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Park Place now in MAIS Class 4A - Page 14

Hinds CC opens new \$64 million Health Sciences Complex on Rankin Campus

Special to The Pearl News

Hinds Community College opened its new state-of-the-art Health Sciences Complex (HSC) on the Rankin Campus on the first day of classes, August 10, 2026.

The new 160,000-square-foot HSC consolidates the college's Nursing and Allied Health programs - formerly spread across multiple campuses - into a single flagship hub equipped with high-fidelity simulation labs, mock hospital rooms and modern clinical instructional spaces.

College administrators anticipate the new facility will serve as a major driver for regional health education and institutional growth. Compared to fall of 2025, Hinds enrollment on the Rankin Campus is up five percent, from 1,286 to 1,354 students. The expansion of health sciences training capacity will allow the school to welcome an additional 480 students over the next three years to further support the region's healthcare workforce needs. Some of those students will likely live in a residence hall currently under construction on the Pearl campus, The Commons, slated to open next fall.



Pictured is Andrew Gunn, Dean of Student Services on the Rankin Campus, in the new Health Sciences Complex.

"We're really excited about what this building has brought to this campus, how it's growing this campus," Andrew Gunn, Dean of Student Services on the Rankin Campus, said about the HSC. "We're really excited about what this is going to do for our enrollment in the future. This is creating a lot of buzz."

For several weeks, the college moved faculty, staff, furniture, hospital



Photos special to The Pearl News

Hinds Community College Health Science students (l to r) Ty Boone of Georgetown, Jennifer Smith of Utica, Sadie Thompson of Lake, Katie Jones of Crystal Springs, Cash Pegues of Senatobia and Camryn Morris of Florence pose for a photo in the new state-of-the-art Physical Therapy Assistant lab on the first day of school, August 10, 2026.



The Hinds Community College "H" was installed on the school's new Health Sciences Complex using a crane, just in time for the start of classes on August 10.

beds and equipment into the modern 160,000-square-foot building across

from the Muse Center. Local, state and federal resources funded the \$64 million project.

With the move complete, the long-term Nursing and Allied Health Center in Jackson is now closed.

Back on the Rankin Campus, students dressed in various colored scrubs were greeted with a complimentary opening-day breakfast before heading to inaugural lectures and laboratory sessions.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the HSC is set for October 7.

For more information, visit www.hindscc.edu or call 1-800-HindsCC.

Newman, Pearl Chamber host Candidates' Forum

Special to The Pearl News

The Pearl Chamber and State Representative Gene Newman recently hosted a Judicial Candidates' Forum for the six candidates running for Chancery Judge and for Circuit Judge at the Pearl Community Center.

The candidates forum had a large crowd, with the candidates all sharing their experience, values and reasons for running for office. Mississippi Supreme Court Justice Kenny Griffis moderated the Forum for those wishing to replace retiring Chancellor John McLaurin and retiring Circuit Court Judge Brad Mills. It was also broadcast on Pearl Municipal Broadcasting.

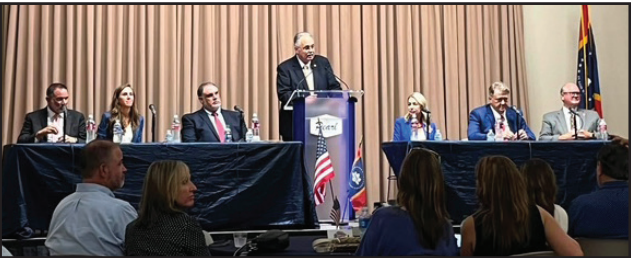
Candidates for Chancery Court Judge are Bo Agnew, Keri Carroll and Michael Wolf. Circuit Court candidates who will cover Rankin and Madison Counties include Sarah Moulder Butler, Scott Gilbert and Carter Smith.

The election will be held on November 3, 2026.



Photos special to The Pearl News

Pictured (l to r) are: Rep. Gene Newman and Judge Kenny Griffis.



A large crowd attended the August 11 Judicial Candidates' Forum for two offices where current judges are retiring. The election will be held in November.

RANKIN COUNTY UNDER A BURN BAN UNTIL SEPTEMBER 21

The Rankin County Board of Supervisors, in conjunction with the Mississippi Forestry Commission, instituted a Burn Ban for outdoor activities for thirty days until September 2, unless terminated sooner by the Board. At press time, the ban was still in effect. The decision follows a period of limited rainfall, low humidity, and high winds, creating conditions that increase the risk of wildfire and the potential for fires to spread rapidly. The ban includes agricultural land clearing. Residents and businesses are urged to comply to the burn ban to help protect lives, property and natural resources throughout Rankin County.

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Vol. 11, No. 09 | September 2026

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Richland Zone’s leadership team for 2026-2027

As the state’s second largest school district, the Rankin County School District (RCSD) has approximately nineteen thousand students in twenty-eight schools. For the 2026-27 school year, the Richland Zone schools are currently educating approximately 1,800 students in three schools: Richland Elementary, Richland Upper Elementary and Richland High School. Pictured are the leadership teams for this school year.









The Richland Elementary team includes Principal Dr. Yarby Anderson (left) and Assistant Principal Jelisa Johnson (right).

Lindsay Starbuck is the Richland Upper Elementary Principal and Madalyn Robinson is the Assistant Principal.









Richland High School’s team is Principal Dr. Marcus Stewart and Assistant Principals Dr. Heather Bryan, Dustin Merchant and Jimmy Tullos.

Photos special to The Richland News

Vernon Neely Swinging Bridge upgraded

Special to The Richland News

The Vernon Neely Swinging Bridge at Eastside Park has officially reopened this summer following repairs and upgrades. The park is highly rated by visitors for its clean facilities and versatile layouts.

The park is behind Richland Upper Elementary, and the area with The Rec Center and Community Center features multiple baseball and softball fields, serving as home to local leagues like the Ranger League softball program. It also has tennis courts, a batting cage and a basketball court. The playground includes a large play area equipped with slides, swings, musical chimes and a wooden suspension bridge.

There is also a paved walking track/trail that loops through the park, which is also suitable for bicycles. Picnic areas are equipped with a covered pavilion featuring electrical outlets, multiple picnic tables and charcoal grills. Public restrooms are available on-site, and the park is fully wheelchair accessible. Dogs are also welcome. Hours are 6:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.



