

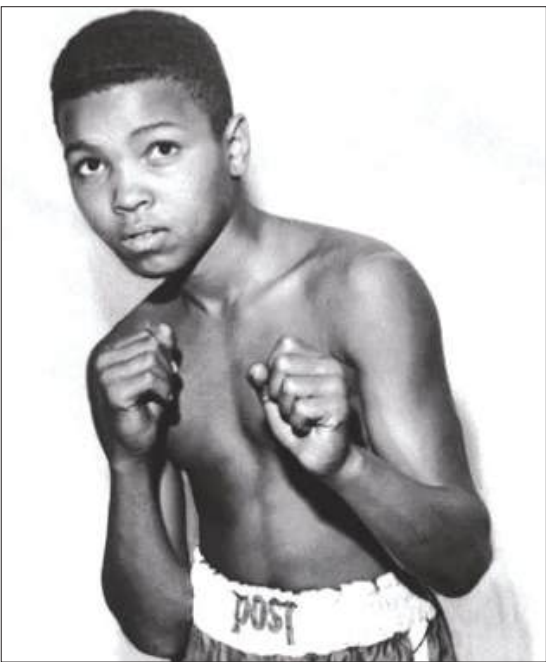
The Greatest! Ten Years On...

By Christopher Young
Contributing Writer

The fight ended on June 3, 2016, in Scottsdale, Arizona. No trunks, no gloves, no squared ring, no rope-a-dope - just a hospital bed, surrounded by his family. The greatest heavyweight boxer of all time succumbed to septic shock, dying of natural causes and was pronounced dead at 9:10PM Mountain Time. At 74, not having fought a professional bout in 35 years, and having suffered the debilitating powerlessness of Parkinson's disease for 34 years, it was a merciful end for The Champ.

Ali was born in Louisville, Kentucky, January 17, 1942, to Cassius Marcellus Clay Sr. and Odessa Grady Clay. His name at birth was Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. Eighteen months later, his only sibling, a brother, Rudolph Arnett Clay, was born.

Cassius Clay won his first professional fight at just 18 years old, defeating 30-year-old Tunney Hunsaker by unanimous decision in the 6th round. Per the Muhammad Ali Facebook page, Hunsaker said afterwards, "awfully good for an 18-year-old," and the two remained lifelong friends. Just four years later, at age 22 in 1964, and just a few weeks after winning his first heavyweight title, he changed his name to Muhammad Ali. He had converted to Islam and joined The Nation of Islam. "He



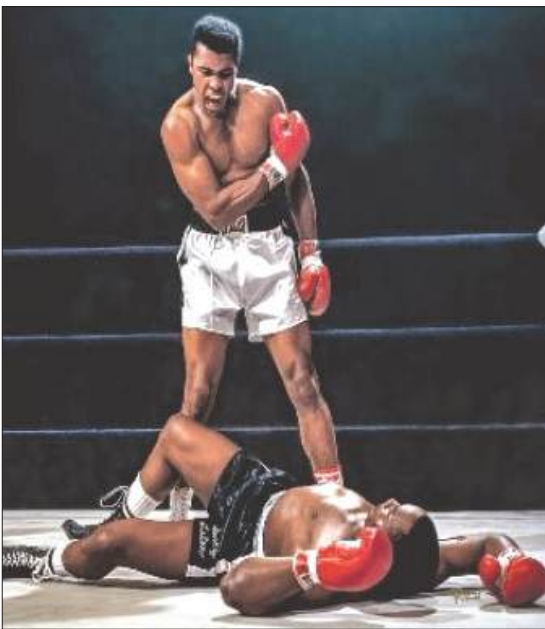
Young Ali. PHOTO: NYMAG.COM.

stated that his birth name was "a slave name," adding, "I didn't choose it and I don't want it." His new name, he noted, is "a free name" meaning "beloved of God." The name Ali inherited from his father — Cassius Marcellus Clay — was in fact given to his dad in honor of Cassius M. Clay, a fervent abolitionist who graduated from Yale in 1832.

The namesake had "joined the antislavery movement and made the abolition of slavery his life's work. According to "American National Biography," Clay "developed an economic critique of slavery that some historians consider to be the most penetrat-

ing analysis of slavery produced by a Southerner." During a political debate in 1943 he survived an assassination attempt, then published "Slavery: The Evil — The Remedy." In 1845-1846 he published an antislavery newspaper, the True American, in the slaveholding town of Lexington, Kentucky, per YaleNews.com. Ali's birth name had come from a fighter, a believer in fairness and equality, whose public refusal of President Lincoln's request that he be a major general in the Union Army, led directly to The Emancipation Proclamation.

Muhammad Ali fought bat-



The knockout, In his rematch with Sonny Liston, May 25, 1965, in Lewiston Maine. PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS.

ties in and out of the ring. Due to his incessant bragging and rhyming predictions, sports writers gave him the nickname The Louisville Lip — we know what those writers looked like in the 1960's. White America didn't appreciate Ali's religious beliefs, his refusal to be drafted into the Army, his opposition to the Vietnam War, or his civil rights activism. When he said no to the draft, he was stripped of his heavyweight title and boxing license. Convicted of draft evasion (unlike Captain Bone Spurs), he lost four years

Ali

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Curtis Nichouls

A visionary who saw Mississippi on the big screen

By Dr. Edelia J. Carthan
Contributing Writer

Mississippi filmmaker Curtis Nichouls had a vision that extended far beyond making movies. He envisioned Mississippi becoming a destination for film and television production, creating opportunities for local talent, developing the state's workforce and building an industry capable of bringing major productions and economic activity to the state.

Nichouls, who died August 22, 2026, at his home in Jackson, built a career that touched nearly every aspect of filmmaking.

His IMDb credits reflect work as a producer, actor, cinematographer, director, writer, editor, stunt performer and location professional. His projects included Premium Rush, River Runs Red, Atone, Hell on the Border, The Vanished, Out of the Fight, A Day to Die and Grace Wins, among others.

Through his work, Nichouls became connected to productions featuring major Hollywood talent, including Bruce Willis, John Cusack, Taye Diggs, George Lopez, Luke Hemsworth, Ron Perlman, Frank Grillo, Anne Heche, Jason Patric, Thomas Jane and Leon Robinson.

But Nichouls was not content with simply working in the film industry. He wanted to help build that industry in Mississippi.

Bringing Hollywood to Mississippi

One of the clearest examples was A Day to Die, the action film starring Bruce Willis, Kevin Dillon, Frank Grillo and Leon Robinson. The production brought recognizable Hollywood star power to Jackson while demonstrating that Mississippi could serve as a viable location for major film productions.

Nichouls helped bring the production to Mississippi through his production company, Sweet Unknown South Productions. According to previous reporting by the Mississippi Free Press, Mississippi had not initially been the production's first choice. Nichouls advocated for Jackson and helped bring the project to the capital city.

His vision also included creating opportunities behind the camera.

During the production of A Day to Die, students from Jackson State University and Tougaloo College, along with high school students, were provided opportunities to gain experience in filmmaking. It represented an important part of Nichouls' larger philosophy: Mississippi could not build a sustainable film industry by attracting productions alone. It also needed to develop its own workforce.

As someone who was present on the set of several of Nichouls' Mississippi productions, I had an opportunity to witness that work firsthand. His productions brought to-



Curtis Nichouls, Mississippi filmmaker, producer and founder of Sweet Unknown South Studios, helped bring major film productions to Mississippi while working to expand opportunities for local filmmakers and aspiring industry professionals. PHOTO COURTESY OF CURTIS NICHOLS/SWEET UNKNOWN SOUTH PRODUCTIONS.

gether experienced professionals, local talent, students and community members while demonstrating the possibilities of building a stronger film industry within the state.

Behind the camera for Mississippi history

Nichouls' camera also captured more than movies.

On June 14, 2016—Flag Day—a group of Mississippians traveled to Washington, D.C., for the Take It Down America Flag Rally, a demonstration calling for the removal of the Confederate battle emblem from Mississippi's state flag.

Mississippi native and actress Aunjanue Ellis helped lead the effort, which brought the campaign against the state flag to the nation's capital. Nichouls traveled with the Mississippi delegation and documented the journey and demonstration.

That trip was also where I first met Curtis Nichouls.

What began as documenting a movement became part of a much larger professional relationship. In the years that followed, I would have the opportunity to be present on the set of a number of his productions filmed here in Mississippi and watch his vision for the state's film industry continue to develop.

Nichouls' participation in the Washington trip illustrated another dimension of his work. His camera was not limited to entertainment. He also used it to document Mississippi people, activism and history as events unfolded.

Building Sweet Unknown South

That same commitment to Mississippi eventually led to one of Nichouls' most ambitious undertakings.

In 2024, the Jackson City Council approved the sale of the former Dillard's building at Metrocenter Mall to Nichouls following his bid of approximately \$360,000. The massive property would become home to Sweet Unknown South Studios.

Nichouls

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Michael Jackson would have turned 68. In Las Vegas, his music is filling the room again

Black Press USA

Las Vegas turns up the music to celebrate Michael Jackson's birthday.

The lights go out, the theater goes dark, and then that unmistakable voice fills the room, even before the song begins.

Suddenly, Michael Jackson feels larger than life once more.

His image appears above the Las Vegas stage while dancers perform moves inspired by him, acrobats spin through the air, and his decades-old music fills a theater designed for it. Now, 64 drones fly overhead, and nine new LED panels light up the room with images.

Jackson died 17 years ago. He would have turned 68 on August 29. At Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino, the Estate of Michael Jackson and Cirque du Soleil are planning a birthday celebration at a special time: Jackson is having another big year.

The biographical film Michael, directed by Antoine Fuqua and starring Jackson's nephew Jaafar Jackson, has made over \$1 billion worldwide. It is now the highest-grossing biopic and music bi-



opic ever and the biggest film in Lionsgate's history. The movie opened in late April with \$97 million in the U.S. and \$217 million worldwide, making it the largest global debut for a musical biopic.

Alana Clapp, general manager of Michael Jackson ONE, thinks the movie's success is bringing longtime Jackson fans back with new excitement and introducing him to a new generation who never saw him perform.

