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# Your Community. Your News. Your Paper.

# SWRANKIN NEWS

Vol. 11, No. 04 | April 2026

The Pearl News

THE NEWS RICHLAND

THE FLORENCE NEWS

## A successful session even beyond the headlines



By Senator Brian Rhodes, State Senator, Mississippi District 36

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I want to thank the people of this district for your continued support. While I have truly enjoyed the work, it is not something I take lightly. It is a privilege and an honor to serve you, and I will continue working every day to represent you well.



## Pearl's Mt. Elam MBC celebrating two anniversaries

By Susie A. Wolfe

Pastor Wayne C. Moore, Jr. is celebrating "One Year of Faithful Leadership" at Mt. Elam Missionary Baptist Church on Old Whitfield Road in Pearl in April. The church will also celebrate its one hundred eighty-fifth anniversary on August 27, 2026, with a Homecoming at the church.

Pastor Moore said that the early church met at what is now Mississippi State Hospital, under an elm tree, which is where it got its name "Elam." The church building is not too far from that location now.

A native of Lexington, Mississippi, Pastor Moore has devoted his life to preach-

ing and teaching the Gospel with power, clarity and conviction. With more than thirty years in ministry, he continues to lead the church, moving forward in unity, healing, and restoration, grounded in the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). The church's theme for 2026 is "A Church Rekindled Through Reconciliation."

He holds a bachelor of theology from United Theological Seminary and Bible College and is currently pursuing a Master of Theology at Slidell Baptist Seminary.

He has served in several leadership roles, including Director of Labor Relations for the General Missionary Baptist State Convention of Mississippi, President of



Special to The Pearl News

Mt. Elam, one of Rankin County's oldest churches, will be celebrating its 185th birthday in August with a Homecoming at the church at 701 Old Whitfield Road in Pearl.

the NAACP Clinton Branch, Dean of Mississippi Baptist Seminary (Jackson Location), and First Vice Moderator of the Hinds County Baptist Association.

Pastor Moore says he is passionate about reaching youth, empowering seniors and transforming the lives of the unchurched, often saying, "The young have much to gain, the elderly have much to give, and the unchurched have eternal destinies awaiting transformation."

"We are not here because of convenience - we are here because of covenant," he said.

Mt. Elam Missionary Baptist Church, "The Church Where Everybody Is Somebody," begins Sunday morning worship at 11 a.m.

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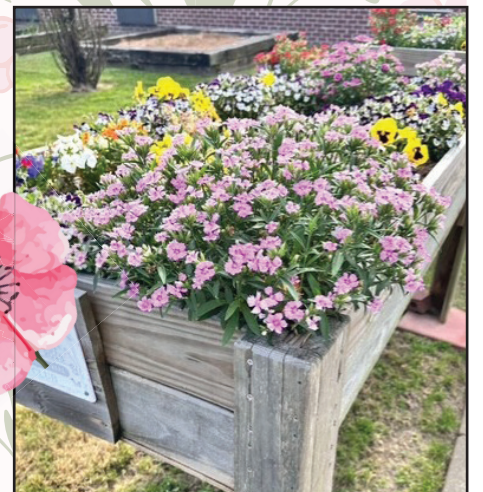


## Neal speaks at first annual Spring Fling



By Susie A. Wolfe

Nellie Neal, the Garden Mama on radio, spoke to the Richland-Florence Garden Club at the Richland Community Center in March on the topic of spring garden top tips. She talked about native plants and their importance, plus her travels to the Netherlands to see tulips.



Garden Club members say the raised beds the Richland-Florence Garden Club planted at Plainview Assisted Living are blooming beautifully, and the residents love them.

Special to The Richland News

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# Town of Star officials take Oath of Office as 300th municipality

Special to SW Rankin News

The Town of Star Oath of Office Ceremony of the mayor and Board was held on March 26, 2026, at Heartwood Lumber in Star. The town became Mississippi's three hundredth municipality. Meredith Green Henderson sang the National Anthem, and Jerry Glass gave the opening prayer. Star, Mississippi's Mayor John Lee met with the Board of Aldermen for their first official Board Meeting on April 7, 2026, at the Volunteer Fire Department in Star. Star became Mississippi's newest municipality in March when the Town officials were sworn in.



Special to The Florence News

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# April 25 Pearl Day includes new events

Special to SW Rankin News

Pearl Day is an all-day event full of activities for all ages, and, this year, includes an extension of two days with the addition of the First Annual Pearl Day Pickleball Classic. Also new this year will be the First Annual Cars for Causes Car Show at Trustmark Park.

The Pickleball Classic starts on April 24 and continues through April 26 at Pearl City Park's pickleball courts at 132 Mary Ann Drive. Registration is open, with entry fees of \$30 per player and the opportunity to win medals, money and special awards. The event will also include raffles, giveaways and food trucks. Registration is available at SwishTournaments.com.

Pearl Day events begin in earnest at 9 a.m. on Saturday, April 25, with a "Pearl's Got Talent" talent show at Pirate Auditorium, bingo at Pearl Parks and Rec, and the car show at Trustmark Park. Pearl City Park will be filled with family-friendly options from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m., including live music, arts and crafts vendors, merchandise and boutique shopping, food trucks, face painting, an entertainment trailer, inflatables and other games.

The evenings' free concerts will be at Trustmark Park, with gates opening at 5:30 p.m. Attendees are reminded to be sure to bring their own lawn chairs for the concert. No outside food or drinks will be allowed at the events.

For more information, including how to sign up to be a vendor, contact the Pearl Chamber of Commerce at 601-939.3338.



EVENT	TIME	LOCATION
PEARL DAY'S FIRST ANNUAL PICKLEBALL CLASSIC	APRIL 24 -26, TIMES VARY	PEARL CITY PARK, MARY ANN DRIVE
PEARL DAY IN THE PARK	9 A.M.- 4 P.M.	PEARL CITY PARK, MARY ANN DRIVE
PEARL'S GOT TALENT	9 A.M. – 12 P.M.	PIRATE AUDITORIUM, 180 MARY ANN DRIVE
PEARL DAY BINGO	9 A.M., 11 A.M., 1 P.M., 3 P.M.	PEARL PARKS AND REC BUILDING, 320 CENTER CITY DRIVE
FIRST ANNUAL CARS FOR CAUSES		TRUSTMARK PARK, 1 MONSTER'S ALLEY
CONCERT GATES OPEN	5:30 P.M.	TRUSTMARK PARK NORTH PARKING LOT
HINDER FREE CONCERT	7 P.M.	TRUSTMARK PARK
DAUGHTRY FREE CONCERT	8:45 P.M.	TRUSTMARK PARK



Photos special to SW Rankin News

## SW RANKIN NEWS

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## Darrow named Pearl Employee of the Month



Special to SW Rankin News

The Pearl Chamber of Commerce named Abagahl Darrow (pictured center, front row) City of Pearl Employee of the Month for March. Darrow is pictured with Mayor Jake Windham and other Pearl employees.

