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Volume 42, No. 10 • March 7, 2018

Jones County EDA welcomes new Laurel Superintendent Toy L. Watts

By Linda Cranford

The Board of Directors of the Jones County Economic Development Authority and Chamber of Commerce recently hosted a reception for Dr. Toy L. Watts, the new superintendent of education for the Laurel School District.

Alecia Walker, Chamber of Commerce Chair, welcomed Watts and offered the services of the Chamber of Commerce and the EDA to her should she ever need it.

"I'm excited about being in Laurel and Jones County; it's like a dream come true," exclaimed Watts. "I really think that Laurel is properly positioned to take off. Once we get the schools right, you might as well buy property now, because you're not going to be able to get any. That's what people are waiting on and I know that. It's a big job I have ahead of me. I believe we can get there. We've got some really good people working with us, and I know it's just a matter of time before we continue to attract positive people who will continue to give us the educational foundation for our children that we need. I'm looking forward to that. I'm very glad to be here. Everybody's been so welcoming, and everybody doesn't mind sharing with me how much they've been praying for me – long before I arrived and long before they even knew who I was. I'm a woman of prayer myself. Prayer's what got me here."

Watts was selected for the superintendent position from 22 applicants and 10 finalists. She has over 20 years' ex-



Dr. Toy L. Watts said being selected as the Superintendent of Education for the Laurel School District was "a dream come true." Photo/Linda Cranford

perience in education, having served as teacher, counselor, coach, principal and assistant superintendent. She has worked in multiple districts including Pass Christian, Bay St. Louis, Vicksburg-Warren, Atlanta Public Schools and Moss Point.

Watts received a Bachelor of Arts in elementary educa-

tion from Dillard University in 1996, a Master of Education in school counseling from the University of Southern Mississippi in 2001, a Specialist in Education in educational administration from USM in 2008, and a Doctor of Philosophy in educational administration from USM in 2012. She comes to Laurel from the Moss Point School District, where she has served as assistant superintendent since 2015.

Watts began working with the Laurel School District on January 1, with a yearly salary of \$135,000 and a three-and-a-half year contract term.



Dr. Toy L. Watts, right, talks with Greg Bennett, left, during the EDA/Chamber of Commerce reception.

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McDaniel announces bid for the U.S. Senate

By Linda Cranford

State Senator Chris McDaniel, who is adopting a campaign battle cry to “Remember Mississippi,” announced Wednesday, February 28, his bid to challenge Roger Wicker for the U.S. Senate in the GOP Primary in June.

Approximately 200 followers gathered in the auditorium of the Home and Health Services Center on the campus of Jones County Junior College in Ellisville.

“Feels good to be here again,” began McDaniel. “It’s been four years ago, but we still remember Mississippi.”

Acknowledging his two sons, Cambridge and Chamberland, and his wife, Jill, McDaniel said, “I love you all very much. I know it’s hard. We’ve waited this long to make our announcement because we know our lives are about to be torn apart. But you know, sons, some fights are worth having.”

“I’m tired of electing people from Mississippi who go to Washington to score points for the other team,” stated McDaniel. “I’m tired of hearing about how we’ve got to reach across the aisle and compromise for the likes of Schumer, Reed and Pelosi. When is the last time any conservative reached across any aisle and received any benefit? We’ve been reaching across the aisle for 50 years and what do we have? We’ve got 21 trillion reasons to never reach across the aisle again.”

“Washington is disconnected,” continued McDaniel. “If Washington looks down on us, and they do, it’s because men like Roger Wicker have failed to stand with you. Roger



State Senator Chris McDaniel announced Wednesday, February 28, his bid to challenge Roger Wicker for the U.S. Senate seat. Photos/Linda Cranford

Wicker has remained eerily silent for the first 24 years of his tenure. Thank God for President Trump. He has made Roger Wicker a conservative for about three weeks.”

