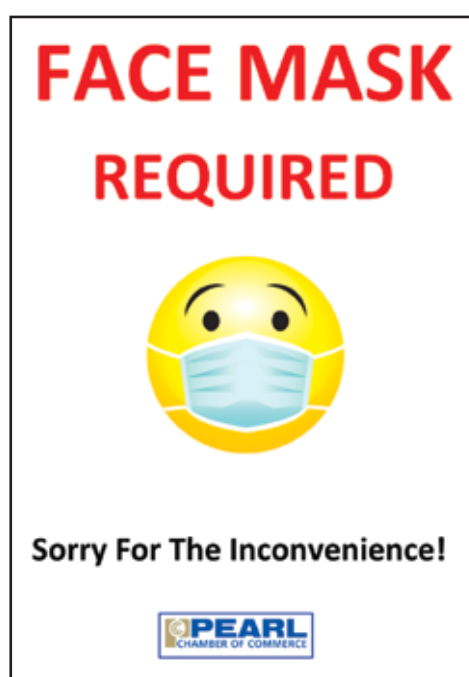
PCC provides assistance to local businesses

Special to The Pearl News

Pearl Chamber of Commerce (PCC) is currently providing free "Face Mask Required" signs to local businesses. All those who are interested are encouraged to contact PCC and provide the number of 8½ x 11 signs needed for their particular business. PCC will have the signs delivered to the requesting parties' location at no cost.

Pearl businesses are also invited to send the PCC a copy of their business fliers, restaurant menus or any other information about themselves, and PCC will add it to the weekly email blast. They are also encouraged to contact PCC about free advertising opportunities in the Chamber newsletter.

Email Kathy Deer at kathy@pearlms.org or call the Chamber at 601-939-3338 for more information.



Special to The Pearl News

Jingle Bell Market 2020: An update from PCC

Special to The Pearl News

Jingle Bell Market is scheduled for Saturday, December 12, at the Clyde Muse Center at Hinds Community College. At this time, Pearl Chamber of Commerce is uncertain if they will be able to hold the event, and if they can, how it will look due to the current social distancing rules with COVID-19. They are experiencing a high volume of calls every day, typical of this time of year, from vendors inquiring about when vendor applications will be available for the 2020 season. Pearl Chamber of Commerce would like local residents to know they will be notifying the public as soon as possible of the plans as they solidify, ensuring that all vendors, old and new, are in the know.

PCC is proud that this annual event draws approximately 10,000 people



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from all over the State of Mississippi, as well as from surrounding states. Unfortunately, at the current time, an event of this size, which is held mostly in an indoor environment, is against current state and federal health regulations.

PCC's parting thoughts are these, "We are hoping and praying that this Covid (sic) nightmare will come to an end sooner than later, and we continue to pray for those that have been affected."



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"Rocking Richland" returns in August

Special to The Richland News

"Rocking Richland," an event that was originally spear-headed by administrative assistant of Parks and Recreation for the City of Richland Tammy Morgan, is returning in August. In conjunction with Richland Economic Development Association (REDA), Richland Mayor's Youth Council (RMYC) as well as local businesses, the City of Richland presents another fun, special event for all ages.

This time, "Rocking Richland" has added new rules to amp up the fun and excitement. Participants will hunt for three kinds of rocks at the Eastside and Westside parks.

The first phase of the event will begin Monday, August 3. It will include three potential treasure finds: rocks that spell out Richland; rocks that have numbers painted on them and rocks painted by artist Cliff Speaks.

Letter rocks should be kept and re-



Photos special to The Richland News

turned to Tammy Morgan at the Community Center on Monday, August 10, between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. The winner will receive a \$50 gift card from a local business. When a number rock is discovered, it, too, should be kept and returned to Morgan, as each day there will be a special prize from a local business. There will be one prize per person each day.

Those individuals who discov-

er a coveted "Speaks" rock may keep it, and are instructed to take a photo and send to Tammy Morgan at tmorgan@richlandms.com.

The second phase of the event will begin Monday, August 10. The same rules will apply. All letter rocks found should be returned to Tammy Morgan at the Community Center on Monday, August 17, between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. The winner will receive a \$50 gift card from a local business.

Upon returning a numbered rock to Morgan, the lucky finder will receive a special prize from a local business. There will be one prize per person each day. "Speaks" rock are to be kept and a photo of the find to be sent to Morgan.

Local business sponsors include: Dollar Tree, Kroger, McAlister's Deli, Mazzio's Pizza and Sonic Drive-In.

For further information about this, or other upcoming events scheduled in the City of Richland, contact Barbara Adams at 601-420-3402.