Special to SW Rankin News

Abagahl Darrow was named the March City of Pearl Employee of the Month.

Darrow started working for the City in 2016 as a dispatcher and began her career at the Pearl Police Department in 2021. She transferred to the records department in 2024 and has advanced quickly.

"Abagahl is an integral part of the team, always offering help, guidance, or a laugh to not only the public but also fellow employees," said her supervisor, Ashton Whitty. "Her

compassion, dedication and knowledge base are true assets to the Pearl Municipal Court System. Court Records is grateful to have her as a part of the team."

Darrow graduated from Northwest Rankin High School in 2015 and attended Hinds Community College with a focus on criminal justice. She handles attorney communications and requests, daily court operations, and also attends court twice a week to ensure court runs smoothly and quickly.

Chief McLendon, Pearl Mayor Jake Windham and Darrow's colleagues all spoke highly of Darrow's work ethic and knowledge of her job. The Pearl Chamber presented her with gifts.

# Sensory Fair to be held April 25 at Richland Rec Center

By Susie A. Wolfe

The Ranger League at Richland Park and Rec Center will hold a Sensory Fair on Saturday, April 25, from 9 a.m. to noon. There will be sensory activities, games and prizes, support and services for families, and entertainment, all designed in a sensory-friendly environment for special needs' participants and their families.

"This is our first sensory-focused event. It is a free event for all ages," said City of Richland Sports Coordinator "Coach" Thelissa Norwood. "We wanted to create a welcoming and inclusive space for individuals who may feel overwhelmed at traditional community events. The goal is to provide a calm, supportive environment where participants can engage, explore and enjoy activities at their own comfort level."

Norwood and her colleague, Cameron Bennett, are targeting individuals in the Rankin County area of all ages with sensory sensitivities, including those with autism, ADHD, and other sensory processing needs. Families, caregivers and community members are also encouraged to attend and participate.



Richland Mayor Clay Burns is shown with a group of winners at All Sports Night. Pictured (l to r) front row, are: Brock, Sarah (holding state award for Ranger League), Jenny, Mary, Jay, Austin and Juanita; and back row: Mayor of Richland Clay Burns, Preston, Coach Norwood, Austin and Benny.

**For more information, contact Coach Norwood at 601-487-9992.**



Photos special to SW Rankin News

More than 24 Ranger League participants played softball during six games in the season for adapted sports. The environment will remain calm, inclusive and accessible for all participants.





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## Old Truths for Today

J.T. Morgan



### The Significance of Christ's Resurrection

The resurrection of Christ is fundamental to everything that is in the Bible. It is the main stumbling block to modernism. If the resurrection can be proven, it establishes the supernatural. Even Modernists admit that if the resurrection is true, there is proof of the supernatural. If Christ were raised from the dead, Christ is truly the Son of God. If He is the Son of God, then God is. Only God would have made all the issues of all the Bible rest on one simple fact, the resurrection of Christ. Yet this is true. Prove the resurrection of Christ and all the rest of the Bible can be accepted without question. Modernism is not really modern. It is old as Corinth.

The apostle Paul gives the greatest argument ever made on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 (15:1-4; 12-20). His argument for the resurrection is unanswerable. It is the most authoritative in history. This chapter removes the subject from theory to certainty. There may be questions as to the how but there are none left as to the fact.

In spite of pagan philosophy and human wisdom he starts with the scripture. The Old Testament is history written before it happened, the New Testament is history fulfilled. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the foundation of the Christian system. If there was no resurrection, Christianity is a hoax and we are wasting our time. But the truth is, the event of Jesus' resurrection is indisputable. Professor Thomas Arnold, a world-renown historian, once said that Christ's resurrection from the dead is the "best-attested fact in human history" (1939).

The resurrection is one of the major evidences that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Paul affirmed that Christ is "declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom.1:3-4). Jesus' resurrection represents an assurance that we can have forgiveness from our sins. Paul contended, "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Cor.15:17). The opposite affirmation would be this: if Jesus was raised, sins will be forgiven when we obey the gospel (Acts 2:38:22:16).

The resurrection tells the world that the kingdom of God is ruled by a living sovereign. The founder of Islam is dead and his bones lie dormant in the earth. The founder of Islam was Mohammed, born at Mecca, in Arabia, A.D. 570 and he died in A.D. 632. He remains dead today! But the founder of Christianity, sixty years after His death appeared to John on the island of Patmos (Rev.1:17-18).

Jesus' resurrection also proves that physical death is not the termination of human existence. God who is the giver of life (1 Tim.6:13) has the power to bring back to life the human body. Christ's triumph over the grave is heaven's pledge to us that we too shall be raised. This is why Jesus is referred to as the "first fruits of them that are asleep" (1 Cor.15:20-23). (see also 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

The resurrection of the Son of God should be a constant reminder to us of these wonderful truths.

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# McLaurin Festival features music, crafts, car show



Special to SW Rankin News

The April 11 McLaurin Festival, now in its fifth year, featured craft tents, high school band music and a car show featuring twenty-seven autos. There were also food booths, animal petting, and kids' games. The Band Director said that it is a McLaurin Band fundraiser and community event combined.

The winners of the car show are first place, Greg Hawes, for his 1999 Chevy S10; second place, Richard and Josie St. Germain, for their 1984 MGB; and third place went to Austin Kilgore for his 1935 Ford GO.

The Tiger Band has forty-five members from the fifth through twelfth grade and received superior ratings at all of its competitions this year.