Special to The Richland News

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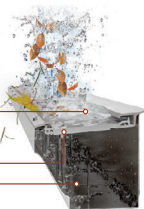
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FHS student travels to Hawaii with MS Lions All-State Band - Page 16

THE FLORENCE NEWS

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4th Annual Pet Parade set for September 26

Special to The Florence News

The Florentine Evening Club's Fourth Annual Pet Parade and Cow Paddy Plop will be held September 26, from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. on Earl Clark Drive in Florence.

Pet Parade registration is ten dollars and begins at 9 a.m. The parade starts at 10 a.m. There will be prizes for the biggest dog and smartest dog, among others.

Other activities include Blessing of the Pets, local vendor booths, food trucks, a puppy playground, K-9 handler demonstration, photo booth, dessert snow cone trucks, raffles, animal rescue groups, pup cups and music.

There will also be the annual Cow Patty Plop Contest hosted by Our Neck of the Woods 4H Club.



Special to The Florence News

RANKIN COUNTY UNDER A BURN BAN UNTIL SEPTEMBER 21

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Get Fit Florence 5K runs for six years

Special to The Florence News

The 2026 Get Fit Florence 5K & Fun raised \$6,361.42, according to race organizer Thomas Tubby with Performance Therapy Florence. Tubby said that the money is split between Florence High School Medical Science Academy, McLaurin High School Health Science Academy, and Discovery Christian

School athletics. Two hundred racers participated in the August 18, Sixth Annual Get Fit Florence 5K & Fun Run event. "What a blessing it is to have people and businesses in this community that are willing to invest in our local schools and step up each year to make this event a success," said Tubby. "I greatly appreciate each one!" Kelsey Williams, a Florence Middle School assistant

principal who ran the race, said, "My favorite 5K! Thomas Tubby and the awesome Performance Therapy Florence team did an amazing job again this year putting on the 2026 Get Fit Florence 5K & Fun Run supporting the Florence High School Medical Science Program (and others). This race started the year I came to Florence, and I've gotten to participate in all six! Can't wait for next year!"



Issac Santitto was the overall 5k male run winner.



Performance Therapy staff came from Florence, Fondren, Brandon, Raymond, Canton and Pelahatchie to help facilitate the race. Photos special to The Florence News



Taylor Benoit was the overall 5k female run winner.



Caleb Hammons was the Masters division 5k run male winner.



Sandi Peterson was the Masters division 5k run female winner.



Rusty Haydel was the Overall 5k male walker winner.



Molly Staley was the Overall 5k female walker winner.



WD Burrell was the Masters 5k male walker winner.



Elizabeth Jennings was the Masters 5k female walker winner.

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PirateFest 2026 celebrates all PHS graduates, Class of 1976’s 50th anniversary

PirateFest 2026 for Pearl High School (PHS) alumni took place on Saturday, August 22, from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. at the Clyde Muse Center in Pearl. It was open to all PHS graduates but was an extra special celebration for the Class of 1976, who celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of their graduation.



PHS Class of 1976 graduates pose by the 1976 Pirate Ship. Pictured (l to r) are: Judy Bevil Temple, Bama Stevens Strong, Kim Cranford, Cindy Cannon Poole Dyess, Cliff Stafford, Theresa Matthews Thomas, and Van Dyess.



A group photo of the Class of 1976, who celebrated their fiftieth anniversary.



The reunion included an area to pay tribute to those who have passed.



Photos special to SW Rankin News

Former students say it is always fun to see former teachers at the reunion. Pictured are Kyle Carson and Cindy Dyess.

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**RFD promotes
Villarreal to Lieut.**



Special to SW Rankin News
The Richland Fire Department recently promoted Sophie Villarreal to Lieutenant. Her father, Pete Villarreal, pinned her at the City of Richland Mayor and Board of Aldermen meeting on August 4, 2026.

Florence FFA receives National Chapter Award

Special to the SW Rankin News

The Florence Future Farmers of America (FFA) received a National Chapter Award from the National FFA Organization. This award is based on the quality of the activities conducted and overall success of the Florence program.

Derek Huffman, Florence High School ANR Instructor/FFA Advisor, said the level of student involvement and commitment to the Florence program is essentially what resulted in being selected as a recipient of this award. The students will be recognized for this award at the National FFA Convention on stage in Indianapolis, Indiana, this October.

“We were assessed based on the National Quality Chapter Standards that measures the impact our program has in emphasizing the divisions of growing leaders, strengthening agriculture and building communities,” said Huffman.

According to Huffman, this is meant to recognize the chapter as a whole due to the impact that every student has in the program. The Florence FFA officer team met this past summer to plan out the current school year Program of Activities (FFA calendar). The remainder of the students will vote on these activities and compile other ideas to make each event happen, allowing every member an equal opportunity to have a "stake" in the program.



Special to SW Rankin News

The FHS FFA Officer team pictured (l to r) are: Noah Fitzgerald, Conner Abernathy, Dakota Redd, Adylyn Tillman, Langston Hollis, Ryleigh Shelton, Anna Grace Priest, Presley Scruggs and Landry Varner.





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Old Truths for Today

J.T. Morgan



“Faith Only?”

This “faith only” system is the popular doctrine in pulpits of the modern pastor and evangelist. There might be some excuse for proclaiming this doctrine were it not for examples of the divine writer about faith. We might fail to understand a definition that is abstract, but how can we fail to grasp the example God has given us in scripture? The divine teacher has given us a wonderful picture of this topic. First, He defines the subject. Then follows illustration after illustration.

One such illustration is, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days” (**Heb.11:30**). In **Joshua 6:2** it states, “And the Lord said to Joshua: ‘See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor.’” God says to Joshua to march around the city with his men of war once around and then for the next six days. God’s order was: the armed men went before then the priests with the trumpets followed by the priests carrying the ark of the covenant, then the host of Israel. This was to be done for 6 days and then the 7th day they were to march around the city seven times. “That day only they marched around seven times.” (**V.15**). As God had directed when Joshua told the people to “Shout!” and the priest blew their horns and the people shouted and the walls fell down flat. (**Joshua 6:20**). When did the walls of Jericho fall down? When? When Joshua obediently and trustingly did just what God said. Is it possible that one could misunderstand this example? Hebrews chapter 11 gives a number of such illustrations.

“What does it profit, my brethren, though a man says he has faith, and does not have works? Can faith save him?” (**Jas.2:14**). James, by inspiration, gives the answer in a parable (**2:15-16**), then asked this: “Even so faith, if it does not have works, is dead, being alone” (**V.17**). “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (**V.24**). “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (**V.26**).