RCSD rolls out "Smart Restart" program

Special to The Richland News

Rankin County School District (RCSD) recently announced their inaugural "Smart Restart" program for the 2020-2021 school year. The strategic plan focus is three-fold: great to best as they continue a tradition to excellence; do what is right for the students and do what is right for the educators. In that regard they released the following statement:

"RCSD, in partnership with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), school administrators and staff, local stakeholders from the fields of education, healthcare, business experts, and city/county/state leaders – has developed this plan for our schools and community to reopen and educate our

students safely in the school year 2020-2021."

The mission for the plan is to bring everyone's strengths together. RCSD ensures families, staff and faculty that the focus will be on empowering the students "to reach their maximum potential by embracing opportunities and challenges while cultivating tradition of distinction in education. The vision is to continue a tradition of excellence by providing a world-class education that empowers all to grow through curiosity, discovery and learning." RCSD's number one goal is to experience a "safe, healthy and inclusive environment."

The Superintendent of Education, Sue



Special to The Richland News

Townsend, Ph.D., stated in a letter to parents that "[w]e are committed to doing what is right for our students and educators. Know that all RCSD employees and the Board of Trustees are passionate about their professional purpose,

which is to protect and educate our most valuable assets – your children...as you know, people move to Rankin County because of its amazing communities and excellent schools. While we may have different opinions and you also have some difficult decisions to make, we can all agree our children are watching and learning from us in this incredibly challenging, historical time. It is imperative that we all join together during these difficult times to support our children. We may be social distancing, but we can do this while modeling patience, flexibility, grace and love as we move forward together."

For further details on RCSD's Smart Restart plan, see page 9.

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Florence's JROTC empowers local youth

By Alexa Haik

Florence's Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) is a student-led program. It is centered around the values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage (LDRSHIP). The program is designed to instill values that lead to a successful life, and it pushes them out of their comfort zone, molding them into a leader.

Historically, JROTC was established in 1916 by the National Defence Act. Florence High School's (FHS's) program began around the 70s or 80s, according to SGM(R) Kevin Donahoe, who oversees the program. This year, the FHS JROTC program has 155 cadets enrolled. As Donahoe explains, "we are the biggest program on campus [and] have the biggest program next to NW Rankin in Rankin County."

Recently, *SW Rankin News* sat down with Donahoe, as well as Service Learning Coordinator Mackinzie Watson and Battalion Commander Jordan Taylor to discuss JROTC in general as well as their personal experiences with the program offered at Florence High School.

Battalion Commander Taylor, who is entering her senior year, is the cadet in charge of the entire battalion. Taylor says she decided to join her freshman year because she had friends who were members and encouraged her to join. Since then, Taylor says that JROTC has taught her to recognize differences in the way people think, and how to successfully lead those who don't think alike. As Taylor puts it, "[the program] teaches you people are the most important resource you have and how to use your personal skills to motivate others to get the job done. People think that being in charge means they are a leader, but that's wrong. True leadership is getting others to do a job because they want to, not because they have to. That's what I learn in JROTC."

Although she does not see herself as having a future in the U.S. military, she says that she has "definitely grown to respect [the military] ...how much more organized and much more structured it is and how important structure is"...Bottom line, her experience shows that any stu-

dent can reap benefits from participation in Florence High School's JROTC.

Mackinzie Watson, a junior at FHS, is the service learning coordinator and is entering into her third year as a cadet. Watson explains that she joined because "I had a personal interest. Because I just thought it was fun... [and] I have never really been one to play sports, and I thought this would be kind of like an extracurricular thing for me to do." She says that the most valuable takeaway from the program is the reminder, "over and over again it is not about whether or not a goal is accomplished, but it is about how the goal was accomplished. What steps were taken in order to achieve it? Were people's ideas pushed away, or was there a united view on the situation? I have learned that being a leader requires an understanding of people's perspectives and what causes people to act the way they do. There is a different way to approach everyone and their needs. I encourage people to join, so they will be prepared for the real world."

A common misconception many peo-

ple have is that someone must have an interest in a future in the military to join JROTC, but that is not necessarily the case. Many students at FHS have completed all four years of the program and have gone on to have very successful civilian careers.

The main purpose of JROTC is to create an individual that has learned to implement the LDRSHIP values in their life and to become better citizens by instilling leadership values. JROTC has a way to help each cadet realize their individual strengths and weaknesses and to capitalize on that knowledge.

Any student enrolled at Florence High School is eligible to participate, the only caveat being that they are willing to learn and grow.

For more information about FHS JROTC program, contact SGM Kevin Donahoe at kevin.donahoe@rcsd.ms, MSG Todd Norris or todd.norris@rcsd.ms or call 601-829-6947.

See page 9 for photo spread from the most recent service learning project.



Special to The Florence News

Florence resident graduates Hinds in drive-through ceremony

Special to The Florence News

Reagan Miley of Florence graduated from Hinds Community College (Hinds CC) on July 29, driving in a car under a partly cloudy summer sky instead of walking across an auditorium stage.