Photos by Susie A. Wolfe

# FHS students excel at state DECA Competition



Special to SW Rankin News

In February, the Florence High School (FHS) DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America) students competed at the Mississippi DECA State Competition. Their sponsor said they represented Florence with excellence, professionalism, and Eagle pride. The State medal winners were: first place, Community Giving Project, Kristen Holmes and Cameron Roberts; second place, Principles of Hospitality and Tourism, Cameron Roberts; third place, Business Services Marketing, Simeyon Lewis; fourth place, Franchise Business Plan, Ava Gonzales and Aniyah Kyle; fifth place, Sports and Entertainment Marketing, Maylee Gilmer, Sydney O'Hair and Mary Elise Taylor; and fifth place, Hospitality Services, Carson Chapman and Conner Abernathy. High test score medal winners were Carson Chapman, Simeyon Lewis and Mady Thompson.



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# Miss Mississippi speaks at Richland Senior Center in March



By Guest Columnist  
Shea Thames, Richland Senior Services Director

The Richland Senior Center was honored to host the First Annual Miss Mississippi Luncheon on Wednesday, March 18, 2026, welcoming Miss Mississippi 2025, Anna Leah Jolly, for an afternoon that our seniors and community will remember for years to come. The event brought together seniors, community leaders, sponsors and volunteers for a meaningful time of fellowship, inspiration and celebration.

Gooch Consulting and Event Services served a full catered luncheon featuring oven roasted chicken topped with spinach hollandaise, garlic mashed potatoes, sweet, glazed carrots, spring mixed greens with house dressing, and cheesecake for dessert. The meal created a warm and elegant setting for the afternoon's program, as the room was filled with conversation, laughter and anticipation before Anna Leah's presentation and time visiting with guests.

Anna Leah Jolly's message was both inspiring and heartfelt as she shared her testimony, her "Limitless" message, and encouraged our seniors to continue sharing their wisdom and life experiences with younger generations. While



The 2025 Miss Mississippi, Anna Leah Jolly of Rankin County, shared her testimony and talked about her platform to a luncheon group at The Richland Senior Center in March. Pictured (l to r) are: Alderman Scot Mancil; Richland Senior Center Activities Director Amy Matthews; Alderman John Hamilton; Jolly; Alderman Beth Sanford; Alderman A. J. Shields; Mayor Clay Burns; and Senior Center Director Shea Thames.

her time speaking was meaningful, what made the day especially memorable was the time she spent sitting, visiting, listening and connecting personally with many of our seniors. Several of our seniors also presented Anna Leah with handmade gifts prepared especially for her, adding a deeply personal touch to the day.

One of the highlights of the afternoon was a special drawing in which eight seniors were surprised with signed copies of Jolly's two books, *Anna Leah: The Limitless Ballerina* and *Theodore: The Little Bear with Big Feelings*. The excitement and gratitude from the winners added another memorable moment to an already wonderful event.

We were thrilled to welcome Barbara Travis as a special guest to introduce Miss Mississippi 2025, Anna Leah Jolly,

and to share a few personal remarks before Anna Leah's presentation. It was a pleasure to have City of Richland Mayor Clay Burns, members of The Board of Aldermen and City Clerk, Karen Jackson, join us for the luncheon. We are deeply grateful to our sponsors—Richland business

HydroShields Rainbow Sales & Ser-

vice, Supervisor Sid Scarbrough, Representative Lance Varner, Scott Womack, and Senator Brian Rhodes—whose continued support allows the Richland Senior Center to offer meaningful programs and special events for our seniors. The Richland Police Department and Richland Fire Department played an important role in the success of the event by volunteering their time to serve as wait staff. Their willingness to serve our senior community in such a hands-on way did not go unnoticed and was sincerely appreciated by everyone in attendance.

The First Annual Miss Mississippi Luncheon was more than just an event; it was a special day that brought together generations, leadership, service, and community in celebration of the seniors of Richland. It was a day filled with encouragement, meaningful conversation, laughter, and lasting memories, and it beautifully reflected how valued and important our senior community is to the City of Richland.

It was truly a joy and an honor to host Miss Mississippi and celebrate our seniors in such a special way. Our seniors are a vital part of our community, and events like this are one small way we can give back to the generation that has given so much to all of us. It is our honor at the Richland Senior Center to create opportunities for fellowship, learning and special experiences for the seniors we are privileged to serve.



Photos by Susie A. Wolfe

Local businesses and state and local representatives were on hand to welcome Miss Mississippi to Richland in March. Pictured (l to r) are: A.J. Shields and Katie Shields, owners of HydroShields Rainbow Sales and Service; State Senator Brian Rhodes; State Representative Lance Varner; Rankin County Supervisor Sid Scarbrough; and Scott Womack, Womack Firearms Training and Polygraph owner.



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## From the Richland Boardroom

By Susie A. Wolfe



In the City of Richland's March Board Meetings, the City Alderman and Mayor discussed engineering service, authorizing the advertisement for bids for projects that include 2026 Water System Improvements, Valve Replacements, Richmond Pointe Bank Stabilization, Detention Pond Rehabilitation and Bradford Storm Sewer Rehabilitation, Phase I.

Aldermen considered bids received for the Highway 49 mowing project, as well as for the City streets mowing project.

There was a Public Hearing: Special Exception for Brantley Rogers, located at 518 Quinn Drive, pursuant to Section 501 of the City of Richland Zoning Ordinance Land Uses Permitted, Article 5-Agricultural District. There are two structures on the property, but the Board only approved allowing one residence until the renovation on one is complete.

There was a Public Hearing: Variance for Andrew Forsdick, located at 214 Spell Drive, pursuant to Article 5 Section I-B; Regulation Governing Rate of Stormwater Discharge Variances of the City of Richland Stormwater Ordinance. The motion was passed.

The Board approved a pay raise for Justin Wilson and Dalton Grantham in the amount of \$1 per hour for passing the Water Operators exam effective March 4, 2026, as well as approved the hire of maintenance workers in the Street and Water Departments at Level 1/ Step 1 effective March 4, 2026, contingent upon passage of drug screening.

A contract with JJB Innovations, LLC. to provide Geospatial Information System Management and Consulting Services for the Water Department was approved, with authorization given to the Mayor to sign the same.

The Board approved a contract with Novum as consultants on financial matters and authorized the Mayor to sign the same.

Aldermen approved to apply for Community Project Funding for the Brandon Avenue Sewer Project, authorize matching funds, and authorize the Mayor to sign all paperwork for the same, and also approved the annual payment to the Richland Creek Watershed District in the amount of \$10,000 and authorized the City renewing Amazon Business Prime for a one-year term in the amount of \$129, upon expiration of the free trial.