"We're seeing such a wonderful movement right now with Michael Jackson and old fans that are coming together to celebrate his legacy and his stature in pop culture," Clapp told The Black Press. "I think a lot of that is obviously driven by the success of the biopic that's come out recently."

That energy is making this year's birthday celebration feel different.

"We're lucky enough in Las Vegas to have a show that can continue to celebrate everything that he has done as a performer and as an entertainer in

today's world," Clapp said.

A one-time birthday surprise The Aug. 29 celebration begins at 12:30 p.m. with the sixth annual fan reception in the lobby of the Michael Jackson ONE Theater for ticketholders to either the 6:30 or 9 p.m. show.

At 2 p.m., the theater opens to everyone. A question-and-answer session with special guests chosen by Jackson's Estate starts at 2:30 p.m., followed by a surprise that Clapp is keeping secret.

"The Q&A portion will culminate with a performance, a unique, one-time-only special performance by the cast of Michael Jackson ONE, where you will only be able to see it this one time," she said.

"The cast and crew have worked incredibly hard on bringing something new and fun and different than anything that you've seen on our stages before."

Organizers plan to livestream the Q&A for fans worldwide. Michael Bush, Jackson's longtime costume designer, will hold his annual book sign-

ing near the Michael Jackson ONE Boutique, followed by pre-show meet-and-greets with Estate representatives, special guests, and members of the ONE creative team.

Cupcakes will be served, too. After all, it is Michael Jackson's birthday.

Michael without an impersonator

The celebration centers on a show facing a clear challenge: its star can't step onto the stage.

Cirque doesn't try to solve this by hiring an impersonator.

For Clapp, this is key to what makes ONE special.

"This is the only show where you get to see Michael Jackson," she said. "It's not an impersonator or somebody who's playing tribute to Michael. It is Michael Jackson."

Jackson is seen through his original recordings and films, sometimes shown on a huge scale. His choreography, costumes, and images are the base, while Cirque's dancers and acrobats perform live around him.

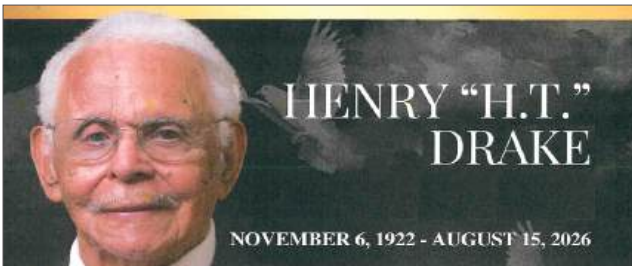
His voice fills the theater as performers move above the audience. Dancers strike poses that fans instantly recognize. Sometimes, the acrobatics fade, and Jackson's image takes over, making it feel like a concert—until you remember he's been gone since 2009.

Michael Jackson ONE just marked its 13th anniversary and, as Clapp describes, has had a "massive refresh" with

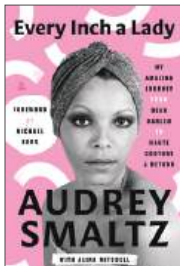
Jackson

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Inside Henry Thornton "H.T." Drake



Every Inch a Lady



Celebrating the life of

Peggy Hudson King James

January 17, 1955 - August 17, 2026



Peggy Hudson, the fourth of seven children, was born on Monday, January 17, 1955, in Vicksburg, Mississippi, to the late James Arthur and Dessie Hudson. After a brief illness, she peacefully departed this life on Monday, August 17, 2026.

Peggy graduated from South Vicksburg High School in 1973. She continued her education at Hinds Community College, the University of Mississippi, and the University of Southern Mississippi, ultimately earning a Master of Science in Nursing. Later in life, her passion for helping others led her to earn an additional Master of Science in Grief Counseling.

Peggy married the late Dennis Ray King, and from their

union were born two daughters, DeVita and Deneatta King. She devoted 49 years of service to the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, where she began her career as a professional registered nurse and later advanced to the role of Nursing Administrator. Her compassion for others inspired her to continually pursue knowledge, mentor those around her, and serve far beyond the responsibilities of her position. Peggy believed in producing results, leading with purpose, and helping others grow along the way.

As her journey continued, Peggy reunited with and married her childhood sweetheart, Eddie Lee James, and shared in the love and family bond he had with Cherie Smith.

Peggy's unwavering faith in the Lord, her deep love for people, and her devotion to family were at the heart of who she was. She was known for her infectious smile, her generous and loving spirit, and her willingness to allow God to use her to help anyone in need.

After a courageous battle with illness, God's sovereign will called Peggy home. Throughout her journey, she faced each day with remarkable strength, grace, faith, and dignity. She was preceded in death by her parents, James Arthur and Dessie Hudson; her sister, Dana Phillips; and her former husband, Dennis Ray King. She will always be remembered as a devoted wife, loving sister, cherished mother, aunt, cousin, treasured friend, and inspiring mentor. Her love, wisdom, faith, and compassion will continue to live on through the many lives she touched.

As her family, we could think of no more fitting way to conclude this tribute than by sharing words of encouragement Peggy once wrote. We hope they serve as a lasting reflection of her faith, wisdom, and the encouragement she so freely gave to others:

May God be above you to bless you, Below you to support you, Before you to guide you, Behind you to protect you, Beside you to comfort you, And inside you to give you strength and joy. Thank you for always making a way. Keep praying, keep believing, keep trusting.

Forever Loved, Forever, Remembered

Homegoing services were held Saturday, August 22, 2026, at 1:00 PM at Pearl Street A.M.E. Church, 2519 Robinson Street, Jackson, MS where friends and family gathered in music, reflections, prayers, and words of comfort.

Greetings and prayer were given by Rev. Larry Hudson and scripture readings from Mr. Jeffrey Powell.

A very touching nightingale ceremony was given by the Mississippi Nurse Honor Guard honoring the services of Peggy. They ended the ceremony with a 'Final Call to Duty,' officially releasing Peggy Hudson King James from her duties as a healthcare worker.

Words of comfort were given by Apostle Dr. Betty Johnson

who said Peggy was one that truly served the Lord; she not only talked to others about the words of the Bible but also walked the words which she spoke of.

Other reflections were given by selected family and friends to include Casandra Stovall, who spoke of Peggy as a loving church member and a devoted Girl Scout Leader with Girl Scouts of Greater MS, Inc. Several Girl Scout leaders attended the service, still finding it hard to believe she had transitioned.

A final tribute was given by Dr. Hillard Lackey, followed by music from the Pearl Street Choir, and the Eulogy by Rev. Dr. Samuel H. Boyd, Sr.



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A healthy community begins with the health of its people — and when you thrive, we all do.

It's good to be blue.



MISSISSIPPI



Nichouls

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Nichoulsenvisionedtransformingtheapproximately 172,000-square-foot space into a major film and television production facility. Rather than Mississippi filmmakers constantly traveling elsewhere to find professional production facilities, Nichouls wanted those resources available in Jackson. Plans for the facility included spaces capable of accommodating multiple productions and sets that could be transformed into homes, kitchens, police departments, jail cells and other locations frequently needed for television and film. The studio also represented something larger for South Jackson. For decades, Metrocenter Mall was one of the state’s most recognizable shopping destinations. Like many malls across the country, it experienced decline as businesses closed and economic activity shifted elsewhere. Nichouls looked at that enormous space and saw possibility. By late 2024, Sweet Unknown South Studios was operating from the Metrocenter property and attracting productions. The science-fiction thriller The Strange was among the projects filmed there. Nichouls understood that the film industry could become an economic-development tool for Mississippi. Productions require far more than actors and directors. They employ camera operators, electricians, carpenters, makeup artists, wardrobe professionals, caterers, drivers, security personnel, editors, production assistants and numerous other workers. Productions also generate business for hotels, restaurants, transportation companies and other

Ali

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of prime-age fighting, but remained out of jail on bail, and ultimately won at the Supreme Court in 1971 – the Clay v. United States ruling stated that his conscientious objector status was valid, overturning his conviction. His championship fights remain legendary. Sonny Liston I (1964) & II (1965), Joe Frazier I – The Fight of the Century – (1971), Ken Norton I, II, & III (1973-1976), Joe Frazier II (1974), George Foreman – The Rumble in the Jungle – (1974), Chuck Wepner – said to have inspired the movie Rocky - (1975), Joe Frazier III – Thrilla in Manila – (1975), Leon Spinks I & II (1978), Larry Holmes (1980), Trevor Berbick (1981). Sixty-one professional bouts, 56 wins – 37 by knockout, and five losses, per BoxRec.com. No one can ever forget his blazing footwork, lightning-fast hands, defensive prowess – dodging punches. A cultural icon. A global icon. His poetry. His proclamations. His charisma. Squarely in the turmoil and pain of the civil rights movement he stood strong, confident, and proud. A lengthy list of biographers and historians all claim how much

local businesses. Building permanent film infrastructure could allow more of those dollars—and those jobs—to remain in Mississippi. **Service beyond the film set** Nichouls’ commitment to service extended beyond filmmaking. He was an active member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., where he used his professional talents in service to the fraternity. Nichouls served as Mississippi State Photographer and Videographer, documenting programs, gatherings, service initiatives and important moments within the organization. He was also Chief Security Officer for the Mississippi Poor People’s Campaign and volunteered for Camp Fabulous, The Emmett Till Scholarship Banquet and many more organizations including Jim Hill High School where he taught the students videography. His involvement reflected a principle visible throughout his career: using his talents not only to build a professional career, but also to document and strengthen the organizations and communities around him. Nichouls participated in community and nonprofit initiatives. His work connected filmmaking, education, mentorship, community service and economic development. That combination makes his contribution to Mississippi significant. Mississippi has produced extraordinary writers, musicians, actors and storytellers, yet much of the economic infrastructure surrounding those creative industries has historically existed elsewhere. Artists

often leave the state to pursue opportunities in larger entertainment markets. Nichouls challenged that model. His vision raised a different question: Why couldn’t the industry be built here? Why couldn’t Mississippi train its own filmmakers? Why couldn’t Mississippi students learn cinematography, editing, lighting and production without leaving the state? Why couldn’t an abandoned department store become a movie studio? Why couldn’t major Hollywood actors come to Jackson to work? And why couldn’t Mississippi receive a greater share of the economic benefits generated by the stories filmed here? Curtis Nichouls spent years working to turn those questions into reality. His legacy can be measured in film credits and productions, but perhaps it is better measured by the infrastructure, opportunities and possibilities he worked to create. He brought Hollywood star power to Mississippi. More importantly, he believed Mississippi could build star power of its own. The challenge now is ensuring that vision continues. *About the Author: Dr. Edelia J. Carthan is a contributing writer for The Mississippi Link and President and CEO of Carthan Enterprises, LLC and Fabulous Fun Rentals.*