She was among more than 600 students who participated in a drive-through graduation ceremony over a four-day period.

Because of social distancing restrictions with the COVID-19 pandemic, Hinds was unable to have traditional ceremonies inside. The spring and summer ceremonies were combined and turned into a drive-through event, over three days at Eagle Ridge Conference

Center in Raymond July 29-31 and a fourth day at the Utica Campus on August 1.

Each graduate was greeted by the new college president, Dr. Stephen Vacik, who took office on July 1, and cheered on by members of the Executive Leadership Team, all of whom wore masks.

Reagan Miley of Florence received her degree in surgical technology, a field she chose because "I like helping whoever I can, however I can."

She already has a job lined up – the robotics team at Baptist Medical Center.

See page 7 for photospread of all Southwest Rankin graduates.



Special to The Florence News

Pictured (l to r) are: Kyle McKay, Reagan Miley and her parents, Amy Robinson and Rex Miley.



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How to start a rose garden, the fundamentals

By Alexa Haik

Recently *SW Rankin News* spoke with the President of Mississippi Old Garden Rose Society's (MSOGR), and Pearl resident Betty Miles Newman. Newman discussed the fundamentals of rose gardening to provide the valuable knowledge and skills needed to make a successful attempt.

Newman explains that "[for] someone who is interested in roses, the first decision they need to make is how much time [they] will be able to devote to this. That will help determine what kind of rose they are looking for. For someone who doesn't have a lot of time to attend to a garden, they will either want some type of old garden rose or knock out rose...the mature size is a significant consideration, as well as how much sun it requires."

Unfortunately, no retail gardening supply stores in the Southwest Rankin area carry old garden roses at this time. A new plant must be ordered online. An alternate route of obtaining the rose of choice is to procure a root clipping from a local garden. Either way, there are multiple online retail establishments who sell old garden roses. A couple of Newman's favorites are Antique Rose Emporium, at www.wearoses.com and Chamblee's

Rose Nursery, at www.chambleerose.com.

Newman further offers "there is information on the Rose Society's website that actually shows how to make a cut

assessment, Newman recommends using what is called the "Mason Fruit Jar Test." A sample of the dirt is obtained, put in a fruit jar, water is added and allowed to sit for twenty-four hours. The



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Pictured: Tess of the d'Urbervilles roses (red) and Seafoam roses (white).

for transplanting."

The second decision is location. The prime areas to plant roses take into consideration sun/shade, space, soil and water accessibility. For an initial soil

results tell how much clay, how much silt, etc. A soil sample (about a pint in size) can be tested at the Rankin County Extension office.

As far as the requisite sun and shade,

Newman explains that "roses need six hours of direct sunlight. Some roses will take less sun, so look at your site, figure out how much sun it gets." This will help narrow down the type of rose to select.

Additionally, site drainage is an important consideration and can be determined by performing this simple test: dig a four inch hole in the ground, fill it with water, and time how long it takes to drain.

The third, and final, consideration is when to plant. Newman explains that "September is actually when the rose year begins, because that is when gardeners prepare their planting site for future roses and begin shopping for roses." February through October are the best months to plant container roses, and January, February, November and December are the months to plant bare-root roses. Fertilizing roses are best any months of the year, with the exception of October through December.

It is Newman's hope that this information is enough to encourage any potential rose aficionado to begin the journey of successfully cultivating their beloved flower.

For further information on how to successfully start a rose garden, visit www.msogr.com or the Rose Society Facebook page.

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City of Pearl releases annual financial audit report

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The City of Pearl recently released their current financial fund balance for the fiscal year 2020, which was \$947,000. This number, in comparison to the 2016 fund balance of -\$924,000, represents a \$1.87 million turnaround in three years.

"This turnaround is due directly to our city department heads and our employees for their creativity and cost saving endeavors. We have worked both smarter and harder over the last three years and are continuing our dedication to conservative fiscal responsibility. We look forward to an even better report in 2021." –Mayor Jake Windham

Local Churches



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Sharon Bunn	71	Brandon, MS	07/04/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Pat Burkett	83	Brandon, MS	07/04/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Gregory "Lane" Nelson	71	Florence, MS	07/08/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Johnny Taylor	73	Florence, MS	07/08/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Reinhold J. Heilmann	82	Florence, MS	07/10/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Everette Allen Schmidt	infant	Richland, MS	07/10/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Joyce Woods	82	Farmerville, MS	07/14/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Sharon Butler	71	Florence, MS	07/18/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Bobby K. Harbour	87	Florence, MS	07/18/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
John Lewis Woodall	83	Richland, MS	07/23/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Bonnie Guthrie	69	Florence, MS	07/24/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Patricia Bryant	76	Florence, MS	07/24/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Daniel "Dann" Plaster	58	Florence, MS	07/25/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Larry Allen Randall	80	Florence, MS	07/28/20	ChancellorFuneralHome
Beverly Burke Cook	64	Florence, MS	07/30/20	ChancellorFuneralHome

Old Truths for Today

By J.T. Morgan



THE LOVE OF GOD

There are 31,093 verses in the Bible and the most familiar one of all is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This is perhaps the most quoted verse, the most used and yet the most abused passage in the entire 1189 chapters of the Bible. Yet, it is one of the sweetest and most meaningful texts in all the scriptures. It is one of the first learned and the last remembered.