The Parks and Recreation Department was authorized to advertise and accept applications for the seasonal positions of summer camp workers and summer maintenance workers.

Regarding engineering service, the

Board approved a Summary Change Order for the Squirrel Branch Bank Stabilization, Phase II project for an increase of \$1,134.50, as was Change Order No. 1 to Thornton Construction Co., Inc. for the 2023 Street Improvements Project for an increase of \$104,506. Both change orders were deemed commercially reasonable, necessary to serve the governing authority, and not made to circumvent the procurement law.

A Final Pay Request to Southeastern Pipeline and Environmental Services, to be paid out of the General Fund, in the amount of \$149,720.23, for work performed on the Squirrel Branch Bank Stabilization, Phase II project was approved, as was Pay Request No. 3 to Thornton Construction Co., Inc., to be paid out of the M.U.T. Bond Debt Fund, in the amount of \$277,298.94, for work performed on the 2023 Street Improvements Project Consideration of Term Bids received.

A Public Hearing: Special Exception was held for Catrina D. Kitchens, for 198 Cleary Road, pursuant to Section 1502-D of the City of Richland Zoning Ordinance; Article XV Commercial District Adopt Ordinances to Authorize Annexation. This is the first step in expanding 70 acres and 100 acres for potential growth on Highway 80 property just before crossing the Pearl River.

Two quotes were received for the purchase of Christmas decorations for the Street Department to be paid out of the 3% Hotel/Motel Tax Fund.

Purchases were approved for three Motorola Radios for the Street Department in the amount of \$6,900, under State Contract Number MSWIN State Contract 3429, as well as two rotary cutters from Deviney Equipment for the Street Department in the amount of \$11,218.00, under State Contract.

The Board approved the hire of a maintenance worker in the Street Department at Level 1/Step 1, the hire of a Firefighter at Level 4/Step 1, a Patrolman at Level 2/Step 2, and a Part-Time Dispatcher at the rate of \$18.50 per hour, all effective March 18, 2026, and each pending the passage of a drug test.

Yearly Maintenance Contracts with Environment Masters for HVAC systems at the Rec Center in the quarterly amount of \$1,724.51, and the Community Center in the quarterly amount of \$1,165.74, were approved, along with authorization for the Mayor to sign the same.

The Board went into executive session for economic development discussions.

## Obituaries

NAME	AGE	CITY	DOD	FUNERAL HOME
Roy Randolph "Randy" Cowling	82y	Braxton, MS	02/28/2026	Chancellor FH
Sarah Katherine McCray	90y	Morton, MS	03/05/2026	Chancellor FH
Carol Jean Sessions	84y	Florence, MS	03/11/2026	Chancellor FH
Patricia Loudermilk-Robinson	86y	Brandon, MS	03/12/2026	Chancellor FH
Major Jean Dilmore	85y	Florence, MS	03/14/2026	Chancellor FH
John Toliver Bruce, Sr.	87y	Florence, MS	03/14/2026	Chancellor FH
Julia "Julie" Glenn Langford	55y	Florence, MS	03/17/2026	Chancellor FH
Rogina "Gina" Anne Keys	63y	Braxton, MS	03/18/2026	Chancellor FH
Jonah "JoJo" Lee Eugene Burroughs	27y	Star, MS	03/18/2026	Chancellor FH
Georgia Merle Lewis	92y	Harrisville, MS	03/22/2026	Chancellor FH
John Bedford Thompson	87y	Florence, MS	03/23/2026	Chancellor FH
Tracy Keith Hughes	69y	Florence, MS	03/24/2026	Chancellor FH
Michael Ray Chambers	75y	Brandon, MS	03/22/2026	Chancellor FH
Donna Lynn King	66y	Florence, MS	03/25/2026	Chancellor FH
Geraldine Lawrence Corso	87y	Richland, MS	03/26/2026	Chancellor FH
Claude "Trey" Boyd III	60y	Florence, MS	03/25/2026	Chancellor FH
Timmy James Sims	66y	Brandon, MS	03/27/2026	Chancellor FH
Michael Ross Smith, Sr.	86y	Flowood, MS	03/30/2026	Chancellor FH



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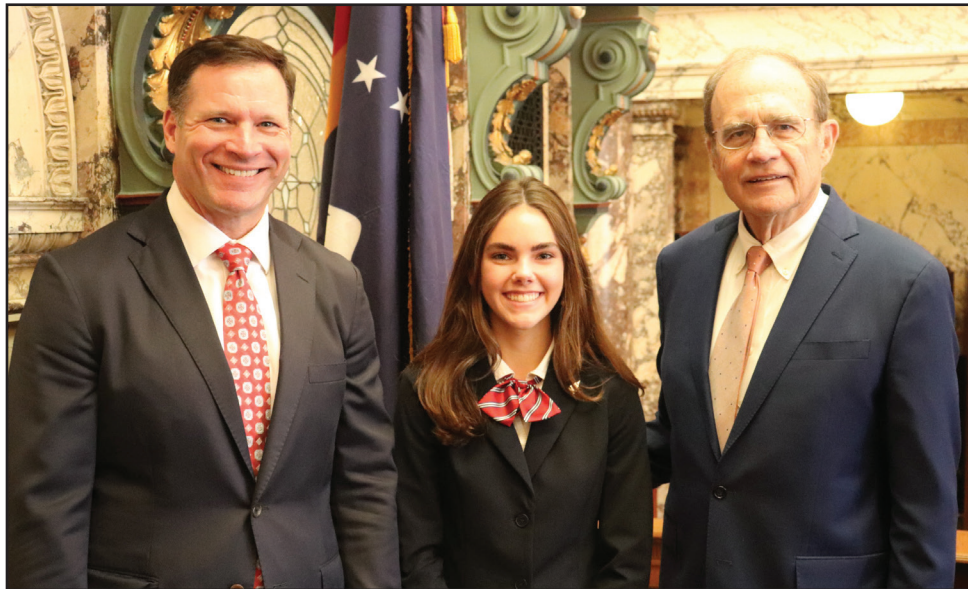
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## Wigley serves as State Senate page



Special to SW Rankin News

Sarah Spencer Wigley (center) served as a page in the State Senate. Pictured with Wigley are Senator Chris Johnson (left) who sponsored her visit, and Lieutenant Governor C. Delbert Hosemann, Jr. (right).

Special to SW Rankin News

Sarah Spencer Wigley of Florence served as a page for the Mississippi Senate in February. Pages generally run errands for officials and Senate staff.