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Richland Senior Travelers enjoyed a day in Natchez



By Guest Columnist
Amy Matthews

Richland Senior Travelers enjoyed “A Day in Historic Natchez” this month. Our day trip, planned by Lance Clay of Trek Travel, began early in the morning, which made for a nice, peaceful ride, enjoying the beautiful landscape of our home state, as we made our way to Natchez.

Our first stop was Visit Natchez at The Depot. This sweet welcome center overlooking the mighty Mississippi River plays a 30-minute movie covering the story of Natchez from the past to present. From the mounds of the Natchez people who first inhabited the area to the city we see today, Natchez has survived centuries of upheaval and change to be an example of resilience and progress.

Our next stop took us to the steps of Dunleith, one of Natchez’s beautiful historic homes, built in 1856. Our gracious guide led us through the house, sharing its long, colorful history.

Though the house is full of beautiful



Photos special to SW Rankin News

furnishings, the most precious memory was a simple window, engraved with the name “Agnes.” Agnes, whose family occupied Dunleith for five generations, used her engagement ring to carve her name into the window on her wedding day, a tradition that has been repeated by the many brides married on the grounds of Dunleith.

Our bus whisked us to downtown Natchez. We visited the majestic St. Mary’s Basilica, where the grandeur of the building, statues, windows and furnishings left us speechless. It’s amazing that our humble state has such a jewel. We then arrived for lunch at Frankie’s on Main, which occupies the original site of the Brit-

ton and Koontz Bank. You can even take your picture by the bank vault! We enjoyed an amazing five-course meal, relaxing in the decadent surroundings, enjoying the cool before our next stop.

We ended our day in Natchez with some shopping downtown. Our determined seniors braved a 97-degree day to hit up the shops sprinkled down Franklin Street. Olive oil, flowers, antiques and bath soaps all made their way onto the bus with their triumphant (and very sweaty!) owners. Ha ha!

Our last stop of the day was the First Presbyterian Church of Port Gibson. We took pictures of “The Hand pointing to Heaven,” the ten-foot, four-inch gold hand positioned atop the church steeple.

Inside, a precious parishioner gave us a talk about the church’s history as we sat on the hoghair-stuffed-cushioned pews, while a slight breeze blew through the beautiful stained-glass windows.

We relaxed and recovered from the heat on our way home, amazed at the treasures that exist in our own backyard. Thank you, Natchez, for a sweet day!



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From the Florence Boardroom - Animal Control Ordinance updated

SW Rankin News



The City of Florence Board of Aldermen met in their regularly scheduled meeting set for the first Tuesday, August 4, 2026, at City Hall. There was also a Special Meeting on August 10. Present were Mayor Trey Gunn and Aldermen John Banks, Brian Grantham, Kyle Martin and Brent Sistrunk. Alderman Mason Herrin was absent.

Mayor Gunn called the meeting to order and announced a quorum. Alderman Banks gave the invocation. Mayor Gunn presented a proclamation to seven- and eight-year-old Gators baseball team for winning the state championship title.

All of the Board members present approved an amendment to the Animal Control Ordinance. It stated that animals deemed vicious would need to be moved outside the City limits.

Upon recommendation from department heads, motions were made to send Investigator Tanner McCue to a Mobile Device Forensics class August



The City of Florence Mayor and Board of Aldermen pictured (l to r) are: Alderman Brent Sistrunk, Alderman Kyle Martin, Alderman/Mayor Pro Tem Brian Grantham, Mayor Trey Gunn, Alderman John Banks and Alderman Mason Herrin.

24-25 in Biloxi; to approve payment of \$9,750 payable to Southern Air Solutions, LLC for emergency repair to install a new 4-ton A/C unit at the public works facility; to approve signage for Southern Oil Company located at 401 East Main Street Florence, as submitted by Champman Canopy, Inc.; to approve the lowest and best quote of Lane Line, LLC for \$27,340 to stripe West Main Street; to promote economic development in the city; and to place an ad in Rankin County News saluting Florence High School football team in the amount of \$239.

Also, the Board directed Mayor Gunn

to sign and submit the MDA/Lighting Grant application.

Upon recommendation of Mayor Gunn, the Board approved the quote of R&W Painting Company for \$4,800 to paint the boardroom.

A Motion was passed to modify water/sewer billing and payment adjustments as needed.

After approving the July 21 minutes and consent agenda, the Board went into executive session to approve the following personnel matters: involving the position of Lieutenant and School Resource Officers, in the Street Department involving personnel mat-

ter and to discuss pending litigation and leasing of lands - to rescind prior board action taken July 21, 2026, involving street employee Tyler Hayes; to rescind prior board action taken July 21, 2026, involving street employee Patrick James; to accept the resignation of Cpl. Daniel McCue from his full-time position as a School Resource Officer, effective August 7, 2026; and to approve moving Cpl. AJ Marbury from her full-time patrolman position to full-time school resource officer position at her current hourly rate of pay plus SRO stipend.

In the Special Called Meeting of the Mayor and Board on August 10, present were Mayor Gunn, and Alderman Banks, Grantham, Martin and Sistrunk. Alderman Herrin was absent.

Mayor Gunn called the Meeting to order and announced a quorum.

The group went into an executive session to approve hiring in the Public Works Department. Public Works Operator Billy Russell recommended hiring Marcil Wilson and Samuel Miller as Technicians in Training for the Public Works Department at \$17 per hour and move Ethan Peden to Lead Technician at his current rate of pay. The hirings and transfer were approved.

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Mansell new chairman of the MSGOP United Republican Fund

Special to SW Rankin News

The Mississippi Republican Party is pleased to announce the selection of State Rep. Clay Mansell as the new chairman of the MSGOP's United Republican Fund ("URF").

Mansell succeeds Phil Buffington, who helped strengthen the organization's efforts to support the Mississippi Republican Party and its advancement of conservative causes across the state.

Mansell and Buffington recently spoke together at a meeting of the Lee County Republican Club in Tupelo. The appearance served as an informal passing of the gavel as they discussed the future of URF and plans to expand its grassroots network throughout Mississippi.

"Phil and I enjoyed the opportunity to talk about the United Republican Fund and our plans to grow URF's grassroots network across Mississippi," Mansell said. "We appreciate Lee County Republican Club President Rita Buse for the invitation and her hospitality. We are excited about what is ahead and look forward to getting more Republicans involved in every corner of our state."