Love is the greatest force in all the universe of God. The Bible declares, "God is love". (1 Jon.4:8; 16). God is the fullness of love. The love of God predates the world. It was before the earth and sea were formed and shall be when they have passed away.

Man was the crowning work of God's creation. He gave him dominion over all the creation. (Gen.1:26). "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him." (Gen.1:27). You bear upon your soul the image of God. You may have stained it with sin and may have forgotten it during your pursuit of other things. However, you are a monument of His love. We are not our own, our spirit that is eternal is His!

When man sinned God did not withdraw His love. That love caused Him to remove man from the Garden of Eden. (Gen.3:22-24). God preserved man and prepared him for the great manifestation of His love in the coming of Christ. In the fullness of time God took His own and only Son from heaven and sent him down to a world filled with sin. No one was immune to sin. Paul stated, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God". (Rom.3:23). Yet, while we were without strength Christ died for the ungodly. (Rom.5:6-8). God so loved a world that was lost in sin, and disobedient and rejected Him and yet God gave His Son that the world might be saved. His love was so great!

God is the greatest being, and He loved, which is the greatest attribute on can possess. He so loved to the greatest degree, for beyond the love which man had known and even beyond that which man can understand. God so loved the world made up of the poor and the rich, the good and the bad, the great and the small, men of all ages, even you and me. God's love was so great that He gave. Giving is the greatest act one can perform. "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive". (Acts 20:35). And, "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (Jon.15:13). God gave the best He had, His only begotten Son, not the animals of His creation or man with his sin and short comings, not even the angels gathered around His throne, but He gave his only begotten Son, the greatest gift in all the world and heaven combined. None could compare. God gave the greatest and the best. (To be continued).

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Five ways to prep for continuous blooms, starting now

By Sherry Lucas

This heat is enough to wilt the best of us, but who still turns a happy face to that summer sunshine? Sunflowers. And zinnias. And a host of other flowers that can perk up tabletops and garden-scapes.

But summer is just one season in a cycle of four, and Flower Growers of Mississippi has tips to expand that pretty picture with blooms year-round. Flower Growers of Mississippi is a statewide program that takes growing professional-quality cut flowers out of the garden arena and into the agricultural realm. About eighty percent of cut flowers sold in America are imported from another country, program founder Donna Yowell says, and, of that, about ninety percent can be grown in America - and a large percentage in Mississippi.

"It's a big market potential for a new ag crop in Mississippi," and more people are jumping in, to put limited resources to work for a profit, she says. "They may want to just grow Dutch irises in a side yard. It gives them a way to supplement their income, or maybe just have fun."

Flower Growers of Mississippi's federally-funded training program started last spring with packed classes at the Ag and Forestry Museum, but the pandemic moved it online, with Zoom classes every two weeks.

To join the Zoom meetings (called Tulip Tuesday at 10), email dyowell@aol.com.

com for an invitation. Classes are free, through next April. Keep up with topics on Flower Growers of Mississippi's Facebook page.

Before you can bask in blooms, start with the soil.

"The most important thing is doing the soil prep," says Betty Newman of Pearl, past president of the Rankin County master gardeners, current president of



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the Old Garden Rose Society locally, and a member of the Perennial Garden Club. The award-winning children's learning garden behind the Pearl Library was her master gardener project.

Here are five ways shape up your garden for year-round beauty:

Get soil smart: Dig in and know what're dealing with.

The Mason jar soil test is an easy one that'll tell you about the texture of your garden soil, Newman says. Fill a jar

half-way with soil, top it up with water, shake vigorously and let it sit twenty-four hours to settle out.

"That tells you how much silt, sand and clay you have." She recommends it to every gardener. "That's just a simple thing, and it doesn't cost anything," but yields valuable information about how that texture can affect plant growth, and how to best amend it.

It's also a good time to do a soil test to determine if you've got the right balance of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium, Yowell says. Get a soil test kit from your local county extension office, or purchase one from a co-op or garden center for about \$15.

Continue key maintenance: Right now, "we are weeding, we are fertilizing, we are trimming our roses," as well as dead-heading and watering, Newman says, "and we're even planting some

passalong plants. It's not the perfect time of year, but you can plant passalong plants anytime you can get somebody to give it to you."

"It's free. What do you have to lose?"