Ali lighting the 1996 Olympic Torch caldron in Atlanta. PHOTO: THE WASHINGTON POST



Ali being presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom on November 9, 2005. PHOTO: DENVERPOST.COM

more he was than a three-time heavyweight champion. He used his platform to challenge racial injustice, redefine global sports activism, while commanding the world stage. The University of Louis-

ville Libraries enshrine their native son - “Refusing induction into the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War cost Ali his prime athletic years and title, transforming him from a polarizing sports figure into a global martyr and anti-establishment icon.” The Champ was often called on by U.S. Presidents. In 1980, Carter asked Ali to travel to Africa to secure support for an Olympic boycott of the Moscow games after the invasion of Afghanistan. In 1990, he went alone to Baghdad to meet with Saddam Hussein and secured the release of fifteen American hostages ahead of the first Gulf War. Ali was appointed a United Nations Messenger of Peace and travelled to hand-deliver food and medical supplies, advocate for debt relief, and spotlight humanitarian crises in Asia and Africa. His list of humanitarian works is exhaustive. So often when the ‘expert’ diplomats and negotiators failed, Ali succeeded. As our nation suffers from an incalculable void of leadership, it’s important to remember a multi-faceted leader, a man, an African American man who sacrificed his professional career to protest the Vietnam War. The Greatest! Ten years on.

Jackson

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new music, costumes, and technology. A striking addition may be flying above the seats: 64 drones will move above the crowd. “This is one of the first times that’s being done in an indoor space,” Clapp said, “and we’re really proud of that.” Nine new LED panels add even more visuals, and a new Diabolo act set to “Wanna Be Startin’ Somethin’” has performers tossing spinning objects high into the air as Jackson’s 1983 hit plays. Clapp thinks Jackson, who always pushed the limits of concert technology and showmanship, would like these updates. “I would hope that he would be very proud of what the team has done,” she said. “Especially with the refresh, bringing some of

these new technological elements.” A new generation finds Michael You can sometimes see the renewed excitement for Jackson even before the show starts. More fans are showing up in Jackson-inspired outfits. Military jackets, black leather, buckles, glitter, and fedoras fill the lobby, creating a living timeline of his career, where his style is almost as famous as his music. Some remember when those looks were new. Others weren’t alive to see them. Michael’s billion-dollar movie has opened a new door for

younger fans. They can see Jaafar Jackson play his uncle, then look back and discover Motown 25, the moonwalk, Thriller, “Billie Jean,” Bad, “Smooth Criminal,” and concert clips of Jackson standing still while crowds went wild. Then, they can visit Las Vegas, where the actor steps aside. Jackson’s real voice and images are still there, with Cirque performers bringing his recordings to life on stage. That mix of generations will be clear on August 29, when fans who remember the Jackson 5 sit alongside people whose first real experience with Michael Jackson was the 2026 movie.

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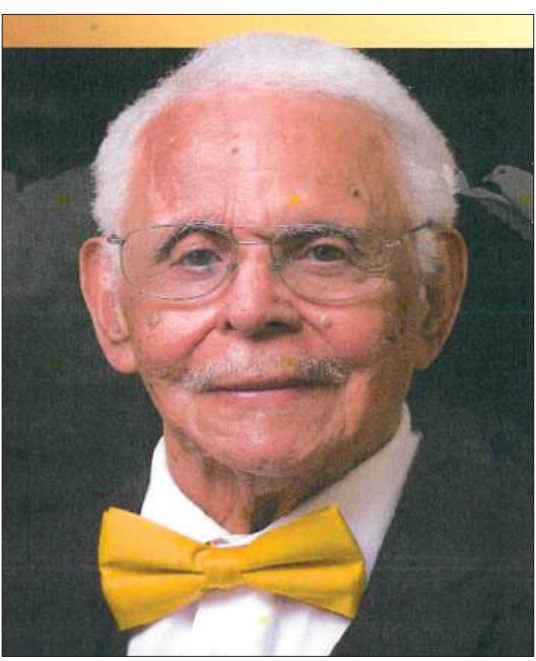
**FMOL Health
St. Dominic**
Mississippi Heart and
Vascular Institute



Celebrating the life and legacy of

Henry Thornton “H.T.” Drake

November 6, 1922 - August 15, 2026



Dr. Henry Thornton “H.T.” Drake, a devoted educator, community leader, and beloved patriarch, passed away on August 15, 2026 after a life spanning nearly a century of service, purpose, and unwavering commitment to others. Born in 1922 in Carroll County, Mississippi, he was the eldest of six children of Aaron Drake, Jr. and Annette Smith Drake. He attended Summerfield School in Carroll County. A proud United States Navy veteran, Dr. Drake served his country during World War II before dedicating his life to a career of education and community uplift. In 1946, he married Maggie D. Burkhead and three children were born to that union. A graduate of Tougaloo College (Class of 1950) and Indiana University, where he earned his Master of Science in Education, Dr. Drake’s passion for learning shaped every chapter of his

life. Tougaloo College later honored him with its highest distinction—the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters—in recognition of his extraordinary contributions to the institution and its mission. Dr. Drake’s career in Mississippi’s public schools spanned more than three decades, during which he served as teacher, coach, guidance counselor, supervisor of schools, principal, and at the state leadership level governing high school activities. As a teacher, coach, supervisor of schools and principal, Drake’s career work in education administration and leadership spanned the Mississippi public school districts for Hinds County, the City of Jackson, and Madison County. His first teaching job was at Hinds County Agriculture High School in Utica, MS from 1950-1952 where he taught social studies, mathematics, science, and coached the dramatic club. At Jim Hill High School (Jackson, MS 1952-1958), he taught social studies and career guidance, coached the girls basketball team and dramatic team, served as assistant principal, guidance counselor, and was the faculty PTA representative. He was Supervisor of Elementary and High Schools in Madison County, MS during 1958-1959. H.T. Drake was Principal of Rosa Scott School in Madison, MS from 1958-1964, which at the time was grades 1 through 12. The school flourished and excelled under his leadership in all areas – P.T.A., basketball, football, baseball, choir, dance, drama, and others. As a trailblazer in eliminating racial inequality for Mississippi’s high school students, H.T. Drake was instrumental in founding two organizations that fostered participation of blacks in student government, sports, and other extracurricular activities: the Magnolia State High School Student Council Association (1955) and the Magnolia State High School Activities As-

sociation (1966). Drake prompted the merger of these two organizations with their counterparts for white students --the Mississippi State Association of Student Councils (MSASC) and the Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA). In 1971, federal court proceedings called for the merger of these segregated organizations. Drake became Assistant Director of the newly merged Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA) and he is the first African American to serve in a directorship capacity of the newly merged organization. He also served as interim director for a brief time. He retired from MHSAA in 1985. Additionally, he served as Co-Director of the merged Mississippi State Association of Student Councils for 25 years.

Beyond education, Dr. Drake was a pillar of the Tougaloo Community, where he lived since the late 1940s. He served multiple terms as president of the Tougaloo Community Civic League and led countless initiatives—community gardens, voter registration drives, Juneteenth celebrations, black history programs, neighborhood improvements, and partnerships with city and state officials. At age 86, he served as poll manager during the 2008 presidential election, helping coordinate record voter turnout.

Dr. Drake’s service extended deeply into civic and faith-based organizations. A member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. for more than 70 years, he was a founding member of the Gamma Upsilon Chapter at Tougaloo College and an active member of the Alpha Epsilon Lambda Chapter in Jackson. His fraternity honored him with numerous awards for his leadership, longevity, and dedication.

Tougaloo College remained central to his life’s work. He served as Acting Alumni Affairs Direc-

tor, Board of Trustees Member, and President Emeritus of the National Alumni Association. He was recognized as Alumnus of the Year, inducted into the Hall of Fame, and celebrated as the College’s Oldest Active Alum. His generosity supported scholarships, publications, and major college milestones.

Dr. Drake also contributed to community development projects such as the West County Line Road Expansion and held leadership roles in Anderson United Methodist Church, Hope Credit Union, Word and Worship Church, and Woodworth Chapel. He was preceded in death by his parents, Aaron and Annette; his wife--Maggie Burkhead Drake, also a Tougaloo graduate and educator; and his siblings Nathan, Clinton (Bay), Andrew (Top), and Ruby. He leaves behind three children—Regina, Godfrey, and his youngest daughter Denise, who served as his devoted caregiver for more than two decades; his brother Zebedee Drake Sr., and a large and loving family spanning five generations including 9 grandchildren, 20 great-grandchildren, and 7 great-great-grandchildren. Dr. Drake’s life was marked by more than 60 plaques and awards, each a testament to his enduring impact on education, civic life, and the countless individuals he guided, supported, and inspired. Dr. Henry Thornton “H.T.” Drake lived with purpose, led with integrity, and served with a heart committed to community. His legacy will continue to shape Tougaloo, Jackson, and the state of Mississippi for generations to come. God blessed him with 103 years and 9 months of amazing life... well done, thy good and faithful servant, well done.

Homegoing service was held Saturday, August 22, 2026 at Tougaloo College, Woodworth Chapel.

PHOTOS BY JAY JOHNSON



Mama Jannie Fair ‘Sage’ comparing back in the day to today

By Janice K. Neal-Vincent, Ph.D.
Contributing Writer

Mama Jannie Fair grew up in Rankin County in Fannin, about fifteen miles northeast of Jackson along Highway 471. Like many Black children, she thought that “things were normal” when it came to separation between Blacks and whites. There were conspicuous signs, however, that said to her and her siblings that they were not white.