The United Republican Fund serves as the sustaining membership and small dollar fundraising arm of the Mississippi Republican Party, helping to provide a continuing stream of resources necessary for MSGOP operations, education, recruitment, and training.

Mississippi Republican Party Chairman Mike Hurst praised Mansell's selection and expressed confidence in the future of the organization.

"Clay Mansell is a proven conservative leader, successful businessman and dedicated public servant who understands the importance of building strong organizations from the ground up," Hurst said. "His passion for grassroots engagement and his commitment to growing the Republican Party will serve URF well. I look forward to working with him as we continue expanding our reach and strengthening the Republican Party in every corner of Mississippi."

"It has been an honor to serve as chairman of the United Republican Fund, and I am excited to see Clay take the organization to the next level," Buffington said. "Clay brings energy, vision and a genuine desire

to grow our party. I have no doubt he will build upon the foundation we have established and help create even greater opportunities for Republicans across Mississippi."

As URF Chairman, Mansell said one of his primary goals will be expanding the organization's volunteer network and increasing its presence throughout the state.



Special to SW Rankin News

From left to right: Clay Mansell, new URF Chairman; Rita Buse, Lee County GOP Chairwoman; Phil Buffington, former URF Chairman.

"Serving as Chairman of the United Republican Fund is both an honor and a privilege," Mansell said. "The Republican Party has achieved tremendous success in Mississippi, but there is still important work ahead. I want to see URF continue to grow its membership, strengthen its grassroots efforts and engage more Mississippians than ever before."

Mansell also announced plans to establish a network of county directors across Mississippi to expand the organization's footprint at the local level.

"Today, URF has four board members representing Mississippi's four congressional districts, and that structure has served the organization well," Mansell said. "My goal is to build on that success by recruiting a director in each of Mississippi's 82 counties. These local leaders will help us grow our membership, strengthen volunteer engagement and ensure we have a presence in every community across our state."

Individuals interested in serving as a county director for the United Republican Fund are encouraged to contact Mansell at ClayMansell@Mansell-Media.net.



PEARL PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT CHILD FIND PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN

The Pearl Public School District is participating in the statewide effort to identify, locate, and evaluate children birth through the age of twenty-one who have a disability. The Child Find Coordinator of Pearl Public School District implements this process. Family members, physicians, educators, or other individuals with knowledge of the child may make referrals of in-school or out of school children. Representatives of various agencies such as the Health Department, Mental Health, Head Start, and other centers may also refer children. Early identification of children in need of special educational services is most important.

Disability categories include the following: autism, developmental delay, emotional disability, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment, and other health impairment, multiple disability, specific learning disability, traumatic brain injury and visual impairment. Each school district has special education programs that provide services to students who have been determined to have one or more of these disabilities. Information gathered from contacts with parents and agencies helps school districts determine present and future program needs to that free appropriate public education can be provided to all children with disabilities.

If anyone needs to refer a child or just wants information, the Child Find Coordinator for Pearl Public School District is Ashley Chism. She may be reached by calling 601-932-7965 or by writing to her at P.O. Box 5750, Pearl, MS 39288.



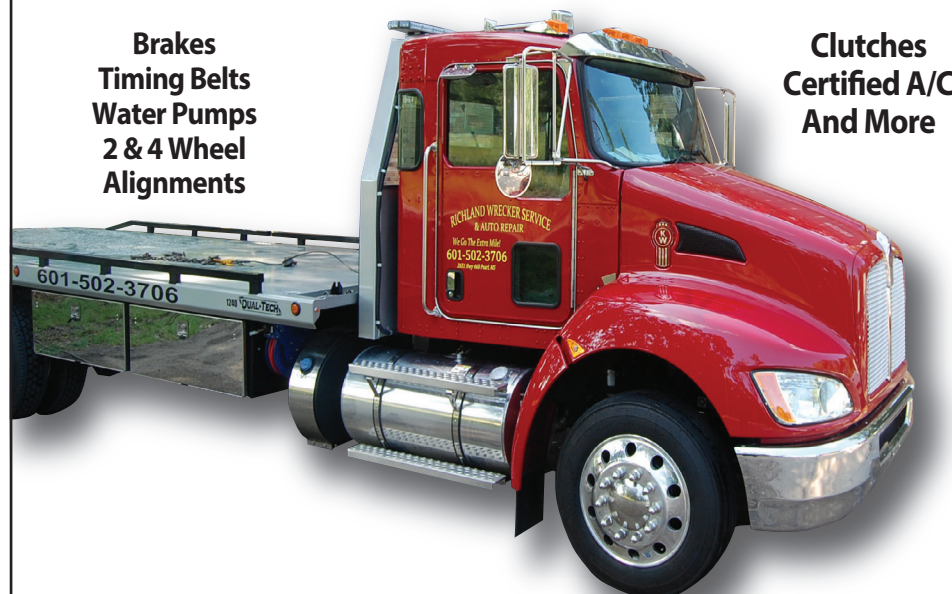
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Florence Middle names August Eagles of the Month



Florence Middle School (FMS) recently named its Students of the Month for August. Pictured (l to r) are: FMS Principal Brock Sistrunk, sponsor Tanner Wilson of Farm Bureau Insurance, Sixth Grade Student of the Month Mykell Fisher, Seventh Grade Student of the Month Sage Hoblyn, Eighth Grade Student of the Month Sawyer Blackwell and FMS Assistant Principal Dr. Kelsey Williams.



Photos special to SW Rankin News

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

A campaign poster for Michael Wolf, a candidate for Rankin County Chancery Court Judge. The poster has a red background with a white border. At the top, the date "November 3, 2026" is written in white. Below it, the word "ELECT" is written in white, flanked by horizontal lines. The name "MICHAEL" is written in large, bold, white capital letters. Below "MICHAEL", the word "WOLF" is written in large, bold, white capital letters, with a stylized white wolf head replacing the letter "O". Below "WOLF", a dark blue banner with white stars at each end contains the text "RANKIN COUNTY CHANCERY COURT" in white capital letters. Below the banner, the word "JUDGE" is written in large, bold, white capital letters. At the bottom, there are three blue squares, each containing a white checkmark, followed by the words "Qualified", "Committed", and "Community Minded" in white. At the very bottom, the text "Paid for By the Committee to Elect Michael Wolf and Approved By the Candidate" is written in white.