Prep beds for fall planting: Determine your bed sites, and start the process now to get the soil ready. Yowell burns weeds first with a propane torch to prepare a new site, then covers it with a tarp.

"A lot of people put a tarp down now and leave it for three months, and that pretty much takes out ninety percent of the weeds," Yowell says. Do that step now, before you break up the hardpan, till and add soil amendments. That way, you'll be ready to direct-seed cool flowers in fall.

Get your plants in order: Order seeds for cool flowers that can be direct-seeded in October and November, such as bachelor button, centaurea, nigella, poppies and larkspur, Yowell says, that'll overwinter in your garden and be a delight come spring. Look into fall bulbs, such as daffodils, and find perennials and flowering shrubs and trees that can expand your bloom potential.

Get a head start: Start seeds in pots, and, when seedlings get to a healthy level, plant them out in the garden.

"You can do plant plugs as annuals or perennials," Yowell says. When it's too soon for cool flowers and too late for summer flowers, order seeds and grow them out in trays. By October, they'll be large enough to get in the ground.



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Southwest Rankin residents graduate Hinds in drive-through ceremonies



Photo by Hinds Community College/Tammi Bowles
Hinds employee Erica Frazier gave graduation directions to Anna Miley of Pearl, who received an Associate Degree in Nursing from Hinds Community College. Hinds held a drive-through graduation at Eagle Ridge Conference Center for all nursing and allied health graduates on July 29.

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Photo by Hinds Community College/Tammi Bowles

Ashley Griffith of Florence received an Associate Degree in Nursing from Hinds Community College.



Photo by Hinds Community College/Tammi Bowles
Alyssa Berry of Pearl received a radiology degree from Hinds Community College on July 29.



Photo by Hinds Community College/April Garon
Kanajah Brown of Pearl is planning to major in business at the University of Southern Mississippi after graduation from Hinds Community College in one of four drive-through ceremonies on July 30.



Photo by Hinds Community College/April Garon

Ann-Taylor Anderson of Florence is on her way to the University of Southern Mississippi for a degree in marine biology after graduation from Hinds Community College on July 30 in one of four drive-through ceremonies.



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RCSD rolls out "Smart Restart" program

Special to SW Rankin News

The Rankin County School District (RCSD) recently announced that in response to Governor Reeves recommendations during the August 4 COVID-19 briefing, the Rankin County School District will move the district restart date to August 17, with Pre-K through twelfth returning to school in the HYBRID scenario for two weeks from August 17- 28. Then, they plan to monitor the situation and move into the "enhanced traditional" scenario on August 31, if possible. Those who chose CHOICE Distance Learning previously will continue with that learning option.

Due to the fluid nature of COVID-19, RCSD has also asked everyone to be prepared for all three potential reopening scenarios- enhanced traditional, hybrid and full distance learning as state and federal guidance changes daily. Therefore, these plans could change at any time. RCSD continues to closely monitor the situation and will adjust the Smart Restart plan as necessary. Changes will be announced as quickly

as possible.

RCSD will comply with the Governor's Executive Order requiring Rankin County citizens to wear masks. Therefore, masks will be required in common areas, halls, lobbies, and during all transitions. "Masks down" will be allowed, if needed, when seated and when six foot social distancing is possible.

RCSD also outlined their policies on face masks/covering requirements. No face mask or face covering should have writing with the following exceptions: School/college mascot name, school name or a brand name such as Nike, Adidas, etc. Face masks/coverings may be monogrammed with the student's name or name initials and may include appropriate designs such as the school mascot. All face masks/coverings must follow the RCSD Dress Code for Students policy, which includes no inappropriate designs, pictures, symbols, slogans, offensive language or political statements.

Parents of medically fragile students or parents with reservations concerning their child returning to in person

learning on school campuses are given the opportunity to apply for the CHOICE Distance Learning Program. They may apply, in lieu of the enhanced traditional scenario, by completing a CHOICE application, available at www.rcsd.ms/coronavirus-information/smart-restart-plan.

Expressing intent to participate in CHOICE constitutes a commitment to virtual learning and acknowledgment to all the statements included in the guidelines listed on the RCSD webpage, www.rcsd.ms/coronavirus-information/smart-restart-plan. Rankin County School District CHOICE Distance Learning Program Description and Considerations are available and listed on the webpage as well. Special Education Services will be determined on the individual needs of the child.



Special to SW Rankin News

If a CHOICE application was not received by Friday, July 24, 2020, the student will be expected to attend school on campus.

Questions about digital learning and the application process can be answered by emailing Lakeisha Maxer, District Parent Engagement and Distance Learning Counselor, at distancelearning@rcsd.ms.