Wigley is the daughter of Bo and Morgan Wigley and attends Florence High School (FHS).

When asked about the week, Wigley said, "Over the past week of paging for the Senate, I experienced an environment where I observed legislation being debated and voted on. I really enjoyed being part of an important process, meeting new people."

## DYW county representatives advance to State Competition in Meridian

By Susie A. Wolfe

At the January 31, 2026, Distinguished Young Women (DYW) Competition held at Jackson Prep, Mary Grace Tomlinson from Florence High School (FHS) was named Rankin County's DYW, and MaKinlee Fallin, a Richland High School (RHS) junior, was named the At-Large participant from Copiah County. They will advance to the state level at the 2027 Distinguished Young Women of Mississippi program to be held in Meridian July 16 - 18, where they will join other representatives from across Mississippi in competing for cash scholarships and the opportunity to represent Mississippi at the Distinguished Young Woman of America program.



Mary Grace Tomlinson is Rankin County's 2027 Distinguished Young Woman (DYW). She is the third in Rankin County DYW in a row who is from Florence High School, joining past DYWs Sydney Higdon and Maylee Gilmer. She was one of fourteen young women competing who were evaluated by a panel of five judges, and she was also named the Scholastic and the Self Expression winner.

designed to inspire and empower young girls by introducing them to the program's values and traditions. Her little sister was Lily Kate Banks, who helped keep her organized behind the scenes at the event. She says she enjoyed making friends and creating memories.

One of the DYW's Founding Principles is ensuring every young woman has the opportunity to participate in a local program. Rankin County DYW also hosted MaKinlee Fallin as an At-Large participant from Copiah County. She is a resident of Crystal Springs and attends Richland High School (RHS). The Mississippi At-Large Program supports this mission by allowing participants who live in an area without a local program to join nearby programs, giving them a full DYW experience and better preparation for potential advancement to the state level.

At-Large participants are evaluated in the same manner as local participants. Scores are submitted to the State Program, who notifies the participants of advancement to the state program, if eligible. Fallin is the first student to par-



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Tomlinson, the winner of the Rankin County honor, was the third Rankin County DYW in a row from FHS, following previous DYWs Sydney Higdon and Maylee Gilmer. She was one of fourteen young women competing who were evaluated by a panel of five judges in the categories of Scholastics (25%), Interview (25%), Talent (20%), Fitness (15%) and Self-Expression (15%). She was named the Scholastic winner and the Self Expression winner at the county competition.

At FHS, Tomlinson's activities include JROTC Service Learning Coordinator, JLAB Academic Team Lead, Company Commander, First Sergeant, Drill Team, Armed and Unarmed Platoon Commander, and PT Team; varsity soccer, MS Rush United Soccer, Interact/RAK Club; and Occupations Students of America (HOSA).

Tomlinson says she is proud that her Armed Platoon won first place statewide for their routine when she was the commander. Her future plans include attending the University of Southern Mississippi to study occupational therapy, which she plans to practice in the Air Force. She said, "I learned that the military isn't people fighting, it's behind the scene work to make sure that everything works together so they are ready when needed."

She enjoyed meeting the other participants from other schools and especially liked the DYW's Little Sister's program

One of the DYW's Founding Principles is ensuring every young woman has the opportunity to participate in a local program. MaKinlee Fallin was an At-Large participant from Copiah County. She is a resident of Crystal Springs and attends Richland High School. She will be attending the state program in Meridian in July.

participate in DYW from Copiah County. Fallin has attended Richland schools since the third grade. Her mother, Lindi Fallin, is the RHS attendance clerk. They have been making the forty-five-minute drive for many years now. MaKinlee Fallin works after school with the Frontiers group at Richland Upper Elementary.

Fallin's other activities include serving as president of the Unified Club; Praise Team; Interact Club; Business Academy; Mayor's Youth Council; Student Council; Health Sciences Program at Hinds Community College; HOSA; and Beta Club. She also participates in softball and powerlifting.

She plans to attend Mississippi College and continue her education to become a doctor of obstetrics and gynecology.

Fallin had an unusual fitness routine at the DYW January 31 competition; she did a powerlifting demonstration to music. She can bench press 115 pounds.

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

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## From the Florence Boardroom

By Susie A. Wolfe



The City of Florence met in their regularly scheduled meetings set for the third Tuesday in February, February 17, and March 3, at City Hall in Florence. Present were Mayor Trey Gunn, Aldermen Mason Herrin, Kyle Martin and Brent Sistrunk. Aldermen John Banks and Brian Grantham were absent. Mayor Gunn called the Meeting to order and announced a quorum.

Upon recommendation of Police Chief Brad Burns, a motion was made to send Officer Ken Stapleton to Southern Regional Public Safety Institute Training Course April 14-16, 2026. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote.

Chief Burns made a motion to approve the quote of BCI in the amount of \$6,875 to set up and manage M365 Bit Titan E-mail service for the City of Florence departments, BCI being a sole service provider due to networking with the current Fort-Net security system which serves the City. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote.

Water/Sewer Operator Billy Russell recommended approving the quote of JMT Construction, LLC in the

amount of \$1,450 to purchase wash gravel and sand for Ramey's Sewer Project, the lowest and best of two quotes received. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote.

Street Director David Myers asked the Board to approve the quote of Magnolia Lawn & Land in the amount of \$1,275 per cut for mowing Hwy. 49 roadside and maintenance, beginning March 1, 2026, and continuing through October 31, 2026, the lowest and best of three quotes.

Community Development Director Joel Sims asked the Board to approve monument signage for Eagle Post Road located at 131 Hwy. 469 North Florence, as submitted by Gator Signs. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote.

Sims also asked to set a public hearing for March 17, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. for consideration of a variance from section 404(A) of the Storm Water/Rain Water Regulations for proposed development Chapter 23 Appendix A Building Ordinances, Ordinance No. 272 in C-3 Zoning District, in the City of Florence, to authorize and direct the City Engineer to review the consideration for a variance request and provide written facts and circumstances concerning the request at the public hearing. The motion was carried

by a unanimous vote.

It was approved to go into executive session to discuss pending litigation, a personnel matter in the Police Department involving the position of officer and in the Park Department involving the position of maintenance employee. A motion was made in executive session to hire Patrick McDaniel as a maintenance worker for the park at \$19.23 per hour starting February 23, 2026, pending a successful background check and drug and alcohol testing with a (90) day probation. And Chief Burns asked to go into executive session to accept the resignation of Officer Jeffery Smith effective February 2, 2026.