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Lantanas celebrate summer in gardens



By Guest Columnist Eddie Smith, MSU Extension Service

Special to
SW Rankin News

Since it's much too late to plant for this summer's landscape, gardeners can take notes on what they see elsewhere and make plans for their own garden next year.

Walking through the trial garden at the Mississippi State University Truck Crops Branch Experiment Station in Crystal Springs, I noticed that few plants celebrate summer quite like lantana.

The brilliant blooms of these heat-loving plants light up the landscape. Three varieties from the Luscious Lantana series captured my attention with their dazzling colors and nonstop flowering. They might make good additions to the sunny areas of your landscape next spring.

The first variety I spotted was Luscious Vanilla Breeze lantana.

This selection brings a soft, graceful elegance to the garden with rounded clusters of delicate, creamy white flowers that are gently brushed with buttery yellow at their centers. Each

tiny floret forms part of a larger bloom head, creating a full, lace-like cluster that glows in the sunlight.

As new flowers open, the subtle yellow highlights gradually fade to creamy white, giving each flower cluster a beautiful depth and dimension. Set against rich green foliage, the blooms create a refreshing, cooling effect that brightens borders, containers and mixed landscape beds.



Luscious Citrus Blend II radiates the warmth of summer. Once established, lantanas tolerate intense heat and periods of drought.

Luscious Citrus Blend II radiates the warmth of summer and is the next lantana I noticed.

The large flower clusters resemble miniature sunsets, combining brilliant shades of fiery red, glowing orange, golden yellow and soft peach. Individual florets open in different colors and gradually change as they



Photos by MSU Extension/Eddie Smith

Lantanas such as this Luscious Vanilla Breeze thrive in full sun and perform best in well-drained soil.

mature, so every bloom head is a living mosaic of warm hues.

The colorful clusters shimmer in the sunshine, creating a cheerful display that you notice from across the garden. The rich blend of citrus colors gives the impression that several different lantanas are blooming together on one plant.

For gardeners who appreciate soft yet strong colors, consider Luscious Pinkberry Blend lantana.

This variety has dense flower clusters in a beautiful blend of rosy pink, yellow and cream tones on dark foliage. Newly opened florets display bright yellow centers, and each bloom cluster has remarkable texture

and color variation.

As the plant produces fresh blooms throughout the season, it develops into a colorful mound covered with blossoms that sparkle in the summer sun.

Lantanas thrive in full sun and perform best in well-drained soil. Once established, they tolerate intense heat and periods of drought while continuing to bloom with very little maintenance. Even during the hottest weeks, the plants remain covered in flower clusters that attract butterflies, bees and other pollinators from morning until evening.

After seeing these beautiful lantanas flourish in the trial garden, I can confidently recommend them for almost any sunny landscape.

Whether you prefer the refined elegance of Vanilla Breeze, the bold tropical colors of Citrus Blend II or the rich, berry-inspired blooms of Pinkberry Blend, each variety offers months of nonstop color, exceptional heat tolerance and reliable garden performance.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. Eddie Smith is a gardening specialist with the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

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A Little Brown Light: What's Eating You?



Special to SW Rankin News

By Becky Brown

Came home to a blocked driveway one Sunday night after praise band practice. A two-pronged limb broke and fell. Landed in a standing position looking just like a huge wishbone. A precision pull with the tractor cleared the path. A chain saw did the rest. We stacked the wood and went to bed.

Morning light revealed the weakness inside the limb was caused by the work of a huge colony of those big black ants. After their initial concussion from the fall and the chainsaw massacre of their tunnel paradise, they spent the day moving all their eggs to safety. I got a folding chair and sat there and watched them. Wonder if they realized that their own tunnels made their own house fall? Be careful what your chew might do.

The picture here shows a small cross in the end of one piece of the wood. The next day, I was thanking the Master Tree Feller for sparing us as we all drove in at separate times and were protected from the moment when the ant house came tumbling down. Great was the fall of it.

Carpenter ants did this damage. Tree looked fine on the outside. Looking good on the outside can be deceiving...holey hearts on the inside will bring you crashing to the ground.

Pearl Seniors celebrate a “wedding in Dubai”



Special to SW Rankin News

Special to SW Rankin News

At a special Armchair Travel gathering of the Pearl Senior Adult program, the travelers with the most “Frequent Flyer Miles” and stamps in their “passports” were treated to a special “wedding in Dubai.” The ladies decorated their hands in henna tattoos and got dressed in pashmina shawls, while the lone gentleman in attendance wore an Arab headpiece. Their “wedding” came complete with dancing, the cutting of a wedding cake with swords, camel races and souvenir shopping.

Gardener named Pearl’s Employee of the Month



Special to SW Rankin News

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Larry Gardener was selected as the City of Pearl Employee of the Month. Gardner is a heavy machine operator at the city landfill, where he has worked for over four years. Public Works Director Shane Burrell thanked him for his dedication to the job, and Mayor Windham presented him with a certificate of appreciation. Kathy Deer, director at the Pearl Chamber of Commerce, awarded him with a \$100 Sam's Club gift card, \$20 in Frisco Deli gift certificates and a backpack cooler from Bass Pro Shops. The Pearl Municipal Federal Credit Union donated a \$25 Visa gift card, and Revell Ace Hardware-Pearl donated a stainless steel tumbler.

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From the Pearl Boardroom - City denies two new business permits

SW Rankin News

At the August Board Meetings, Aldermen present were: David Stovall, Alderman-at-Large; Sammy Williams, Alderman Ward One; Keith Dennis, Alderman Ward Two; Gary Broadwater, Alderman Ward Three; Casey Foy, Alderman Ward Four; Dwight Knight, Alderman Ward Five; and Kyle Foster, Alderman Ward Six.

Public hearings at the August 18 Board Meeting were held and resulted in the following:

1. The Board approved a Comprehensive Plan, including zoning plans for the future. The City Planner worked with CMPDD to update the Land Use Plan from 2019.
2. The Board denied the request by Austin Minton of Country Boy Dispensary for a conditional use permit to allow him to operate a medical cannabis dispensary at 5311 Highway 80. Since there are currently six dispensaries in Pearl, the City objected because of oversaturation of certain types of businesses.
3. The Board denied a request as recommended by the City Planner, a requirement for Manjinder Singh for a conditional use permit to allow him to develop a convenience store with automobile and commercial truck fueling facilities on the Parcel on Highway 475. The Board again cited oversaturation with a number of new businesses being built recently.
4. The Board approved the preliminary plat for The Plains of Pearl Subdivision, located at the former Rankin Cablevision site. There will be variances for lots 1, 5, 33, 34, 57, 58, 64-68 to use the setbacks as outlined in the zoning ordinance for R-3 Patio Homes and not be required to provide the 30-foot buffer from the current R-1 zoned property.