McDaniel pointed out how Wicker has come alive lately since finding out he might possibly have a primary challenger. “He wants you to forget about all those bad votes. He wants you to ignore all that bad stuff for the last 24 years,” said McDaniel. “He’s says, ‘But, but, but, I’ve voted with Trump.’ We didn’t fall off the turnip truck yesterday. Let me very clear about something, I’m tired of the way things are being done in Washington. Donald Trump told us he wanted to drain the swamp. I’m going to go there and help him drain the swamp.”

If I’m elected, I’m not going up there and beg; I’m going up there and fight. I’m not going up there to be a leadership lap dog. I’m going up there to be Mississippi’s bulldog,” declared McDaniel.

McDaniel encouraged the citizens of Mississippi to look at Wicker’s voting record. “Don’t take my word for it. There are objective score cards by which we measure these individuals. Go look up the actual data for yourself,” exclaimed McDaniel. “Roger Wicker is one of the most liberal republicans in Washington and his record shows it.

“This race is a contest against very different views,” continued McDaniel. “Do you want a fighter or do you want someone weak? Do you want a leader or do you want someone who follows leadership? Do you want a conservative or one who just pretends

to be one on TV? Specifically it’s a referendum. It’s a referendum on Mitch McConnell’s failed leadership. To add insult to injury, Roger Wicker’s campaign manager was Mitch McConnell’s campaign manager.

“The establishment is here,” he continued. “The machine is here. They’re looking for a fight. We’re not going to let them down, we’re here to fight. This is an establishment war. This is a referendum on their leadership, that’s why we can’t lose. If you want to drain the swamp, let’s drain it right now.”



Chris McDaniel’s family, Cambridge, Jill, and Chamberlain await his arrival.



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IMPACT

JCJC’s JC Voices perform spring concert in Laurel

Submitted

Jones County Junior College’s JC Voices will present their annual spring concert, “Tears from Heaven: Make Our Garden Grow,” on Tuesday, March 27 at First-Trinity Presbyterian Church in Laurel. The 7 p.m. concert will feature works by Antonio Lotti, William Billings, Maurice Duruflé, Frank Ticheli, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, Leonard Bernstein, and others. The public is invited to attend this free event.

Everything from Renaissance and Classical sacred music to secular twentieth-century selections and Bernstein’s Broadway favorites, “Somewhere,” from West Side Story and “Make Our Garden Grow,” from Candide, in celebration of the anniversary of the composer’s birth, will be featured in this concert. The program will also feature the women’s ensemble performing four movements from Pergolesi’s, “Stabat Mater,” and the men’s ensemble singing the hauntingly beautiful, “Prayer of the Children,” arranged by Andrea Klouse.

The Chamber Singers are conducted by Dr. Susan A. Smith, with assistant director Jennifer Bruton, and accompanied by Dr. David Goldblatt. This year’s program will also feature new faculty percussionist, Kristopher Grant and retired JCJC Organ instructor, Kay Guiles. The singers will begin the program with, “When Jesus Wept,” by William Billings, followed by Edwin Fissinger’s, “Clap Your Hands,” and “Ubi Caritas,” by Maurice Duruflé.

“The group chose ‘Tears from Heaven: Make Our Garden Grow’ as a theme for this year’s program to share, through music, their love for life. The songs express both in text and music all the emotions they experience as they begin their adult lives, from sorrow and gladness, to fear and courage, and the joy that comes with living life to its fullest. The singers beckon the audience to embrace joy, live without fear, and see the world in a positive light, through new eyes, and let the tears of heaven help make our garden grow,” said JC Voices director, Dr. Susan Smith.

JC Voices’ inspirational and eclectic evening of music ranging from Antonio Lotti’s, “Crucifixion,” to Dave Matthews’ “Gravedigger,” will elevate your spirit as Easter approaches. For more information, contact the Fine Arts Division at 601-477-4203.

IMPACT

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LLT continues 57th season with comedy "Noises Off"

Submitted
Laurel Little Theatre continues their 57th season with the Michael Frayn comedy "Noises Off" running the first weekend of March under the direction of Sam Buchanan. Evening performances are March 8-9-10 at 7:30 p.m. and on March 11 there's a Sunday matinee at 2 p.m. The LLT reservation line answers 24 hours a day all of show week at 601-428-0140.