Chief Burns got approval to send Dispatcher Corry Mobley to a dispatch course in Clinton, Mississippi, April 6-12, 2026. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote.

The Mayor and Board, City Clerk and City Attorney will attend the MML Summer Conference June 27-July 2, 2026, and a motion was made for the City to pay the registration fee of \$350 and all related costs as allowed by state law. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote.

The Board approved signage for Crawfish Shack located at 2873 Hwy. 49 South Florence, as submitted

by Rainbow Signs. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote.

The Board authorized City Attorney Bobby Lingold to send a demand letter to C-Spire regarding damage to the city sewer line caused by C-Spire or their contractor, located at 165 West Main Street. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote.

Upon recommendation of City Engineer, the Board authorized direct submittal of Tanks Rehab Project to Congressman Guest as a FY27 Appropriations Request with Mayor Gunn and City Engineer providing support letters. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote.

The Board accepted the resignation of Officer Hayden Lukens effective February 23, 2026, and the resignation of Dispatcher Lucy Macias effective February 24, 2026.

Upon recommendation of Mayor Gunn, a motion was made to look into the feasibility of constructing a gun range site to be located behind the water/sewer treatment plant. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote.

Upon recommendation of Mayor Gunn, the Board authorized the purchase of a metal detector from Com-South for use in the board/court room at a cost of \$4,918. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote.

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# PPSD honors PHS and PJH Carson Scholars

The Pearl Public School District recently named its 2026 Carson Scholars, defining them as students who demonstrate exceptional academic achievement and a strong commitment to community service at Pearl High School (PHS) and Pearl Junior High (PJH).



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Pictured are Pearl Public School District Superintendent Chris Chism and Pearl Junior High School 2026 Carson Scholar Claire Cutcliff.

Pictured are 2026 Pearl High School Carson Scholar Campbell McHenry and his high school instructor.

Jack Durr (center) and Abby Grace Lewis (right) have been recognized as Carson Scholars in prior years for Pearl High School and were lauded this year for continuing to uphold the high standards required by the program. This marks Durr's sixth year and Lewis' fifth year to be recognized as Carson Scholars. They are pictured with Pearl Public School District Superintendent Chris Chism (left).

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# FMS names February, March Eagles of the Month



Florence Middle School (FMS) recently named its Students of the Month for February. Pictured (l to r) are: FMS Assistant Principal Tyler Walters, FMS Principal Brock Sistrunk, Sixth Grade Student of the Month Catherine Stanley, Seventh Grade Student of the Month Easton Hall, Eighth Grade Student of the Month Ryker Ready, Student of the Month Sponsor Tanner Wilson of Farm Bureau Insurance and FMS Assistant Principal Dr. Kelsey Williams.



Kristen Gray has been named the February Florence Middle School Teacher of the Month. Pictured (l to r) are: FMS Assistant Principal Tyler Walters, FMS Principal Brock Sistrunk, Kristen Gray, Teacher/Staff Recognition sponsor Representative Lance Varner, and FMS Assistant Principal Dr. Kelsey Williams.



Photos special to SW Rankin News

William Ainsworth has been named the Florence Middle School Staff Member of the Quarter. Pictured (l to r) are FMS Assistant Principal Tyler Walters, FMS Principal Brock Sistrunk, William Ainsworth, Teacher/Staff Recognition sponsor Representative Lance Varner, and FMS Assistant Principal Dr. Kelsey Williams.



Florence Middle School (FMS) recently named its Eagles of the Month for March. Pictured (l to r) are: FMS Assistant Principal Dr. Kelsey Williams, FMS Principal Brock Sistrunk, Teacher of the Month Leidy Velez, Sixth Grade Student of the Month Taylor Childers, Seventh Grade Student of the Month Logan Hodges, Eighth Grade Student of the Month Lyla Fontan and FMS Assistant Principal Tyler Walters.



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# Star Spring Festival is April 18



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The Fifteenth Annual Star Spring Festival is set for Saturday, April 18, and organizers say it will be a day of community celebration and attractions held at Star Baptist Church at 301 Mangum Drive.

The festival is dedicated to raising funds for St. Jude Children's Hospital in fighting childhood cancer. It has raised more than \$135,000 since its inception in 2011. The event, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., features a car show, vendor booths, entertainment and local artisans. The Car, Truck, and Bike Show will let participants show off their vehicle and enjoy the burn-out contest.

The booths feature unique crafts, food and more. Entertainment will include a live DJ, raffles, door prizes and a 50/50 drawing.

# Hogue serves as State Senate page



Special to SW Rankin News

Park Place Christian Academy (PPCA) freshman Macy Hogue served as a page at the Mississippi Senate in March for Senator Josh Harkins. She is pictured with Senate Sergeant-at-Arms Jimmy Jordan, aka "Officer Jordan" to the PPCA family.

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By Susie A. Wolfe

## From the Pearl Boardroom

The City of Pearl March 2026 business was held at two Board Meetings, on March 3 and March 17.

A public hearing was set for April 21, 2026, at 6 p.m., to consider amendments to the Zoning Ordinance.

The Board approved the annual renewal of Absolute - Netmotion Secure Access in the amount of \$5,209 to be paid to Absolute.

They authorized payment to Pickering Firm for the Concourse / Valley Drive Extension project; for the North Pearl Interceptor Rehabilitation project; MPO STBG Applications 2026; and approved to Amend Section 24-5 of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Pearl, Mississippi.

Mayor and Board of Aldermen authorized the Deputy Clerk as an authorized signatory in connection with the execution and delivery by the City of the documents necessary to secure a loan from the

Mississippi Development Bank to said City for the purpose of currently refund-



*Pearl Day events begin in earnest at 9 a.m. on Saturday, April 25, with a "Pearl's Got Talent" talent show at Pirate Auditorium. Encourage Pearl friends to participate. Share your talent.*

ing and redeeming all of the outstanding \$10,000,000 (original principal amount) City of Pearl, Mississippi Taxable Urban Renewal Revenue Refunding Bond, Series 2013 (Childre Road Urban Renewal

Refunding Project), plus all accrued and unpaid interest thereon; and for related purposes.

The Board approved the appointment of a new Pearl Public School District Board Member, Brad Hayes.