Fair recalled that she had to walk to school (which was nearly a half mile from her house) while the white children rode in school buses. “My dad was like a policeman. He watched me until I got out of his sight. The first – fifth grades were all together in one room. One teacher taught all of us in groups, right behind the church.

Fair recollected that after going from six grade to eight grade, schools were consolidated. All the children moved then to white schools in Brandon. “My sister and brother came along with me, then we were separated. The little Black children had to walk to school, and white children passed us on the bus,” she commented. Fair added that because her mother worked for the whites, the white children did not bother her and her siblings. Despite Blacks and whites living together in the neighborhood, they were still divided.



Mama Jannie Fair, a pillar pitching grace, respect and love.

PHOTO BY JANICE NEAL-VINCENT

Recalling Black History, the interviewee mentioned that it was not until she went to college that she had any idea of it. “When I was coming up, I knew I wasn’t white. We were treated differently. We had to address girls and boys my age as “Miss” or “Mister.” Like now, it bothers me. We don’t respect people

like we’re supposed to. Now we’re back to the same thing,” stated Fair.

The informant vocalized that parents are not training their children to respect them and other adults. Adding that children don’t respect their teachers, she charged that nowadays parents want teachers to raise their children. “If you rear them right, they will respect us,” she said.

Not one to mince words, Fair cited a number of examples. She recalled a mother saying that her daughter was her best friend. On the contrary, a parent is not to be a buddy to her/his child, but the parent.

Fair then reminisced about the woman on television news who defended her guilty son by saying, “My son didn’t kill nobody.” The mother was nowhere to be found when the victim was killed. Further, she was not in her son’s presence when the murder occurred.

When asked about the role of the administration in the school system, the interviewee maintained that the leaders “should be qualified and do what they are supposed to do.” Their goal should not be working for people but working as faithful servants to God. Hence, moving the children to their highest levels within the educational process via character development in their circles of learning different subjects, etc. is high

on Fair’s list.

On another matter, Fair commented that Blacks should stop fighting against “our own people” and “should look out for people like our parents did when we were growing up.” Charging Blacks for lying when they say that President Donald Trump “is doing good,” she said that “everything that comes out of his mouth is a lie.” “I tell people, ‘You would rather have a crook in the White House [than a woman concerned about the well-being of all the people].’”

The interviewee did not stop there. She voiced that the police, the governor and the President should do right by the people. Conscience should speak to them when they are doing things that “are not right.”

Fair graced her words with a message to family dynamics. She remembered washing clothes on the scrub board and noted that it would be better if the children “were reared like we were.” “There are ways to train a child without being abusive. The children need to learn respect. They can’t sit up all night and sleep all day. Teach them to use their time wisely.”

Of leadership behind the sacred desk, Fair was forthright. Experience has taught her that high maintenance is having God for soul stability. She noticed that pastors and ministers should be

careful when it comes to their conduct. Recollecting that some have changed down through the years for the worst, she cited the biblical scripture 1 Timothy 6:10: “The love of money is the root of all evil.” The pinnacle of her concern is that rather than saving souls, the emphasis has shifted to loving money. Not only has it shifted, but it has escalated to greed. She advises those caught up in this spell to divorce the habit by getting still to assess who they are in the Lord who reminds them in Luke 6:46: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”

The respondent was asked, “What is the most invaluable thing you have learned about life?” “I’ve done things I now regret, but if I had to do them all over again, I wouldn’t do them anymore. I want to be as clean as I can on earth. God washed me up and cleaned me up. Lord, I thank you for what you’ve done for me and what you’re going to do for me.”

Many call her Mama Jannie Fair because of her stance on matters such as what are mentioned in this story. When it comes to people, her goal is to be a role model. Mentoring for her must come not only in truth, but also in agape, that love that is unconditional. “No matter what a person does to me,” she said, “I will demonstrate love.”

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The latest insult – USS Doris Miller (CVN-81)

Nothing is sacred to this man, except power, wealth, and notoriety

By Christopher Young
Contributing Writer

We all know he does not govern for all Americans. He governs as an extension of his own base instincts. He uses America and Americans to exalt himself. He has undermined elections and the transfer of power. He has attacked institutions and the rule of law. He has damaged media and public discourse. He is not ‘for the people,’ he is for himself. And now, proving again that he has no respect for norms and customs - an effort to replace an aircraft carrier already named for war hero Doris Miller with his own name. Miller is the first enlisted man and first African American to have an aircraft carrier named for him. He is also the first African American to receive the Navy Cross, the Navy’s second highest honor, per NBC News on August 20, 2026.

On January 20, 2020, during Trump 1.0, the U.S. Navy announced the naming of CVN-81 as USS Doris Miller – one of six aircraft carriers in the Gerald R. Ford Class. The lead ship in the class, CVN 78, was commissioned in July 2017. The USS John F. Kennedy (CVN 79) is due to be delivered next year. The USS Enterprise (CVN 80) is due in 2030. USS Doris Miller (CVN 81) is due to be delivered in 2034. USS William J. Clinton (CVN 82) is due to be delivered in 2034. USS George W. Bush (CVN 83) is due out in 2036, per U.S. Naval Institute News.

One of the many summaries of Doris Miller’s life and heroism is by The National Museum of the Pacific War. “Doris Miller was born to Connery and Henrietta Miller, sharecroppers in Waco, Texas, on 12 October 1919. He had to drop out of school to help support his family, working as a cook



Descendants of Doris Miller gather at the official naming ceremony for the newly named aircraft carrier in Pearl Harbor on January 20, 2020 (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day).

COMMENTARY

to supplement the family income during the Great Depression. In 1939, just before his 20th birthday, he enlisted in the United States Navy, and after training in Norfolk, Virginia, Miller became a Mess Attendant, one of the few positions open to African Americans in the Navy. He was assigned to the USS West Virginia, which soon left to join the rest of the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor in response to increasing Japanese aggression.

Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, African American roles in the Navy were limited to messman and general service. Segregation was deeply ingrained into the military structure, and many of the leading military and political figures believed that not only would any white serviceman refuse to serve under a black man, but they

truly thought that such areas of authority were beyond the capabilities of any person of color. There was some discussion about finding other areas of service for blacks in the Navy, but very little came of it, until December of 1941.

On Sunday December 7, 1941, Mess Attendant Third Class Miller was retrieving laundry when the Japanese bombs fell on Pearl Harbor. He arrived on deck, where he encountered his mortally wounded commanding officer and carried him to safety. He proceeded to one of the machine guns and although black sailors never received training on the anti-aircraft guns, he opened fire on the Japanese planes overhead. After the gun ran out of ammunition, Miller assisted in evacuating sailors after the order to abandon ship and was one of the last three men to leave the vessel as it sank. Even after

leaving the ship, he helped numerous sailors to safety.

Miller continued to serve in the Navy as a mess attendant until November 24, 1943, when his carrier, USS Liscome Bay, was hit by a torpedo during the Gilbert Islands Campaign and its bomb magazine exploded, and most of the crew were killed. Miller was “presumed dead” and although his body was never recovered, he was declared killed in action after a year. Miller was 24 years old....Mess Attendant First Class Miller left behind a legacy that impacted generations to come. His actions during the attack on Pearl Harbor alone saved numerous lives, risking his own to ensure the safety of sailors escaping sinking ships and perilous waters and Japanese fire.”

While the Secretary of The Navy has the authority to name ships, when it comes to aircraft carriers, the Sec-



U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Alexander C. Kubitza. Mess Attendant Doris Miller photographed after receiving the Navy Cross for heroism by Admiral Chester Nimitz. PHOTO: BETTMAN ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES.

retary of Defense is often involved. The current SECDEF, former Fox News personality Pete Hegseth is now known for thwarting promotions of women and officers of color to the highest grades, establishing a pattern of racial and gender bias. It would add up that he is involved in this effort to replace Miller’s name with Trump’s.

This writer has messaged the Acting Secretary of the Navy, Hung Cao, a retired Navy Captain, to have my voice heard. You can do so also at <https://www.navy.mil/Resources/Contact-Us/>. At the naming ceremony on the hallowed ground of Pearl Harbor, then Former Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas B. Modly stated, “Doris Miller stood for everything that is good about our nation, and his story continues to be remembered and repeated wherever our people continue the watch today.”

NABJ Convention brings Black Journalists, Civic Leaders together in Atlanta

By Brandon Patterson
Oakland Post

The 52nd National Association of Black Journalists conference brought thousands of journalists, students, media executives and civic leaders to Atlanta Aug. 12-16 for its 2026 Convention and Career Fair, a five-day gathering centered on the theme “Our Revolution: Truth, Power and Black Journalism.”

Among the conference’s most closely watched sessions was Thursday’s Newsmaker Plenary, where House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries discussed the national political climate with NABJ President Errin Haines. Journalist Joy-Ann Reid later led a fireside conversation with legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, creator of the term “intersectionality,” and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones, author of the 1619 Project.

The plenary also turned toward grief, accountability



Civil Rights Attorney Ben Crump, (left) House Majority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, (middle) Rev. Al Sharpton, (right) at the NABJ Conference in Atlanta Aug. 13 with Elmore and Christine Wansley, parents of Nolan Wells, a Black 18-year-old who died July 4th week-end in Mississippi.

and justice as the parents of 18-year-old Nolan Wells, Christine Wells-Wonsley and Elmore

Wonsley, appeared with civil rights attorney Ben Crump and the Rev. Al Sharpton.

Crump was also the attorney for Trayvon Martin’s, Michael Brown’s, and Tamir Rice’s

families. Moderated by journalist Tiffany Cross, the Wells family’s appearance focused

on unanswered questions surrounding Nolan’s July death in Mississippi and calls for a federal review.

Reid and journalist Don Lemon also joined a separate discussion with Cross, columnist Michael Harriot and journalist Chandra Whitfield about career disruption, resilience and building independent platforms as Black journalists face layoffs and wider media industry upheaval.

Across generations, attendees exchanged ideas about sustaining careers and serving Black communities.