At the August 4 Board Meeting, Alderman Dennis opened the meeting with prayer, and City Clerk Kelly Scouten led the Pledge of Allegiance. After the approval of the Consent Agenda, the meeting minutes, claims docket, and authorization to travel were approved.

A budgeted \$6,600 donation to the Pearl Community Theatre was approved, to advertise and bring into favorable notice the opportunities, possibilities and resources of the municipality.

The recommendation by the Selection Committee regarding proposals for the Economic Development Administration Grant 2026 approved Heflin Engineering.

The Board approved payment to Pickering Firm for the Highway 80 Raised Median Project total-



Photo by Susie A. Wolfe

Pictured (l to r) are: Representative Gene Newman, David Stovall, Sammy Williams, Casey Foy, Gary Broadwater, Mayor Jake Windham, Dwight Knight, Keith Dennis and Senator Dean Kirby.

ing \$9,510; to Right of Way Technologies, Inc. for the Pine Park right-of-way acquisition appraisals totaling \$24,500; to Neel Schaffer for the Highway 80 Lighting Phase II Project totaling \$30,915; to Pickering Firm for the Concourse Drive Project totaling \$30,202.503; and to Wildstone Construction for \$77,874.44 for estimate #1 for the Riverwind Sidewalk Project Phase One.

The Board approved a budget amendment accepting \$160,000 in grant from the Task Force Grant and approving a matching increase for Police Capital Outlay Vehicles for vehicle purchases.

Other approvals included the purchase of a 2026 Dodge Durango from Mandal Chrysler Jeep Dodge for \$45,435.00; of a 2026 Chevrolet Tahoe PPV 2wd from Rogers-Dabbs for \$53,870.17 for the Police Department (state contract); and the purchase of two 2026 Nissan Frontier S Crew Cab 4WD from Cannon Motors of Mississippi for \$34,712.00 each (state contract).

Also approved were the purchase of chlorine for four wells from Harcros Chemicals Inc in the amount of \$8,395; and the demo and installation of flooring at Fire Station #2 by Byrd and Cook in the amount of \$11,165.

Public hearings were set for September 15, 2026, at 6 p.m. to address unkempt property, including property owned by Stonetown Highlands MS, LLC. and located at 3127 Greenfield Road, Lot 389 Pearl; property owned by Integra Associates, LLC. and located at Parcel#E08P-37-10 Pearl, and property owned by First American National Bank and located at 231 South Pearson Road, Pearl. The public hearing will address whether the properties are in such a condition or state as to be unsightly and un-kept or otherwise a menace to the public health and safety. In addition, the Board approved to charge the cost of cleaning of properties and assess the costs against

said properties on the list.

On August 18, the Mayor and Board acknowledged the 2026-27 Mayor's Youth Council Induction; Employee of the Month, Larry Gardner - Public Works; and Firefighter of the Month, BJ Wells.

After approving the Consent Agenda items and the same regular items as last month, the Board declared Orion Vehicle Wireless Water Meter Readers with computer modules, antennas and cables, etc., to be surplus property and to authorize the inter-governmental transfer of same to Village of Palmetto, Louisiana.

The Board authorized the removal of old insulation and the installation of Closed Cell Sprayfoam Insulation at the Auto Maintenance building by Air Tight Solution for \$11,472.

The Board authorized the purchase of 2026 Can-Am Defender Max HD10 Cab from Patriot Motorsports for \$26,494 to be paid from Drug Seizure Funds (reimbursed from JAG Grant); 2026 Dodge Charger from Mac Haik for \$49,999 to be paid from Drug Seizure Funds (quotes obtained, reimbursed from JAG Grant); 2026 Nissan Rogue from Cannon Motors of Mississippi for \$25,500 to be paid from Drug Seizure Funds (reimbursed from JAG Grant).

They also approved payment to Neel Schaffer concerning the Highway 80 Lighting Project Phase Two totaling 28,380; to Pickering Firm concerning the Southeast Sanitary Sewer Phase II Project totaling \$16,530; of 2022 Komatsu PC138USLC-11 Excavator from Lyle Machinery in the amount of \$64,905.86; and of Stand-on skid steer from Ditch Witch in for \$24,930.88; Public hearings were set on September 15 at 6 p.m., to determine whether property owned by Oley R. and Rebecca A. Harrell and located at 207 Cunningham Drive, Pearl, is unsightly and un-kept or otherwise a menace to the public health and safety of the community; to determine whether or not a conditional use permit should be granted to Wendy Ochoa to allow her to operate an ice cream and snack shop at 422 Riverwind Drive, Suite D.; and to determine the cost of cleaning of properties and assess the costs against said properties on the list.

The Board approved entering into a three-year contract for Software as a Service (SAAS) Polimorphic's Government AI Platform for Voice & Data Services, upon final approval of the City attorney, and approved the Memorandum of Understanding for sewer infrastructure project between the City of Pearl, Mississippi and Rankin County, Mississippi, utilizing proceeds of 2025 Rankin County General Obligation Bonds.

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From the Richland Boardroom - Financing discussed for \$850K Fire Station Expansion

SW Rankin News

The regular Board of Alderman August meetings met on August 4 and 18, 2026, at City Hall. Present were the Mayor Clay Burns and Aldermen John Hamilton, Scot Mancil, Matthew Quick, Beth Sanford, and A.J. Shields.

There was discussion on the Engagement, Intent and Note Sale Resolution authorizing the City to Issue a negotiable note in the amount of \$850k for the Fire Station Expansion. They discussed a 5-Year note but decided to get bids and revisit how they want to budget at the September 15 Board Meeting.

After approving the Consent Agenda on August 4, Sophie Villareal was pinned for promotion to Lieutenant by her father, Pete.

Engineering Service approved the change order of \$132,195.19 to Thornton Construction Co., Inc. for the 2023 Street Improvements Project that is being paid out of the M.U.T. Bond Debt Fund. The requested change order is commercially reasonable, not made to circumvent procurement laws, and necessary to serve the governing authority.

Public Works is to apply for a Transportation Alternative Grant through MDOT for Town Square Lighting Project. It is estimated to be over \$15,000.