This is a deliciously hilarious show about a dizzy group of actors staging a new comedy - but they just can't seem to get their "act" together. Mix in lots of slamming doors with offstage romance and intrigue, and you have what's been called the "funniest farce ever written." First you see them acting the show on the stage, but then the set turns completely around, and you see what's been going on behind the scenes - and that's even crazier!

The play won Best Comedy awards on its original run in London, and then New York's Broadway production was nominated for the Best Play of the year there. A funny 1992 movie version starred Carol Burnett, Michael Caine, Marilu Henner, John Ritter and Christopher Reeve. Requiring exact timing and a ton of expertise to pull this all off, the entire cast is made up of LLT alumni. Playing the directors and stage crew of the "show within the show" are JT Robinson, Kade Lee and Logan Prince.



L-R, Natalie Davis, Ethan Glenn, JT Robinson, Kade Lee, Catherine Nowicki, Scottie Corely, Jeremy Cumpton, and Jody Ridgeway. Photo/submitted

Robinson graduated from William Carey, where he appeared in many productions. Lee is a senior at Stringer High School but has been in over a dozen LLT productions over the last decade. And Prince has been involved acting and stage managing shows with both LLT and Bottom of the Barrel Players.

Playing the actors in the "show within the show" are Catherine Nowicki, Scottie Corley, Jeremy Cumpton, Natalie Davis,

Ethan Glenn and Jody Ridgeway.

Nowicki is well known to local audiences as LLT's Miss Hannigan in "Annie" and Louise in "Always . . . Patsy Cline." Corley, Cumpton and Ridgeway are USM graduates and were all seen last year in LLT's "The Crucible" and in productions with the Bottom of the Barrel Players.

Davis is a freshman at JCJC and was seen in LLT's "Brighton Beach Memoirs" this past fall. Glenn is a tutor at Mason El-

ementary and is an LLT actor, crew volunteer and board member. He was seen in the season opener of "Joseph."

Directing "Noises Off" is long-time LLT alumni Sam Buchanan. He's been working at LLT since he was a teenager - as an actor, light board operator, set designer and director. He's also the founder of the local performance group, the Bottom of the Barrel Players. He's a USM graduate and now works for the Hattiesburg Convention Commission. His stage manager, Olivia Chauvin, is also a graduate of USM and now works for the Hattiesburg Zoo. She's assisted on productions at both LLT and with Bottom of the Barrel.

Single tickets are \$17 (adults) and \$15 (seniors/students), but the best deal is a 4-punch LLT season ticket that saves over 40 percent off the single ticket prices. The 4-punch ticket allows one or two punches to be used on each production and are still on sale for the 57th season. After "Noises Off" there's still two events left in the season. April brings the 1920s silent movie night with Charlie Chaplin's "The Gold Rush" and then LLT presents the family show "Shrek the Musical" in June.

Because of the adult situations in the play, "Noises Off" is not a show for kids, but it's an appropriate choice for all ages high school and up. For more information, check LaurelLittleTheatre.com or drop a line to LLTLaurelMS@aol.com



NO ZONE - Laurel High School driver's education students recently had the opportunity to see an educational demonstration sponsored by Landstar Inway, Inc. The demonstration, called No-Zone, allows students a behind the wheel experience of an 18-wheeler driver's viability. Vehicles are strategically parked around the truck in areas not visible to the big-rig driver. The demonstration allows students the opportunity to see the difficulties that truck drivers often have due to low visibility in certain areas around their cargo trailer. Mark Green and Earl Yarbrough of Landstar spent time with students in the classroom and at the 18-wheeler answering questions and educating students on the dangers of driving in a no-zone. Photo/submitted

YWCO Annual Children's Tea Party March 10



YWCO Board of Directors will host their annual Children's Tea Party on Saturday, March 10 beginning at 3:30 p.m. and lasting until 5 p.m. This event is a great opportunity for grandmothers, mothers, and daughters to enjoy an afternoon of getting dressed up and having tea at the historical YWCO tea room. A photo booth will be set up so you can take your own pictures with your precious one. Cost is \$15 per person and reservations are required. Call today: 601-428-5694. Fincher Trest, left, and Lucy Raspberry, right, enjoy their first Children's Tea at last year's event. Photo/submitted



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AREA HAPPENINGS

The Area Happenings section is a schedule of activities for non-profit groups only – such as schools, churches and other not-for-profit organizations or family events. You may send your events to: Admin@laurelimpact.com.