The Board considered the request by Wild Woods Properties, Inc. to rezone the property located at 5447 Highway 80 E from C-2 (General Commercial District) to R-1 (Single Family Residential District). The Board checked with CMPDD on the status, and, as it has been zoned commercial since 2009, they saw no reason to change it. The Pearl Board of Aldermen agreed.

A request by Jasmine Fenderson for a Conditional Use permit to continue operating an existing hair salon located at 100 N. Bierdeman Road, Ste B. was approved by the Board.

Minutes of the Regular Meeting, March 3, 2026, were approved, as was the Claims Docket.

## OBITUARY

### Erma Gay Jones

Erma Gay Jones, 83, of Pearl, Mississippi, passed away peacefully on Monday evening, February 9, 2026, surrounded by her family following sudden heart failure.

Born October 11, 1942, in Leake County, Mississippi, she was the daughter of James Cecil Jones and Marguerite Wright Jones.

She is survived by her children, Christy Ware (Duane), Jaye McNinch (Melissa), and Jeremy McNinch (Staci); her sisters, Hilda Jones Nichols and Judith Latricia Jones (Parker Keeton); and her grandchildren, Anthony Minardi, Patrick Minardi, Joey McNinch, James McNinch, Van McNinch, Hayes McNinch, and Jane McNinch. She is also survived by several nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her parents and her brothers, Hugh Ellis Jones and Dwight Jones.

Erma Gay devoted more than 35 years to teaching social studies in the Pearl City School System and also taught at Hanau American High School on a U.S. military base in West Germany. She earned her bachelor's degree from Mississippi University for Women and a Master of Education from Mississippi State University. Among the first educators in Mississippi to achieve National Board Certification in Social Studies, she was also named the 3rd Congressional District Teach-



Erma Gay Jones

*Special to SW Rankin News*

er of the Year. Throughout her career, she inspired generations of students and generously mentored young teachers entering the profession.

An avid reader believed to have read more than 10,000 books, she loved learning about the world and traveling widely. Through Fulbright scholarships from the U.S. Department of State, she studied cultures abroad and brought those experiences back to her classroom.

A graduate of Pearl High School's Class of 1960, where she was Salutatorian and voted "Most Likely to Succeed," she remained devoted to her community through organizations including Alpha Delta Kappa and the Pearl Kiwanis Club.

She especially loved spending time with her grandchildren and gathering with friends for lively games of bridge.

Visitation was held Thursday, February 12, and services were held Friday, February 13, in Pearl.

Those wishing to honor her memory may contribute to the Erma Gay Jones Scholarship through the Pearl Education Foundation. Donations may be mailed to Pearl Ed Foundation, c/o Community Bank, 1905 Community Bank Way, Suite 19, Flowood, MS 39232.

Arrangements were entrusted to Baldwin-Lee Funeral Home of Pearl.

Her love of learning, travel, and community will continue to live on in the many students she inspired and in the family who cherished her.

# Evergreen shrub Temple Bells shine in the spring



By Guest Columnist  
Eddie Smith, MSU  
Extension Service

Special to  
SW Rankin News

Sometimes it seems that spring is all about the flowers, but trees and shrubs play a significant role in the landscape waking up from winter.

At my house, an early bloomer I look forward to seeing each year is Temple Bells, a beautiful evergreen shrub that shines in late winter and early spring.

Temple Bells produces large, waterfall-like clusters of white, bell-shaped flowers that hang gracefully beneath the foliage. The blooms resemble delicate strings of little porcelain bells that last for weeks.

I especially like how the plant displays these flowers. Instead of

sitting upright on top of the plant, the clusters hanging down create a soft, cascading look. When the plant is covered in blooms, it almost looks like a living chandelier in the landscape.

The foliage adds another layer of beauty throughout the year.

The leaves are an ovate shape, or basically egg-shaped, with a broad base that tapers to a narrower, rounded tip. These leaves emerge in attractive shades of red to bronze before maturing into a rich, glossy dark green.

That color transition gives the shrub interest well beyond the flowering season and helps it stand out, even when it's not in bloom.

Temple Bells is a small to medium-sized evergreen shrub with a slow growth rate, which makes it easy to manage in the landscape. It works well as a



MSU Extension Office

specimen plant, in mixed shrub borders or as part of a foundation planting. It grows slowly and maintains a naturally attractive shape, rarely requiring much pruning.

Another interesting fact about Temple Bells is that it is a member of the blueberry family.

Like many of its relatives, it prefers acidic, well-drained soil and appreciates soil that is rich in organic matter. If

you already grow plants like azaleas, camellias or gardenias successfully, Temple Bells will likely feel right at home in your landscape.

One of its greatest strengths is its ability to tolerate shade. While it appreciates some morning sun, Temple Bells performs beautifully in filtered light and even does quite well in shady areas of the garden where many flowering shrubs struggle.

Temple Bells is a wonderful choice for gardeners looking to add year-round structure along with beautiful, early-season blooms. It is elegant, dependable and a real standout when very little else is flowering in the landscape.

Early spring plants like this remind me why I love Southern gardening so much.

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## Revell Outdoor Power launches “Pink Warrior” mower raffle for Hope Lodge

*Special to SW Rankin News*

Revell Outdoor Power, which operates a dedicated outdoor power equipment store in Pearl, has announced the launch of a special community fundraising initiative aimed at supporting breast cancer patients in Central Mississippi. The company is raffling a limited edition “Pink Warrior” Scag Patriot mower, with one hundred percent of the proceeds benefiting patients staying at the Gertrude C. Ford Hope Lodge in Jackson.

Hope Lodge provides free lodging for cancer patients and their caregivers who must travel away from home for treatment. The facility offers a safe, comfortable and supportive environment designed to reduce both the financial and emotional burden that often accompanies long term medical care. By covering lodging costs, Hope Lodge allows patients to focus fully on treatment and recovery rather than expenses.

According to Revell Outdoor Power owner Joe Rooks, the fundraiser is deeply personal for the company.

“Our Revell family has been impacted by breast cancer,” Rooks said. “My wife Lisa is a breast cancer survivor, as well as our accounts payable accountant, Christy Daughtry. My two sisters, Elizabeth Barber and Frances Patterson, are also breast cancer survivors. Statistically, one in seven women will get breast cancer, and that reality is why all of us at Revell are passionate about raising funds for the Gertrude C. Ford Hope Lodge in Jackson to support patients



*Special to SW Rankin News*

actively fighting this battle.”