Three quotes received for the remainder of the four-year grass cutting contract on city streets: Lawn Dawgs, LLC \$120,000.00 Wenger Lawn Service \$130,465.00 Brickstreet Lawn & Landscape \$150,500.00. It was awarded to Lawn Dawgs.

The Board approved yearly Maintenance Contracts with Environment Masters for HVAC systems at City Hall for \$2,435.64, and for the Richland Library for \$1,256.39, per year.

The Board approved of "Welcome to Richland™ sign design.

The City of Richland Fire Department's Payroll Policy was amended to include overtime and rotating shifts.

Approved the transfer of Steven Parkman from full-time to part-time with the Fire Department effective August 5, 2026, at the current part-time



Special to SW Rankin News

The Richland Board of Aldermen pictured (l to r) front row, are: Beth Sanford; Mayor Clay Burns; and A.J. Shields; and back row: Matt Quick; John Hamilton; and Scot Mancil.

rate of pay; the hiring of James Saucier as a Lieutenant at Level 4/Step 1, and Keith Jordan as Sergeant at Level 3/Step 1, with a start date of August 5, 2026; the promotion of Officer Shawn Walters to the rank of Sergeant at Level 3/ Step 1; and the transfer of Lieutenant Joseph Mullins back to the rank of Detective at Level 4/Step 1, effective August 5, 2026.

The Board adopted the resolution Approving the Mississippi Office of Highway Safety Grant Agreement, for \$53,001; and the budgeted sponsorship of Ranger Nation Club; and approved an advertisement in Rankin County News for High School Football Issue to run on August 26, 2026, for \$239.

Travel/Meetings: the Mayor and Aldermen are attending the MML 2026 Small Town Conference in Hattiesburg, MS on October 7 — 9, 2026. Registration is \$125.00. Will need hotel, per diem, and mileage or use of a city vehicle; the Mayor and Aldermen will also attend the MML and GCD 2026 CMO Elective Evening Class in Ridgeland, MS on October 1, 2026. Registration is \$25; and Josh Westbrook to attend an Energetic Handlers & Breaching Course in Byhalia, MS on August 9-14, 2026. Registration is \$1,475.00. Will need hotel, per diem, and mileage or use of a city vehicle.

On August 18, the Board passed for Engineering Service: to advertise for the Squirrel Branch



Bank Stabilization, Phase Three Project; and to advertise for the North Richland Detention Pond Improvements Project; and approved Pay Request No. 3 to Hemphill Construction, Inc. for \$531,779.70, out of the M.U.T. Fund, for work performed on the Old Hwy 49 & Carrier Blvd. Intersection Improvements Project and authorized the LPA Official to execute MDOT Reimbursement in the amount of \$349,136.15; and they approved the General Services Agreement with Engineering Service for FY 2027, effective September 2026 - August 2027.

Public Hearing was held on the Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year ending September 30, 2027. A Resolution Establishing the Tax Levy for Ad Valorem Taxes for the City of Richland, Mississippi, at 20.5 mils for the Fiscal Year ending September 30, 2027, passed.

The Board approved payment to Engineering Service for \$16,745.15, out of the M.U.T. Fund for CE&I work completed and as appointed by the Board on November 5, 2024, for the Traffic Signal Improvements at Old Hwy 49 and Carrier Blvd; approved payment to Engineering Service for \$6,877.50, for professional services rendered on the Richmond Pointe Bank Stabilization out of the reallocated funds from the SB 2468 tranche as authorized by the Board on May 5, 2026.

The Board accepted Born Again Roofing's estimate of \$6,100 for the repair of the library ceiling damaged by air conditioner leak. They also approved of Central Mississippi Regional Library System's budget allocation request for FY 2027, in the level amount of \$10,197, as requested Approve Privilege License Form and consecutive numbering of license issued to begin at 001 for Fiscal Year 2027.

They approved the hire of Firefighter, at Level 4/Step 1, effective August 19, 2026.

The Board approved of a full-page advertisement in *Hometown Rankin Magazine's* annual Rankin Chamber Directory in the amount of \$895.

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MHS dedicates new football field

McLaurin Elementary named MS Emerging Science of Reading School



The McLaurin High School (MHS) Tigers kicked off this football season in August on their newly renovated, state of the art, synthetic turf field funded by the Rankin County School District (RCSD). School fans came out on August 11 to celebrate the ribbon cutting of the new turf field and for a Meet the 2026 Tigers event. According to the coaching staff, the new field represents more than an improvement to the facilities; it represents an investment in the students, the school, and the community.

Photos special to SW Rankin News

Special to SW Rankin News

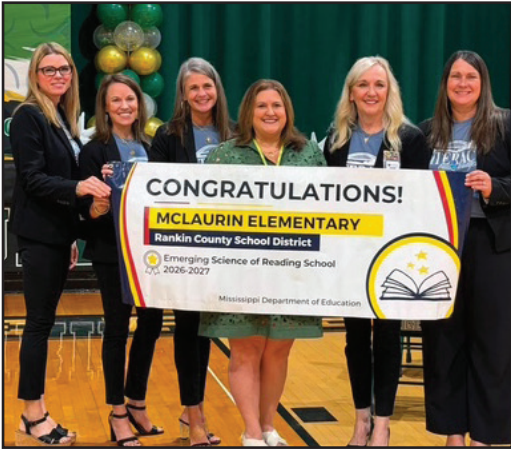
For the second year in a row, McLaurin Elementary has been named a Mississippi Emerging Science of Reading (SOR) Schools. This year’s honor pertains to the 2025-26 school year, and only seven schools were awarded the designation.

The Mississippi Emerging SOR designation is for schools that have trained teachers in the science of reading, exemplified a change of instructional practices and embodied a school culture that focuses on building skillful, strong readers in kindergarten through third grade.

The Mississippi SOR designation may be awarded to a school that has been an Emerging SOR school for two consecutive years.

All Mississippi K-5 schools are invited annually each spring to apply for science of reading recognition. Since the 2021-22 school year when MDE began offering this recognition, twenty-six schools have received the designation. Schools must reapply annually.

MDE’s Literacy Leadership Team traveled to the Mississippi Emerging SOR Schools in August to celebrate this accomplishment.



Special to SW Rankin News

The Mississippi Emerging SOR designation is for schools that have trained teachers in the science of reading, exemplified a change of instructional practices, and embodied a school culture that focuses on building skillful, strong readers in kindergarten through third grade.