The gathering reflected NABJ’s long-standing role as both professional home and public forum for Black journalists. For Black-owned legacy newspapers, including ours, the Atlanta convention reinforced a familiar mandate: defend truth, elevate Black voices and connect national debates over politics, justice and media power to the communities most affected.

Will the Democrats come together in time to win the midterm elections?

By James B. Ewers Jr. Ed.D.
President Emeritus
Teen Mentoring Committee of Ohio

The political trade winds today are more complicated than they have ever been. The germaneness of traditional political parties is changing each day. I believe many Americans will agree with this assertion.

Over the years, there have been different sub names to political parties. What seems like a long time ago, there were the Dixiecrats. They were Democrats who formed a faction and were from the southern part of the country.

The Dixiecrats, a group of White men, was formed in 1948. Their main goal was to

fight against the Civil Rights agenda put forth by then President Harry S. Truman. They did not want the U.S. Armed Forces to include African Americans.

Throughout the ages, political parties have come up with different names to describe themselves. Philosophies of these groups have become more conservative and more liberal. That is my opinion.

The key to getting different political voices is to get a rallying cry and people to push a specific platform. Without these components, your ideas just fizzle away and go blowing in the wind.

One of the more interesting voices is that of Senator Bernie Sanders, an Independent from Vermont. He is a self-described Democratic Socialist. He is

now the longest serving Independent in United States history. As you recall, he favored universal healthcare for all Americans.

Now on the horizon is a group called the Progressive Democrats. There are almost 100 members in the House and Senate. The chair is Representative Greg Casar (TX).

Within the Progressive Democrats is a group called The Squad. They are led by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY). She is rumored to be a candidate for president in the 2026 election. We'll see what happens.

The Progressives want prescription drug prices lowered, want more consumer-friendly economic policies and to adjust corporate campaign contribu-

tions. According to reports, these ideas have caught on with the American people. Right now, the cost of living is increasing for everyday working-class citizens.

Opinion polling shows that voters want changes in America. The current system of using unbridled power to control people has run out of steam. Could it be that liberal, moderate and progressive Democrats might be elected to office. Reports show that Third Way\Global Strategy Group conducted a survey and found the above-mentioned Democratic groups stood out during recent polling.

Luke Bronin, a former mayor of Hartford, Connecticut defeated John Larson in that state's first Congressional district. Recently after his victory,

Bronin said, "Tonight, voters sent a message that if we are going to fix this mess we're in, we need to build a Democratic Party that's bringing a whole new energy to this fight. It's time to be courageous, bold, and clear about who we're fighting for and what we're fighting for."

The stage is set for the midterm elections in November. It's clear that non-traditional Democrats will play a major role as candidates. The ballots will have the names of men and women who have different values and visions of what this country will look like in the future.

There will be newcomers to these political races. Will they be able to galvanize voters in order for the Democrats

to win? The prevailing question is whether they can mount a united front and win when it counts?

Our America, the one that we call home, is experiencing some rough times now. Economic indicators at all levels show we are wading through uncharted waters. We are a ship at sea with no port in sight.

There is a window of opportunity now open for the Democratic Party. The opposing party has opened it themselves by the laws and policies that most Americans oppose. Trouble is brewing for them. There is an old expression that is relevant to this upcoming election. Will the Democrats strike while the iron is hot? The answer will come in less than ninety days.

American men have been in crisis for generations. A remedy from 1879 offers hope.

Working-class men of every color have been in crisis for generations.

The way out is to come together, for the sake of all our kids.

By Ben Jealous
People For the American Way

I understood the depth of it first at a friend's twenty-first birthday party in college. Somebody raised a glass to celebrate him. Then another raised his glass before it reached his shoulder and tipped it.

He poured libations for the ones who did not make it. Shot, or sent away, before the rest of us got to college. In a room of nothing but young Black and Latino men, we all joined in.

A Latino friend from childhood, hiding from his own gang the last time I saw him. My best friend, Black, locked up for taking a pair of sunglasses from a Goodwill. A Filipino buddy shot dead that summer over a drug deal, folks said.

Splash. Splash. Splash. Then a friend lifted his glass and toasted the plain fact that one more of us had lived to twenty-one.

That cut me like a knife. In the richest country on earth, we were congratulating a Black man for breathing past his birthday.

That grief runs deep in our community. But it floats on deeper American water.

Not long after, my mind raced through every young man I knew who was suffering or gone. Among them, White friends whose father killed himself when we were teenagers, after the plant let him go.

Last week I promised you numbers on the crisis facing our nation's men. Here are a few.

Start with work. About seven million American men between twenty-five and fifty-four are neither working nor looking for a job. More than

one in ten. Every recovery of the last fifty years has left that share higher.

Then violence, which wears two extreme faces. In 2023 Black men were murdered, usually by other Black men, at roughly eight times the rate of White men. Meanwhile White men killed themselves at nearly twice the rate of Black men.

Then prison. America locks up more of its people than almost any nation on earth. Here is what nobody says. Count White Americans alone and they are still locked up at several times the rate of Canada, Germany, or Japan.

This is a national problem, far bigger than any one community.

And yet we stay a house divided. Divide and conquer is the oldest game in America. The British brought it here to keep the king rich. The Revolution should have killed it. It did not, because it works just as well at helping the rich get richer.

Whenever working people have reason to stand together, somebody pits them against each other. Dr. King named it in Montgomery in 1965. Borrowing from historian C. Vann Woodward, he called segregation a strategy to keep the masses divided and labor cheap.

After that party I went to my grandmother's house and laid the burden on her table.

Her grandfather was Edward David Bland, born enslaved in Virginia in 1848. He was sixteen when he walked out of slavery in the last days of the war, and he learned to make shoes.

Then he went into politics at the worst moment imaginable. Reconstruction was over, the troops sent home, the men who once ran the Confederacy taking it back with rifles.

He did the arithmetic any-

way. Poor White farmers wanted the same free schools his people wanted. Together they were a majority. Apart, they cancelled each other out.

So, he pushed for a deal with the unlikely partner in Virginia, a railroad magnate and former Confederate general named William Mahone. In 1879 Bland stood before his own people and made the case. He won them over.

They called themselves Readjusters, and they swept into power. In a few short years they abolished the whipping post, repealed the poll tax, and funded schools for every child. Virginia had 415 Black teachers in 1879. Soon it had 1,588.

Then, in Danville, on November 3, 1883, after a circular full of lies about Black rule swept the town, white gunmen killed at least five people, four of them Black. Three days later white supremacists took back the legislature. The oldest trick, right on time. Still, they had governed four years, in the old capital of the Confederacy.

The men in trouble today are in trouble together. The White man in the hollowed-out mill town and the Black man on the South Side want the same thing. A better future for their children.

They are not each other's problem. Nobody is coming to tell them so. Bland did not wait for anyone. He did the math, organized, and made it real.

The old Readjuster arithmetic still works. Divided we cancel out our children's dreams. Together our families are the majority that can make them real. Let's get to work.

Ben Jealous is a professor of practice at the University of Pennsylvania and former president and CEO of the NAACP.

Getting married is easy but staying in love is not

By LaShunda Calvert, Ph.D.
Tips for a Good Marriage

If you have ever been in love with your spouse, you know that it is the best feeling imaginable. However, if spouses do not

work hard to maintain the spark of being in love with each other, the spark will greatly be reduced and/or disseminate to nothing. In other words, getting married is easy but staying in love with each other is not.

Are you currently in love with your spouse?

Being in love with your spouse feels like the following:

- Spouse knows and others can see it (hhmmmm – think on this for a minute)
- Go out of your way to protect your spouse's heart
- Have selfless love versus selfish love
- Care for each other's well-being
- Patient
- Hold each other accountable and you do not enable each other because you understand that it can negatively impact your marriage
- Apologize quickly – admit your wrong and tries to fix it/ make up for it
- Forgive quickly – don't stay mad for long
- Consistently and positively think about your spouse
- Anxious to see your spouse
- Work well together even down to doing household chores together
- Plan your future together
- Plan fun activities/dates often
- Enjoy communicating with your spouse/text each other throughout the day
- Can be vulnerable and talk to your spouse about anything – friends/besties
- Express gratitude to each other often
- Give eye contact with each other
- Can't keep your hands off each other – affection is present
- Trust each other – feel comfort/safe with him/her
- Can be yourself – this is

extremely important – can you truly be yourself?

- Intimacy - Quenching each other's thirst
- YOU ARE GENUINELY HAPPY!
- Have no doubts that you want to spend the rest of your lives with each other until death do you part

If you are not in love with spouse based on the signs above – what happened that caused you to no longer be in love?

There are various factors that can contribute to the dismantling of you not being in love like a lack of communication, lack of respect, constant nagging, constant criticism, lack of appreciation, can't be yourself, have no say so – your opinion doesn't matter, don't take accountability for your wrong, unforgiveness, unresolved conflict, living in the past, broken trust like affairs, financial infidelity, and secrets, etc. financial issues, division with parenting, abuse, spouse neglect (you are a part-time spouse), spouse abandonment, lack of intimacy, growing in isolation instead of growing into one, etc.

Is it possible to reignite the in-love experience you had with your spouse?

Yes, I believe it is possible to fall in love with your spouse again.

I believe if you both consistently adhere to the following you can help save your marriage and fall in love with each other again:

- Fall and stay in love with God FIRST
- Engage in self-healing/marriage healing and restoration
- Go out of your way to protect each other's hearts
- Seek God for strategies
- Pray together and for each other daily
- Check in daily with each other
- Apologize quickly and don't repeat the hurt/offense – if your spouse is willing to forgive you – why would you continue hurting them?
- Forgive quickly
- Love your spouse unconditionally

Carefully communicate about EVERYTHING– sometimes it's not what you say that triggers hurts/ offense -it's how you say it honey

• Listen and give eye contact – (put Max (Pro Max) and Proretta (Pro) away – iPhone users know what I mean...

• Reassure each other of your commitment and love

• Empathize

• If you caused mistrust – restore it daily

• Don't enable each other as described above

• Spend quality time together

• Have FUN together

• Help your spouse – Ex. house chores

• Show gratitude

• Hug/be affectionate

• Plan your future together

• Husbands woo woo your wife - she wants flowers, gifts, special dinners, surprise dates, dances, etc.