The mower featured in the raffle is part of Scag Power Equipment’s special edition “Pink Warrior” lineup, created to raise awareness and show support for the ongoing fight against breast cancer. The Scag Patriot is a premium residential zero turn mower recognized for its durability, performance, and operator comfort — now finished in a bold pink design symbolizing strength, courage and resilience.

Revell Outdoor Power is raffling the mower as part

of its “Power with a Purpose” campaign, an initiative that blends high performance outdoor power equipment with meaningful community outreach. The campaign reflects the company’s commitment to using its platform, products and customer base to make a tangible impact beyond the business itself.

Raffle tickets are available both in store and online. Tickets cost twenty five dollars for one entry or one hundred dollars for five entries. All proceeds will be donated directly to Hope Lodge in Jackson. The raffle drawing is scheduled to take place on July 31.

In addition to its outdoor power equipment store in Pearl, the company also serves customers through multiple Revell Ace Hardware locations across the state, including Richland and Florence, Clinton, Brandon, Byram, Madison, Northeast Jackson and the Reservoir. Company leaders encourage customers across all locations to participate, share the fundraiser with friends and family, and help extend its reach throughout the community.

“This is about turning horsepower into hope,” Rooks said. “Every ticket sold represents real support for someone going through one of the hardest moments of their life.”

Community members interested in supporting the cause can purchase raffle tickets at any Revell Outdoor Power or Revell Ace Hardware location, or online via the company’s official raffle form. Additional information about the fundraiser is available in store and through Revell Outdoor Power’s customer service channels.

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## PHS students named to Lions All-State



Special to SW Rankin News

Students who have been selected to represent Pearl High School in the 2025–2026 Mississippi Lions All-State Band this summer, include (l to r) Sevin Crump, trombone; Maverick Miller, French horn; Kaitlyn Grace Bailey, dancer; Austin Harrell, euphonium; and Wilmer Gomez, trombone. They will be performing alongside the top student musicians from across the state this summer.

## PJH band students named to MS ASBDA Middle School All-State Band



Special to SW Rankin News

Four Pearl Junior High band students have earned a spot in the Mississippi ASBDA Middle School All-State Band: Emma Odom, flute; Addie Dennis, clarinet; Addison Lyons, euphonium; and Cooper Batson, French horn. This summer, these students will attend a clinic at Pearl River Community College, where they will work alongside top musicians from across the state and prepare a full concert.

## PJH TSA recognized at state competition



Special to SW Rankin News

The Pearl Junior High TSA group placed in four categories at the State Competition recently held in Jackson.

Special to SW Rankin News

Pearl Junior High School Technology Student Association (TSA) students were recognized in March for achievements at the state competition.

The winners in Digital Photography were Jack Flynn in second place, and Aiden Smith in third place. In the Off The Grid category, NiQueax Harrigill, Ainsley Scutch, Allyson Solis-Gonzalez and Isobel Little won first place. In Leadership Strategies, Tayla Henderson, Zee Rainer and Aiden Smith win

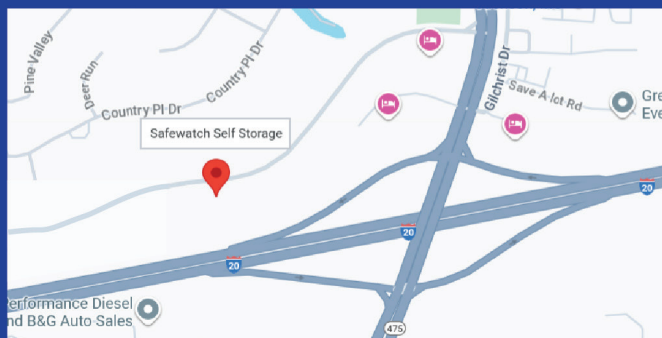
third place.

Honorable Mentions in various categories included: Claire Cutcliff and Zayla Patel for Medical Technology; Stephen Daniels and Ryleigh Watson for Children's Stories; Abigail Slawson and Tayla Henderson for Children's Stories; and Zayla Patel for Marketing.

"We are so proud of these students ... for their achievements and the effort they put into this competition. Great job representing Pearl Junior High!" said sponsor Sunny Oberto.

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## Long named Officer of the Month



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The Pearl Chamber of Commerce presented Officer Sam Long with a framed certificate and gifts in March. Long is pictured with Mayor Jake Windham and the Pearl Police Department.

Special to SW Rankin News

Officer Sam Long was named the March Pearl Police Department (PPD) Officer of the Month. Long graduated from Pearl High School in 2021 and from the Mississippi Law Enforcement Officers Training Academy in 2024. He is formerly a firefighter at the Reservoir Fire Department for two years.

According to Pearl Police Chief Nick McLendon, "Officer Long exemplifies what it truly means to go above and beyond the call of duty. Recently, while off-duty, Officer Long noticed trash scattered along one of Pearl's major thoroughfares. Without hesitation, he stopped his marked patrol

unit, stepped out, and picked up the litter himself. Unbeknownst to him, a citizen witnessed the act, recorded it, and later shared it on social media."

According to the Chief, this simple moment reflects a mindset that deserves daily recognition — a mindset rooted not in what one can get out of a situation, but in what one can give.

He said, "Even as a rookie officer, Sam has consistently demonstrated compassion, humility, and a deep sense of responsibility that far exceeds his years of experience."

"I am incredibly proud of the officer he is becoming and look forward to watching his bright future unfold. How you serve tells me who you serve."

## Mclaurin High names January, February Students of the Month



Photos special to SW Rankin News

The January Mclaurin High School Students of the Month pictured (l to r) front row, are: Mason Patton, Kali Meloling, Jaylee Lampkin, Aubrey Pettigrew, Natleigh Cole and Joseph Rouson; and back row: Phillip Dunn with Farm Bureau, Beanney Aguilar Garcia, Wesley Erven, Brody Berry and Principal Russell Granberry.



The February Mclaurin High School Students of the Month pictured (l to r) front row, are: MyKayla Caston, Clayton Newton, Robert Dylan King, Ellayssa Lopez, Ti'Andria McLin and Christian Hughes; middle row: Amaya Resendiz Barrera and Josie St. Germain, Nevaeh Jenkins and Principal Russell Granberry; and back row: Phillip Dunn with Farm Bureau, Tylon Williams, Clayton Neely and Isaac Davidson.

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