McLaurin Elementary school officials said, “We are incredibly proud to be recognized as one of Mississippi Department of Education’s Emerging Science of Reading Schools! This incredible accomplishment reflects the dedication of our teachers, staff, students and families who continue to work together to build strong readers and lifelong learners. We kicked off the celebration with an EPIC pep rally!”

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Pearl Junior High teacher receives Kids Scholarship



Special to SW Rankin News

Special to the SW Rankin News

Pearl Junior High School teacher Ariel Brown (center) recently received the Dollars for Kids Scholarship from Kids First. The Dollars for Kids is a grant program providing Pearl Public School District teachers and school administrators with direct support to purchase classroom supplies and resources that benefit their students.

Park Place Christian Academy now in MAIS Class 4A

Special to SW Rankin News

Park Place Christian Academy is taking a step forward as the Crusaders enter the 2026 football season.

The Crusaders experienced an up-and-down campaign last fall. Park Place picked up a dominant 56-6 victory over Christian Collegiate Academy late in the season, while also facing difficult matchups against teams, including Bogue Chitto and East Rankin Academy.

Park Place's recent seasons have included several changes for the program. The Crusaders competed in MAIS eight-man football in 2023 and 2024 before returning to a larger classification. Park Place is listed in MAIS Class 4A for the upcoming season.

The Crusaders have a mixture of public and private school opponents on the schedule this fall. At press time, Park Place was preparing to open the season at home against Mt. Zion on August 21, followed by an open week. The Crusaders then travel to Amite School Center and Stringer before returning home to face Manchester Academy and



Special to SW Rankin News

Park Place is listed in MAIS Class 4A for the upcoming season, and the Crusaders have a mixture of public and private school opponents on the schedule.

East Rankin Academy.

Later matchups include Bogue Chitto, Christian Collegiate Academy and McLaurin, giving Park Place several opportunities to measure its progress throughout the year.

As the Crusaders continue to build the program, Park Place will look to find more consistency and turn its opportunities into wins during the 2026 season.

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Veazey of Florence receives MS Trucking Association Endowment

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Over thirty-five years ago, the Mississippi Trucking Association Foundation Scholarship Program Foundation was founded. It has awarded forty scholarships for the 2026-27 school year, including Cayla Veazey of Florence, who received the H. Dean Cotton Endowment to help further her education at the University of Mississippi, where she will study Allied Health.

The primary objective of the Foundation, a 501(c) (3) charitable corporation designed to receive contributions, memorial gifts, and property, is to promote educational projects related to the trucking industry and provide scholarships to deserving students who have ties to the trucking industry and who are enrolled in scholastic endeavors in the state of Mississippi. This class joins about five hundred students who have received this scholarship.

Scholarships are offered through the Mississippi Trucking Association Foundation and the following Endowments: Mike McLarty, John Fayard, Jr., H. Dean Cotten, G. Larry Kerr, R. Gene Holmes, Vernon & Nancy Sawyer, John D. Stomps, and W. Todd Bates.



Special to SW Rankin News

The Mississippi Trucking Association held a scholarship awards ceremony in Jackson in July. Cayla Veazey of Florence received the H. Dean Cotton Endowment to help further her education at the University of Mississippi, where she will study Allied Health.

FHS students serve as Rankin COC Youth Leaders



Special to SW Rankin News

Florence High School (FHS) recently recognized students for representing the school as members of the Rankin County (RC) Chamber of Commerce Youth Leadership Class of 2026-27. Pictured (l to r) are: Karlie Higdon, Kendall Wilder, AnnaKate Dudley, Taylor Gunn and Mac Taylor. These students will spend the next several months learning more about Rankin County, developing valuable leadership and life skills to prepare them for life after high school and giving back through community service.

3 MHS students serve with Rankin Youth Leadership



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The 2026-27 Rankin Youth Leadership representatives from McLaurin High School include (l to r) Perla Aban, Xavier Cameron and Emma Paul.



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Gammill wins design competition



Special to SW Rankin News

Kale Gammill (right) was recently named the winner of a shoulder patch design contest for the Mississippi Riverland Council.



Special to SW Rankin News

Kale Gammill, an employee in the City of Pearl's Auto Maintenance Department, recently submitted a design for the Mississippi Riverland Council's new council shoulder patch. The new design was to incorporate America's 250th anniversary, and Gammill's design was selected as the winner.

Scouting has been an important part of Gammill's life for many years. He participated in Boy Scouts as a youth and earned the rank of Eagle Scout. Today, he continues to give back to the program, serving as Scoutmaster of Troop 575 for the past ten years and as Assistant District Commissioner for the Pearl River District.

FHS student travels to Hawaii with MS Lions All-State Band



Special to SW Rankin News

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Thirteen Rankin County School District (RCSD) students were selected as members of the 2026 Mississippi Lions All-State Band that recently traveled to Hawaii. They performed in the 77th Kailua Independence Day Parade and earned the Grand Champion Award for their outstanding performance.

Paul Martin, Jr. a trumpet player from Florence High School, joined other RCSD students Jaxon Miller from Brandon High School and William King, Brayden Harlan, Kaleb Reulet, Fabricio de Melo, Harish Rajan, Aiden Curry, Nathan Carrington, Jacob John-

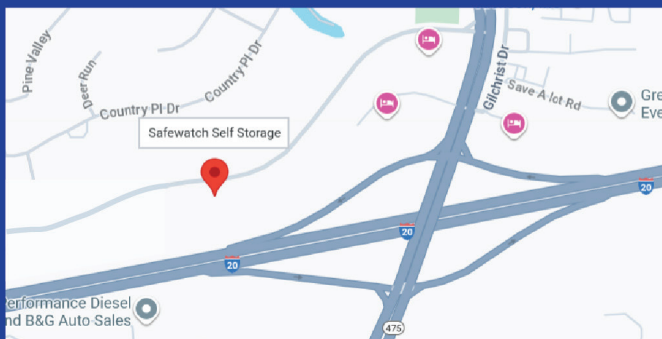
ston, Jasmine Birkhead, Abram Eubanks, and JT McDaniel, all of Northwest Rankin High School (NWRHS).

Matt McDonald was selected as the Concert Director of the Lions Band Staff this year. He teaches AP Music Theory and is the band director for grades six through twelve at NWRHS. He was also the District Teacher of the Year in 2024.

"What an incredible experience and accomplishment for these talented students and director! We are proud to see RCSD students representing Mississippi on a national stage and bringing home the top honor," Shane Sanders, RCSD Superintendent of Education.

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