• Wives respect your husbands but husbands you must earn this respect – otherwise it will be hard for your wife to respect you

In conclusion, getting married is easy but staying in love with each other is not. However, you can turn your marriage around for the better and fall in love with each other again. But it will require both of you to become intentional about having a healthy and happy marriage as described above. Lastly, falling in love with each other again is a choice – a choice that my husband and I recently made and by the Grace of God it is so far, so good. Every day you wake up is an opportunity to woo woo and fall in love with your spouse again!

Contact Dr. LaShunda Calvert for speaking engagements (Motivational, Ministering, Marriage Counseling, Marriage Workshops, Marriage Seminars, Marriage Conferences, etc.) Marriage Ministry: The Restoration Church, Suite H, Jackson, MS. 39206, on: Instagram: letsstay2gether4ever (Dr. LaShunda Calvert) Facebook: Dr. LaShunda Calvert Email:letsstaytogether4eva@gmail.com Contact # 601-596-2528

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P R E S E R V E D

Taking the Limits off of God

By Shewanda Riley
Columnist



"I'm not a man, I cannot lie. I know the plans for your life, I'm asking you to dream again, believe again and take the limits off of me." – Israel Houghton

These words from an Israel Houghton song point to an aspect of living a Christian life that can sometimes be difficult. As Christians, we believe God but find it hard to take the limits

off of Him to do "exceedingly and abundantly" as Ephesians 3:20 says. How do you take the limits off of God who is beyond space or time? You have to first acknowledge that you've put limits on Him not by a lack of faith but by having narrow faith and low expectations.

There have been times in my life when I found myself proudly proclaiming freedom as a Christian but living with low expectations of God. And lately, I've had conversations with friends who have the same

problem. For example, one friend shared how excited she was to start a business. She knew that she had exercised great faith by starting the business. However, now that she'd made such a big step of faith, she found herself dealing with the fears and uncertainty of what to expect in the future. As a result, she was struggling with the low expectations that she'd set. Even though she'd dreamed big by starting the business in the first place, she was uncomfortable as she felt pulled to dream even bigger.

And that's where she was stuck. I knew how she felt because I'd been there before myself many times.

For example, when I was looking to purchase a home over a decade ago, I started looking at homes that were 5 years old or less. After not having much luck, I talked to my real estate agent about how difference in price it would be to have a home built. After looking into it, I was surprised to learn that it was cheaper to have the house built. In the end, I had the house built just

like I wanted it and learned to trust God in a totally new way.

Taking the limits off of God is not about being greedy but about realizing that the same God who blessed you with \$10 also can bless you with \$1,000. We just have to have faith to boldly go to Him and ask for the greater blessing. I've often struggled with asking God for more in certain areas of my life because I felt like I was being selfish. However, God had to remind me that he had been waiting to give me the greater blessings. God is waiting to

bless us and won't force us to take the "limitless" blessing if we don't ask for it. But he's more than happy to give that limitless blessing when we take the limits off and trust him without limitations.

Shewanda Riley is a Fort Worth-based author of "Love Hangover: Moving from Pain to Purpose After a Relationship Ends" and "Writing to the Beat of God's Heart: A Book of Prayers for Writers." Email her at preservedbypurpose@gmail.com or follow her on Twitter @shewanda

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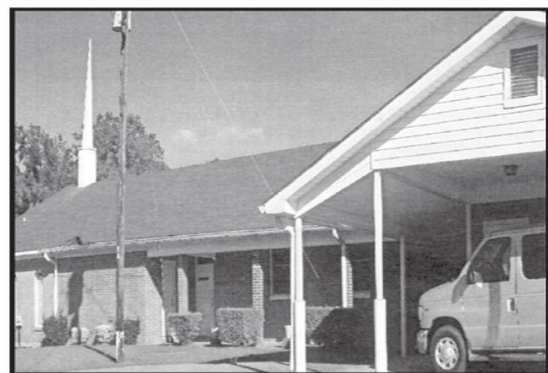
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A legacy of service: Lee A. Unger celebrates 70 Years

By Dr. Edelia J. Carthan
Contributing Writer

Family, friends, former colleagues and community leaders gathered Saturday, August 15, at the Arts Center of Mississippi in downtown Jackson to celebrate the 70th birthday of Lee A. Unger, honoring a life marked by leadership, mentorship, family and service.

The celebration was more than a birthday party. It provided an opportunity to recognize a man whose influence stretches across his family, his community and generations of students connected to The Piney Woods School.

Unger devoted 28 years to Piney Woods, beginning as a staff accountant and eventually serving as vice president for fiscal affairs and interim administrator. His contributions, however, extended far beyond budgets and financial reports. Throughout his career, Unger became a mentor and father figure to students, providing guidance, encouragement and, at times, financial assistance to help students continue their education.

Will Crossley, president of The Piney Woods School, was among those who spoke during the celebration, reflecting on Unger's years of service and the lasting impact he made on the institution and its students.

Crossley has previously credited Unger with opening doors for others, including recommending him for



Lee A. Unger celebrated his 70th birthday surrounded by family, friends and community leaders at the Arts Center of Mississippi in downtown Jackson on August 15, 2026. PHOTOS BY DR. JAY

service on the Community Foundation for Mississippi board. "There are people behind us who are doing good work for us, and we ought to take the time to say thank you," Crossley said when Piney Woods honored Unger for his service.

That same commitment to service extends beyond Piney Woods. Unger currently serves as president of the Brookhollow Place Neighborhood Association, where he actively advocates for residents and improvements in his community.

Hinds County Supervisor Wanda Evers, who spoke during the birthday celebration, shared an example of Unger's hands-on leadership. She recalled receiving a call from him telling her, "We have some roads that need paving over here."

Her story brought laughter, but it also illustrated the type of leader Unger has been throughout his life. When something needs to be done, he makes the call, asks the question and works to get it done.

A graduate of Alcorn State Univer-

sity and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Unger's life reflects a longstanding commitment to education, leadership and service.

Among those joining the celebration were Dr. Eddie J. Carthan, Dr. Neketa Carthan, Cissy Carthan-Bowen, Dr. Rodney and Dr. Heather Denne, Derrick and Erica Cannon, Jeff Tinsley, Ruby Darbandi, Linda and Tom Irwin, Pastor and Mrs. Joe Anderson, Ced and Frances Langston, Genette Holmes, Michelle Washington-Cage, Shirley Barfield, Michael Fleming,



Lee A. Unger, with his sons, Dr. Rodney Denne, left, and Jeff Tinsley, right. PHOTO BY RODNEY HART

Sandra Anderson, Annie Williams Washington, Bennie and Mae McDaniel, James Alfred and others.

Public and community leaders attending included Supervisor Evers, Commissioner De'Keither Stamps and State Rep. Stephanie Foster.

For his family, Unger's legacy cannot be measured simply by professional titles or years of service. He has long been considered part of the glue that holds the family together—the person relatives can call for advice, assistance and encouragement.

Reaching 70 is a milestone. Reaching it surrounded by people whose lives have been influenced by your presence tells an even greater story.

Unger's legacy demonstrates that leadership does not always require a spotlight. Sometimes leadership means showing up, solving problems, opening doors and helping someone else move forward.

His 70th birthday celebration gave family, friends, colleagues and community members an opportunity to say something that Crossley reminded those gathered is important to say while people are here to receive it, "thank you."

About the Author: Dr. Edelia J. Carthan is President and CEO of Carthan Enterprises and Fabulous Fun Rentals. She is an educator, entrepreneur, author and contributing writer for The Mississippi Link.



Institute improves Community Health via action and impact

Mississippi Link Newswire

The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health takes its mission beyond the four walls of its offices and directly into local communities. From health education and screenings to vital resources and support, the Institute meets people where they are and helps connect them to the tools needed to live healthier lives. The Institute's work is more than outreach. It's the action and impact necessary to reduce health disparities in Mississippi, one community at a time.

Throughout this summer, the Institute has engaged residents from the State Capitol to the Mississippi Delta. By hosting and participating in public health community gatherings, the Institute listens to residents, identifies community needs and connects individuals and families to resources that can make a meaningful difference in their lives. Whether providing prostate cancer information, offering free STI screenings, distributing essential baby supplies or supporting teens who want to quit vaping, the Institute remains committed to removing barriers, building trust and creat-



Throughout the month of August, the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health has been in the community at various events. Institute CEO/Founding President Sandra C. Melvin shared health information and distributed essential baby supplies to Metro Area families. During the Black Men's Wellness Walk in downtown Jackson, the team encouraged participants to prioritize preventive care. At Mississippi Delta Community College, students received information about the risks of vaping and tobacco use.

ing opportunities for Mississippians to improve their health outcomes.

For more information or to access Institute programs visit, minority-institute.org

About the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health

The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health is a Mississippi-based nonprofit organization dedi-

cated to reducing health disparities through education, advocacy, research, and community partnerships. The organization works to improve health outcomes and advance health

equity for underserved populations across Mississippi by developing innovative, community-driven solutions that improve lives one community at a time.





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AccelerateMS, Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid launch UPSKILL Mississippi Grant

The Mississippi Link Newswire

AccelerateMS and the Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid launched the UPSKILL Mississippi Grant, creating a new pathway for adult Mississippians to access state financial aid for education and training connected to critical careers.

Created by House Bill 562 during the 2026 legislative session, UPSKILL Mississippi — Upgrading Priority Skills for Key Industry Learning and Labor — provides last-dollar financial assistance to eligible Mississippians enrolled in workforce-aligned certificate and associate degree programs at the state’s public community and junior colleges.

Under the legislation, AccelerateMS is responsible for identifying eligible programs annually based on Mississippi’s priority sectors and occupations. The State Workforce Investment Board has approved the initial list, which includes programs in advanced manufacturing and industrial maintenance, construction and skilled trades, agriculture, transportation and maritime, and healthcare.