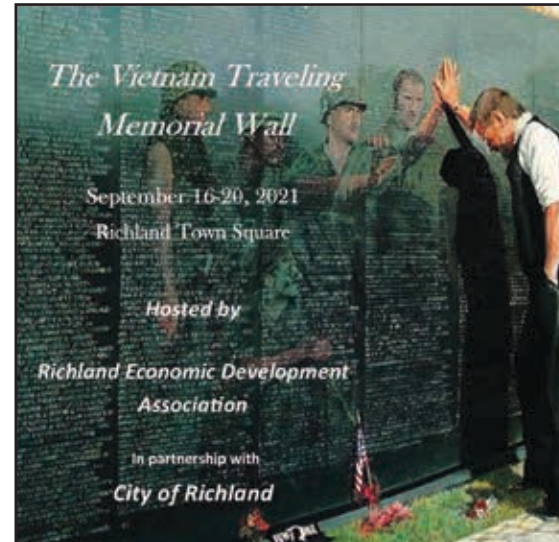
For a complete Smart Restart Plan document, visit www.rcsd.ms/coronavirus-information/smart-restart-plan.

Coming to Richland: The Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall

Special to SW Rankin News

The Richland Economic Development Association (REDA), a non-profit organization that works with the City of Richland, will be hosting in partnership with tCity of Richland, The Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall. The exhibit will be available for viewing Saturday, September 16 through Wednesday, September 20, 2021 at the Richland Town Square. It is a free event.

Over three million visitors each year visit the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington D.C., but not everyone is able to travel there for various reasons. Therefore, Therefore, this scaled down replica was created for the purpose of



Photos special to SW Rankin News

healing and to allow an opportunity to rekindle friendships. According to the www.travelingwall.us website, it also provides viewers the opportunity to visit loved ones in their home town who would otherwise not be able to make the trip to Washington D.C.

REDA and the city are currently working on the agenda, which will be made public in the near future. The agenda will include an official escort of the wall to the city, an Opening Ceremony, a Wreath Ceremony, and more.

Once the wall has been setup, it will be available for viewing by the public twenty-four hours a day un-

til the wall leaves on September 20, 2021.

The Richland Economic Development Association helps produce community activities, to assist Richland businesses with their needs and wants from the local government, and to encourage businesses to locate in the Richland area. It meets the second Tuesday of every month at 5:30 pm at Richland Community Center.

To find out how to become a member of REDA, contact Terri Wood at 601-420-3401 or email at twood@richlandms.com.

For more information about The Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall, visit www.travelingwall.us/, email info@travelingwall.us or visit their Facebook page.

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Volunteer Arthur Whigham cleans ditches and beautifies Richland

By Andy Kanengiser

Arthur Whigham stays on fire about cleaning ditches, cutting limbs, removing trash and tackling other odd jobs to improve the look of his Rankin County hometown.

People often notice the 64-year-old Army veteran working hard as a volunteer in the downtown Richland vicinity off busy U.S. 49.

It's all volunteer work, and Whigham goes it alone up to twelve hours a day. He's out there even as July's summer temperatures climb beyond the mid-90s; hot weather doesn't bother him. Whigham tries to stay cool with a hat, a white T-shirt to go along with his Army fatigues, and a handy cloth to wipe off the sweat. A cross dangles from his neck as he works.

"It's my passion," Whigham says. "It's who I am." Whether he's got a weed-eater in hand or wearing a mask, the former Mississippi Gulf Coast resident finishes jobs with his own equipment.

People will never see Whigham working with another clean-up partner.

"If you want to do it right, do it yourself," he said.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Whigham focuses on his clean-up mission to upgrade the appearance of portions of Richland. He moved to

the Central Mississippi community several weeks ago from Biloxi and likes the quality of life.

"In Richland, Mississippi, the people are extremely nice and courteous," Whigham says. "They are so appreciative and grateful for what you do."

His schedule from one day to the next varies: it could be working highway ditches one day and cutting tall grass in a neighbor's yard on day two to keep snakes away.

"I play it by ear," Whigham says. The scorching summer days roll by, and "I see something that needs to be done."

It could mean seven-day work weeks, but it's really a labor of love for the retired Mississippian.

Whigham says he enjoys working outdoors. He did it as an MDOT employee and as a laborer beautifying community college campuses. He can bush hog and take on projects most people would shy away from.

It's just part of his DNA, he says.

"I've worked for charitable organizations all of my life," including the Salvation Army.

Besides being passionate about upgrading the appearance of neighborhoods, Whigham stays in shape by pumping iron and working out. He's been spotted at places like Planet Fitness in Pearl and at Fitness 1440 in



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Super volunteer Arthur Whigham of Richland

Richland. The gym off U.S. 49 isn't far from the ditches and roads where he volunteers. The outdoor work is a dependable way for the former body builder to keep in tip-top shape.

The Mississippian isn't rich, and he didn't turn down an offer recently to help him financially. Richland neighbors collected \$180 as a way to say thanks for his hard work. Whigham notes he buys his own equipment, and that doesn't come cheap.

Honorably discharged from the Army, Whigham comes from a military family. His dad served in the Coast Guard, and he has an uncle who was a Navy man. His deep sense of community service was passed off to his son, Arthur Harris, Jr., who works in law enforcement in the Dallas area.

Asked if he's noticed any problems with the work he performs, Whigham noted motorists along U.S. 49 need to slow down.

"Cars go fast down through here."

But that won't stop him. One of his first jobs happened when he gazed at a neighbor's yard and noticed the grass was getting out of hand. "It has issues," he said.

People wanting to thank super volunteer Arthur Whigham can drive by to honk or wish him well. Typically, he's laboring in the city near the Richland Public Library and local Kroger. Chances are, the Army veteran won't pause very long to chat. There's always more work to be done to benefit his new hometown of Richland.

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f t s i y

Florence's JROTC empowers local youth



Pictured (l to r) are: Brooke Ray, Service Learning Coordinator MacKenzie Watson, Skyler Barnes, Craig Millette, Brayden Slaughter, Rebecca Aycox and Jenna Howard.



Pictured (l to r) are: Service Learning Coordinator MacKenzie Watson, Jenna Howard, Brayden Slaughter, Keith Reed, Rebecca Aycox, Brooke Ray, Battalion Commander Jordan Taylor and Chief Richard Thomas.



Pictured (l to r) are: Jenna Howard, Brooke Ray, Craig Millette, Richard Wilson, Service Learning Coordinator MacKenzie Watson and Rebecca Aycox.



Photos special to SW Rankin News
Pictured (l to r) are: Rebecca Aycox, Brooke Ray, Skyler Barnes, Service Learning Coordinator MacKenzie Watson, Craig Millette and Jenna Howard.

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During the 2019-2020 school year, Florence JROTC Service Learning Team (SLT) made a decision to reach out to the local police and firefighters in some way, to show their appreci-

ation for their service. The SLT was able to follow through on that decision during the summer months, when a small contingency of cadets paid a visit to local first-responders to deliver some goodies (i.e., candy, food and snacks).

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MDWFP provides insight about Mississippi's alligator population

Special to SW Rankin News

Alligators may be found all across Mississippi. They are most prevalent in the southern two-thirds of the state (south of Hwy 82). While alligators typically avoid humans and human activity, occasionally they do cause conflicts with humans. Juvenile alligators often disperse into new territories in the late spring and early summer months. During this dispersal, they occasionally find themselves in unusual locations near human development, such as; farm ponds, road ditches, highways, parking lots, yards, swimming pools, neighborhood water landscape pools, and even buildings. It is illegal and very dangerous for the public to capture and remove or kill an alligator without a special permit from the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP). As human developments (residential and commercial) continue to encroach into more rural areas of the state, increased interaction and conflicts with wildlife are subject to occur.

According to Ricky Flynt, Alligator Program Coordinator, MDWFP Alligator Program, the central Mississippi area receives between 100 to 200 calls a year regarding alligators. Of those, approximately 100 require agency response. MDWFP will typically respond when the alligator is deemed a "nuisance." Of these 100 calls, ones that require immediate attention are those where the alligator is in an out-of-place location, such as a private home, a highway, a parking lot or business and/or considered to be an eminent threat to the public.

Flynt says that the most common situation where alligators and humans come into contact on a more frequent basis are local "high recreation areas" such as the Ross Barnett Reservoir and Pearl

River. As a result, the alligators are less spooked by human activity, but will typically continue to avoid contact. Flynt recommends recreation seekers avoid contact with alligators when one is spotted in these circumstances. Mississippi residents can only legally seek the indigenous reptiles out when issued a permit from MDWFP during hunting season.

Flynt says that "alligators have a bad wrap, that has been given them by Hollywood, TV shows, cable TV shows." But he wants to reassure SW Rankin res-



Special to SW Rankin News

idents that ultimately alligators "are generally not dangerous and avoid people in normal circumstances. The problems that do arise between human and reptile exist because someone has fed them and or provided access to a food supply" and Flynt wants to emphasize that the intentional "feeding alligators is illegal."

For more information about MDWFP Alligator Program, visit www.mdwfp.com/wildlife-hunting/alligator-program/ or call 601.432.2400. To report alligators, or any wildlife, violations, call 1-800-BE SMART(237-6278).

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PPSD delays Back-to-school date

Special to SW Rankin News

In response to the Governor's recommendation during a recent briefing, Pearl Public School District (PPSD) will delay the start of the 2020-2021 school year until Monday, August 17, 2020. PPSD students will begin the 2020-2021 school year with a traditional, in-person format. Alternate hybrid and virtual learning plans are being finalized should a need for either situation arise.

Modified school day schedules are as follows: On August 17, students Pre-K through fifth grade will begin on a traditional schedule with a staggered start. On August 17, students in grades six through twelve will begin a hybrid schedule for two weeks. Beginning August 31, the district will implement a traditional schedule for all students.