“UPSKILL is about being more intentional with the tools we already have,” said Dr. Courtney Taylor, executive director of AccelerateMS. “When we know where Mississippi has workforce shortages and where employers are creating opportunity, we should be reducing barriers that keep people from connecting to those opportunities. Aligning financial aid with priority occupations gives more Mississippians a way to build valuable skills while strengthening the talent pipeline our economy depends on.”

The UPSKILL Mississippi Grant will be administered by the Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid. For eligible recipients, the grant will cover remaining tuition and fees after other gift aid has been applied and provide an additional \$500 annual stipend for books and materials.

“UPSKILL Mississippi creates an important new opportunity for adult Mississippians who may have thought the cost of returning to school to pursue a credential or degree was out of reach,” said Dr. Jennifer Rogers, executive director of the Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid. “By pairing state financial aid with programs connected to workforce opportunity, we can help students make informed choices about their education while reducing one of the biggest barriers to completing it.”

To qualify, applicants must

meet requirements established in HB 562, including being at least 24 years old, meeting Mississippi residency requirements, completing the FAFSA and Mississippi Aid Application, and enrolling at least half-time in an eligible program at a Mississippi public community or junior college.

UPSKILL Mississippi goes beyond tuition assistance by requiring participating institutions to provide recipients with additional support designed to help them complete their programs and transition into the workforce. Those supports include advising or success coaching, career planning, connections to paid practicums or apprenticeships when available, and assistance identifying resources for needs such as childcare and transportation.

“Mississippi has to be strategic about how we invest in workforce development,” said Sen. Nicole Boyd. “UPSKILL gives us a way to focus state resources on the skills our economy needs most while creating a stronger connection between education, workforce development and the industries driving growth in our state.”

The program will launch with a limited pilot, followed by a full pilot during the 2027-28 academic year and full implementation beginning with the 2028-29 academic year.

“Strengthening Mississippi’s workforce is not a one-year initiative; it is a long-term investment in the future of our state,” said Rep. Donnie Bell. “By continuing to strengthen quality career training and pathways into high-demand fields, we can create opportunities that benefit Mississippi families, communities and employers for years to come.”

“Workforce development isn’t simply about creating more training programs. It’s about making sure our policies, investments and institutions are working together toward the same outcomes,” Taylor said. “UPSKILL Mississippi is another step toward building that kind of system — one that starts with where Mississippi’s economy is going and helps our people get there.”

Adults enrolling in eligible programs at a Mississippi community college may apply now by completing the 2026-27 Mississippi Aid Application (MAAPP) available online at www.msfinancialaid.org. Students who have already completed a 2026-27 MAAPP may apply by logging into their MAAPP Dashboard and updating their application.

Canton Career Center - Advanced Manufacturing “Student of the Month”

The Mississippi Link Newswire

De’Kyiah Handy, a Canton Career Center Advanced Manufacturing student was chosen as “The student of the Month” and was awarded a \$100 gift certificate for this accomplishment.

The Student of the Month is a Madison County Business League & Foundation program that serves as a vital networking initiative that connects local industry with motivated and talented career and technical education students.

The career center, which is located in Canton, MS, features an advanced manufacturing and engineering curriculum.

By showcasing exceptional individuals, the program plays a crucial role in fostering the essential skills that strengthen the local workforce in Madison County.

This collaborative effort not only supports students’ aspirations but also paves the way for a brighter, more prosperous future for the entire community.



(L-R) Michael Ellis Canton CC, Lindsey Fordis Advanced Manufacturing COE Teacher (Nissan), Shirley Danzy - Workforce Development (Nissan), De’Kyiah Handy, student of the month; Jason Derryberry - Workforce Development (Nissan) and Clifton Goodloe III – Director of Operations (Nissan)

Alcorn State University President delivers State of the University address

ASU Newswire

Alcorn State University President Tracy M. Cook opened the 2026 Faculty and Staff Institute on August 10th with a State of the University Address that set one expectation for the year ahead, everyone owns the university’s future.

Cook delivered in the James L. Bolden Campus Union Ballroom, launching the two-day institute themed “Student Success Reimagined.” He framed the year around his institutional vision, and three commitments meant to guide how the university operates — customer service, protecting resources through efficiency and capacity building for the future.

Enrollment led the list. “Enrollment is not just a Student Affairs affair,” Cook said. “It’s a university wide responsibility.”

He asked faculty and staff to recruit directly, noting that growth in the student body drives the budget that funds salaries and services.

He tied the message to pay. The university secured raises this year, he said, and is working to move long-tenured employees into more competitive



ASU President, Tracy M. Cook

salary bands.

He also acknowledged the funding gaps that separate Alcorn from the state’s larger institutions — differences he said the university must keep pressing to close.

The address doubled as a construction preview.

Cook pointed to residence hall upgrades, a planned science building and athletics improvements that include tennis courts and a new soccer and track facility on the site of the old football field. The (roughly) \$28 million plus Davey L. Whitney HPER

Complex is set to begin within weeks.

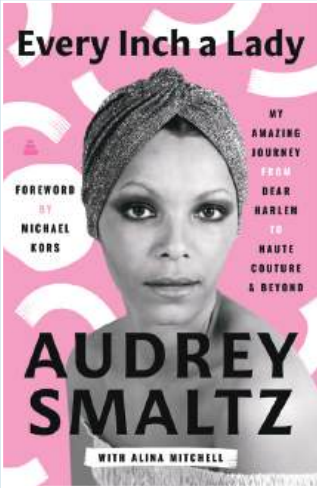
Then he turned to artificial intelligence.

AI is not new, Cook said, and Alcorn cannot treat it as a passing trend. He challenged employees to fold the technology into teaching, advising and daily operations rather than working around it. The theme carried through the institute, which featured sessions on teaching and writing with AI, led by Jose Bowen of the Bowen Innovation Group, and an introduction to the university’s EAB Navigate stu-

dent success platform.

He closed with a charge that was part institutional, part personal. Do the work. Meet deadlines. Take care of your health and your family and take a real vacation. He reminded the audience that Alcorn has stood for 155 years and pointed to a larger ambition — building toward R2 research status while keeping the culture that makes people want to stay.

“Do your job, and do your job well,” Cook said. “That’s all I ask.



BOOK REVIEW:

EVERY INCH A LADY:
MY AMAZING JOURNEY FROM DEAR HARLEM TO
HAUTE COUTURE & BEYOND

BY AUDREY SMALTZ WITH ALINA MITCHELL,
FOREWORD BY MICHAEL KORS,
C.2026, AMISTAD
\$27.00 • 256 PAGES

By Terri Schlichenmeyer
Columnist

Snaps, zippers, buttons, ties. Toss that garment on, pull it up, wrap it around, you know what you like and how to wear it. The color is perfect for your skin tone; the fabric enhances your form. Yep, you always look your best and, as in the new book “Every Inch a Lady” by Audrey Smaltz (with Alina Mitchell), that best is fabulous. Born, bred, toasted, buttered, jellied, and honeyed in Harlem” in 1937, Audrey Smaltz was a force to be reck-

oned with almost from the time she could walk. Her parents imbued confidence in her, they nurtured her creativity and sent her to charm school, but they never allowed her to create a stir.

“That,” says Smaltz, “is not what ladies did.”

By the time she was a teenager, Smaltz was modeling for New York City designers. Shortly thereafter, she started working for a married man with whom she had an affair, and whom she loved very much. She broke up with him, attend-

ed college, worked a series of jobs that taught her about fashion and jobs that didn’t seem to fit her. An ill-fated marriage took her to Chicago where she ultimately landed a position that sent her to work in Ebony magazine’s New York office.

Working at Ebony was a career-changer, in a way. Smaltz was able to travel the world and learn more about fashion, but she didn’t exactly get along with her boss.

Finally, seizing an opportunity, Smaltz decided to launch her own company, Audrey

Smaltz, Inc., a “fashion production business,” but she couldn’t get any designers to take a chance on her. Undaunted, she reorganized, re-branded, hit the streets, and knocked on doors until she finally found one client, which led to many others.

Through it all, her personal life was a whirlwind. She dated “more men than you can shake a book at,” settling down occasionally, briefly. Fashion had always been her first love, but she accidentally found real love, “the love of a woman,” at a leadership course...

There’s an old saying that writers need to add lots of “color” into their stories. Read a little of “Every Inch a Lady,” and you’ll notice immediately that author Audrey Smaltz (with Alina Mitchell) quite literally takes that to heart by mentioning nearly every color of the spectrum here. Hmm.

That oddity aside, Smaltz is a wonderfully lively storyteller, speaking with the energy of a woman much younger to the heart of anyone who loves fashion. That glee extends to collectors of vintage clothing, who

will be delighted to read about the industry long ago and the way things worked then. Smaltz says she experienced racism, which is not unusual for pre-Civil Rights America, but doors were surprisingly closed for other reasons that will astound anyone who’s savvy about the fashion industry, even today.

There’s quite a bit of name-dropping in this book but most of it belongs in the anecdotes, so you likely won’t mind. If you’re a fashionista, too, find “Every Inch a Lady,” and snap it up.