Upon arrival to work, staff will have their temperature screened each day by a school official. Teachers will screen the temperature of each student upon entering the classroom at the beginning of each day.

Each school has a designated sick room to isolate students demonstrating COVID-like symptoms until they can be picked up.

Social distancing protocol will be implemented in the following ways: classrooms have been decluttered to maximize space; additional classes have been added to reduce class sizes wherever possible; procedures will be in place to increase separation between students in hallways, in classrooms, and in communal areas; elementary students (K-fifth grade) will remain in their classroom while teachers move from classroom to classroom and secondary students (sixth through twelfth) will change classrooms, but Pearl Junior High School (PJHS) and Pearl High School (PHS) will have a moving plan to optimize safety and social distancing; additional hand sanitizing stations will be available throughout the school buildings and upgraded cleaning measures and sanitizing fogging machines will be used routinely throughout the day to disinfect the classrooms, restrooms, offices, buses, etc.

Masks will be required at certain times. Each employee and student will be provided a washable mask to be worn at all times on school buses and any time social distancing cannot be maintained. Students will be able to take their mask off during class when social distancing is maintained.

No visitors will be allowed on campus

without an appointment.

Visitors with an appointment will be required to wear a mask, have their temperature taken upon entry and asked to practice safe social distancing.

Parents/Guardians checking students in or out will be required to wear a mask into the main office and remain in designated areas to maintain social distancing and to protect school staff.

All schools will continue to serve breakfast and lunch each day. Each school will implement a plan to limit excessive student interactions based on the age and grades of the students (for example eating in their classrooms, fewer classes in the cafeteria at one time and spread out, etc.).

Parents/Guardians are strongly encouraged to provide daily transportation to and from school for their children during the 2020-2021 school year. Students will be seated on the bus maximizing the space available for social distancing. Students will be expected to wear a face mask at all times on school buses. The buses will be sanitized daily.

If the PPSD moves to hybrid or distance learning, the district is in the process of implementing a modified 1:1 initiative to make a district-owned device available to each student at some point during the school year. Instructional content and student assignments will be made available on Google Classroom for students in K-fifth grade and on Canvas for students sixth through twelfth grade. The district will use WebEx for all virtual meetings. Information related to the district's modified 1:1 plan, including types of devices, device checkout procedures, rental fees, etc., will be made available at a later date.

A series of online training sessions (videos and documents) will be made available later in the summer to provide assistance and support for parents in the 1:1 plan

There will be state testing this school year. Students in grade 4K, K, third through eighth, and high school will be required to participate in the state assessment program. Third graders must score in the third performance level or higher to be promoted to fourth grade. High school end of course tests must be passed to be eligible for graduation.

Additional information will be added as it becomes available from MDE and other governing agencies. Be sure to check the district website frequently.

<https://www.pearl.k12.ms.us/>



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Florence's Baldwin receives MC's Sadler Award

Special to SW Rankin News

Enrolling at Mississippi College Law School starting in August, Kelsi Baldwin says her career will lead her to serve society's voiceless.

"There are countless individuals who feel as if their voice has been ripped away, and I want to help them find it again," said Baldwin. "I have no doubt that MC Law will equip me with the necessary skills to do so."

A May 2020 Mississippi College political science graduate, Baldwin excelled as an undergraduate to earn the university's Sadler Award. The award goes to a student who attended a community college for two years and achieved MC's highest grade point average.

The honor was established by the late Dr. William O. Sadler, a 1929 graduate and longtime MC biology professor.

Baldwin, 22, says her undergraduate years on the Clinton campus were awesome and got her well-prepared for MC Law in Jackson.

"My time at MC was filled with amazing experiences, and I knew the professors were one of a kind," says the Florence High graduate. "I have dreamed of practicing law for as long as I can remember, and MC continues to help me achieve this goal."

A 2018 graduate of Copiah-Lincoln

Community College who transferred to the Baptist-affiliated university, Baldwin wants to give back to her alma mater.

"I hope that I can one day repay Mississippi College for the countless positive ways this university has affected my life."

Political science professor Glenn Antizzo served as her advisor. He salutes the Nenamoosha Social Tribe member and recipient of the 2019-2020 Political Science Student of the Year Award.

"She is incredibly smart, has impeccable communication skills, and fearlessly takes on subjects for papers that are intellectually interesting, yet very demanding to pursue," Antizzo said. "Kelsi is an absolute joy to have in the classroom, with a fun and infectious happy, upbeat personality."

Kelsi Baldwin mastered her political science studies and was just as strong in the classroom as an English Writing minor.

Associate Provost Debbie Norris joined school leaders commending Kelsi Baldwin for her solid academic achievements and wish her the best at MC Law this fall.



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Sadler Award winner
Kelsi Baldwin.

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