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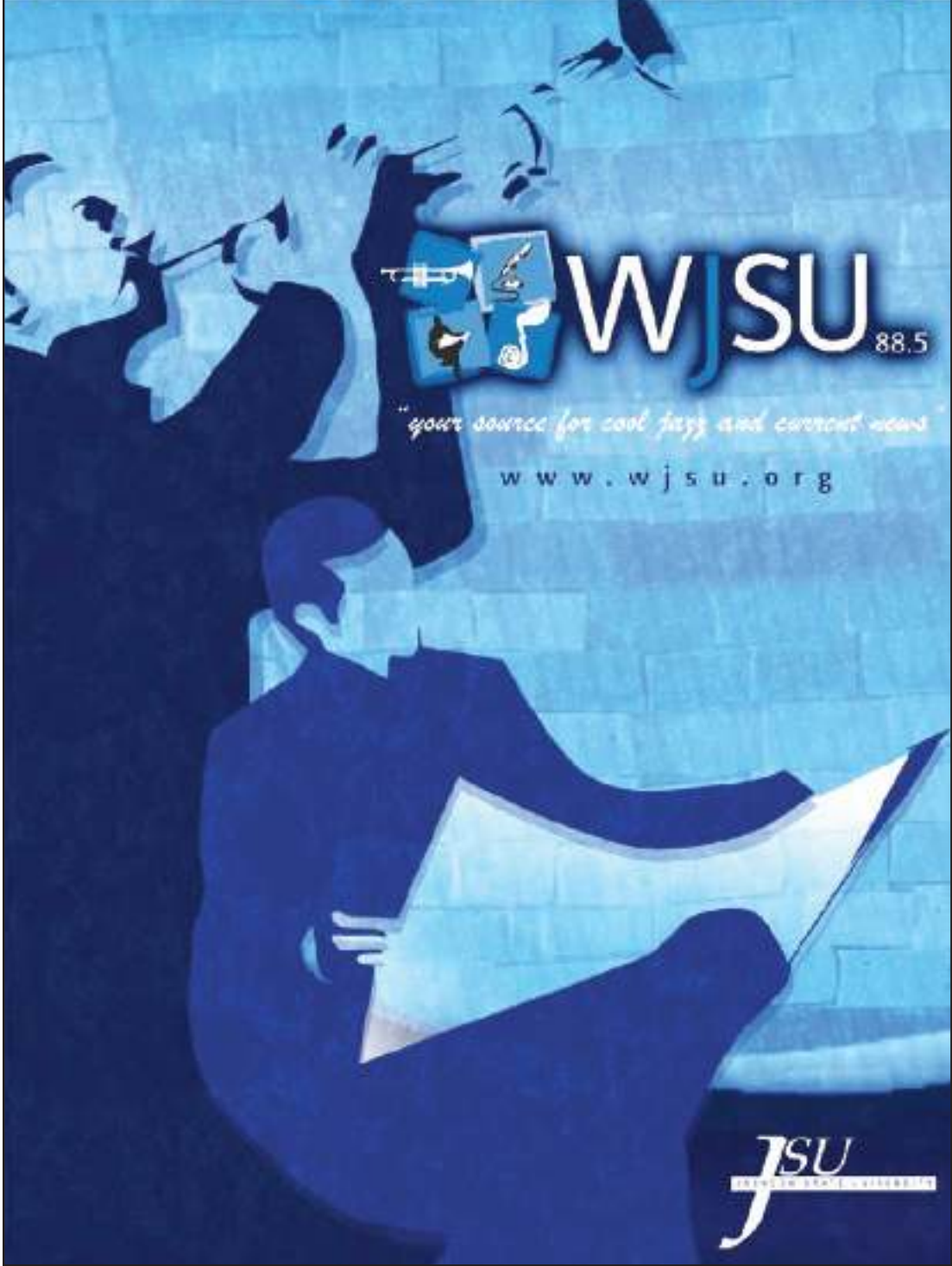
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HINDS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT WEEKLY UPDATE

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY SUCCESS

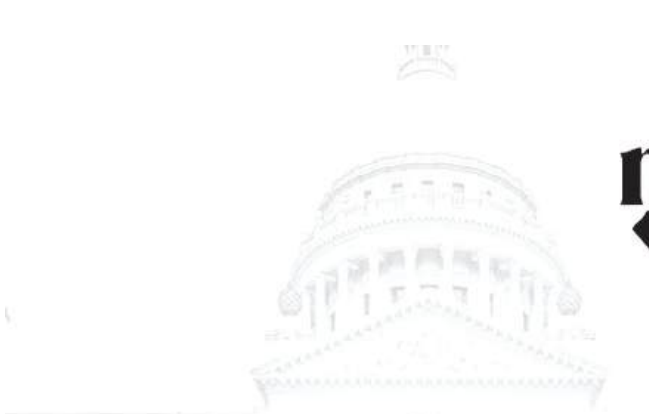
What a day to F.L.E.X.! Professional Development Day was filled with learning, collaboration, team spirit, and plenty of HCSD pride!

Our Transformation Teams, UBUNTU, KAIZEN, LUMEN, ÉLAN, and ARETÉ, showed up and showed OUT in their team colors, waving their flags, sharing their chants, and celebrating the values that make each team unique. The energy was contagious!

Then, it was time to learn. Our HCSD Professional Development F.L.E.X. Faculty stepped into the spotlight to share their knowledge and expertise with colleagues across the district. From instructional practices, customer service, special education, transportation safety and more, our professional achievers spent the day learning from one another and strengthening the work we do for students every day.

This is what happens when professional learning meets community, collaboration, and a little friendly team competition! We laughed. We learned. We celebrated. We FLEXed: Focused Leadership, Learning and Literacy to Elevate eXcellence.





we must vote

MISSISSIPPI REDISTRICTING HEARINGS

REVISED SCHEDULE - ALL HEARINGS BEGIN AT 6:00 P.M.

Thursday, Aug. 27 - Northwest

Northwest Mississippi Community College, Ranger Center Conference Room 107-109, 1210 Church Rd., Southaven, MS

Tuesday, Sept. 1 - Delta

Delta State University, Bologna Performing Arts Center (BPAC), 1003 West Sunflower Rd., Cleveland, MS

Tuesday, Sept. 8 - Southwest

Alcorn State University, MBA Building Auditorium, Natchez ASU Campus, 15 Campus Dr., Natchez, MS

Thursday, Sept. 10 - East Central

Meridian Community College, McCain Theater, 910 Highway 19 North, Meridian, MS

Thursday, Sept. 17 - Pine Belt

University of Southern Mississippi, Mannoni Performing Arts Center, 3057 Hardy St., Hattiesburg, MS

Tuesday, Sept. 22 - Gulf Coast

Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Hospitality and Resort Management Center, 420 Debuys Rd., Biloxi, MS

Thursday, Oct. 1 - Metro

Mississippi Legislature, State Capitol, 400 High St., Jackson, MS

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5th Annual Grandparents Really Do Matter Luncheon attracts hundreds and says, “Thank You”

By Janice K. Neal-Vincent, Ph.D.
Contributing Writer

An event to remember in more ways than one was the 5th Annual Grandparents Really Do Matter Luncheon - orchestrated by Minister Nancy Gaynor - Chief Executive Officer/Founder. Held at New Horizon Church International (1170 Bobby Rush Blvd, Jackson, MS 39204), which is pastored by Bishop Henry Joseph III, the free event lasted from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and brought forth several hundred people from the City of Jackson and surrounding areas. Included were residents, pastors, city officials, businesspersons, friends and acquaintances who showed deference to grandparents and seniors. Co-emcees were State Representative Fabian Nelson and Executive Linda Chess, Byram Chamber of Commerce. A large number of community leaders served as celebrity waitresses and waiters.

From Gaynor’s purpose-driven, storied ministry, she felt the impact of the organization that has become a movement. She told the crowd that she has been raising her grandson since her daughter-in-law was killed in a car accident. At the time her grandson was two years old. Her son was not in a position to raise his son, but the minister was able to adopt him.

“I found out then that I couldn’t get anything from the State of Mississippi because you have to have the parents’ permission. Eight and a half years have been a challenge. It becomes really overwhelming,” she said. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency supports fellow grandparents who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren.



Ribbon Cutting PHOTO BY JANICE NEAL-VINCENT

Voiced Gaynor, “Grandparents Really Do Matter is not a program, it’s a movement to empower, stimulate, and motivate a change for the betterment of ourselves and our grandchildren. We proudly take on the responsibility to seek and save those who may be overwhelmed.” Being overwhelmed can result from a parent’s drug addiction, incarceration, missing in action or some other causes.

The celebratory occasion was a way of sharing the role of the organization and extending an invitation to the community to volunteer their time by uplifting grandparents who serve as caregivers for their grandchildren. In assisting grandparents, Grandparents Really Do Matter collects year-round donations for food pantry items, clothing funds, school supplies, and counseling. The organization also has monthly support groups.

A number of accolades were expressed by city officials and others to Minister Gaynor for her compassion for grandparents and senior citizens.

Nic Lott - Director of Communication for the City of Jackson - honored her with a proclamation. The proclamation recognized Gaynor’s steadfastness in supporting full-time grandparent caregivers.

Throughout the gathering, friends and acquaintances mingled. Many who had not seen each other in a while expressed joy for their fellowship. They also exchanged contact information.

Several persons paused and commented about the occasion. Said Thomas Cheatham Jr., “This is a wonderful thing for Minister Gaynor to do.” “This event encourages, strengthens, and shares love to grandparents as they go through this season of life,” voiced Songbird Desiree Johnson. Dr. Charles Smarty Pants King, Jr. asserted, “History isn’t here to make us comfortable. It’s here to make us honest.”

In their open letters, several dignitaries honored grandparents. Congressman Bennie Thompson com-

mended them for their strength, prayer, emotional stability, knowledge, wisdom, patience and sacrifice. Hinds County Sheriff Tyree Jones stated, “To every grandparent being honored today - please know that your sacrifices are seen, your tears are valued, and your labor of love is deeply appreciated.”

Mayor Richard White of the City of Byram penned that events like the luncheon are essential for honoring grandparents raising their grandchildren for “the health and future of our communities.” Mayor Willis Thompson of the City of Vicksburg was grateful for the occasion and noted, “We must make a conscious effort to bring our youth and grandparents together to learn from one another and improve our community. This will promote love, unity, and caring relationships.”

Minister Gaynor mentioned her gratefulness to the State of Mississippi, attendants and well-wishers in their absence. She called for volun-



Minister Gaynor receives a proclamation from Nic Lott on behalf of The City of Jackson PHOTO BY KEVIN BRADLEY

teers to work for the good of children. Acknowledging that “It takes a village,” she commended grandparents for “taking on the responsibility for the day- to-day health care, social welfare, financial needs and spiritual guidance.”

The honoree explained that every second Tuesday of the month from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. is a phenomenon that occurs in her office. “We need help. We’re hoping to get resources for our grandchildren. Keep us in your prayers, and don’t let us feel down.”

Grandparents Do Matter is located at 192 Office Park Plaza, Jackson, MS 39206. Hours of operation are from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday-Friday. The telephone number is 601-317-5724.

PHOTOS BY JANICE NEAL-VINCENT AND KEVIN BRADLEY