March 8

Laurel Little Theatre continues their 57th season with the Michael Frayn comedy “Noises Off” running the first weekend of March under the direction of Sam Buchanan. Evening performances are March 8-9-10 at 7:30 p.m., and on March 11 there’s a Sunday matinee at 2:00 p.m. The LLT reservation line answers 24 hours a day all of show week at 601-428-0140. Single tickets are \$17 (adults) and \$15 (seniors/students), but the best deal is a 4-punch LLT season ticket that saves over 40 percent off the single ticket prices.

March 10

Gospel Sing on Saturday, March 10 beginning at 6:30 p.m. at the Sanford Community Center, located at 663 Old Hwy 49, Sanford. The featured artist will be “Shallow Creek,” “Generations,” and “Faithway Singers.” Admission is free; a love offering will be received. For more information, call 601-765-6485.

Soso Seventh-Day Adventist invites you to our Friends and Family Day, Saturday, March 10. Sabbath school starts at 9:30 a.m. and Divine worship service at 11:00 a.m.

Sandra Hancock Ministries is hosting a Voice of Hope Conference March 10 from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at “The Gathering Place,” 3227 Audubon Dr. in Laurel. God has given Sandra a word just for you! Bring your friends and come expecting your miracle! There are no admission costs! For more information, call 1-800-579-7350 or see our webpage at www.sandrahancock.org.

45th Annual Gospel Singing Jubilee will be held at the Magee High School Auditorium, 501 Choctaw Street, Magee, on March 10 at 6:30 p.m. Featured artist are the world famous “Dixie Echoes Quartet” along with “Time Frith & Gospel Echoes,” “Revelations,” “Mike Vaughn,” and “Faithful Four.” Advanced tickets are \$10; at the door \$12. Tickets are available at the Baptist Bible & Book House, Laurel. For more information, call 601-906-0677.

March 11

The Bibletones will be in concert at Moss First Church of God at 10:45 a.m. on Sunday, March 11. Lunch will be served in the fellowship hall immediately after the service. To get to the church, go north on Highway 15 from Laurel toward Stringer. About two miles north of the Laurel city limits, turn right onto Highway 537 (just past the new Dollar General store) and go two miles. Church is red brick building. Find Moss First Church of God on Facebook.

Sweet Hope Baptist church invites you to celebrate our 80th year church anniversary on Sunday, March 11. The speaker for this occasion will be Rev. Cornelius McDonald of John the Baptist Church, Barnett, MS.

Center for Gifted Studies to host Spring Day of Sharing for teachers March 9

Submitted

The spring 2018 Day of Sharing for Teachers of the Gifted will be held Friday, March 9 on the Hattiesburg campus of The University of Southern Mississippi. Sponsored by Southern Miss’s Frances A. Karnes Center for Gifted Studies, this event is designed to educate teachers on current curriculum and instructional issues in gifted education. Guest speakers and presenters for Day of Sharing include the following:

*Jen Cornett, gifted education specialist for the Mississippi Department of Education, will give a presentation that includes ideas for gifted programming and organization based on the Outcomes for Gifted Education Programs 2017.

*Carol Paola, executive director for Mississippi Association of Gifted Children (MAGC), will discuss the benefits of joining MAGC, as well as classroom resources

for teachers, scholarship opportunities for students, and other membership benefits.

*Dr. Heather Houston and Marla Freitag of the Karnes Center for Gifted Studies will address the topic of underserved gifted populations, along with strategies for addressing their needs in the gifted classroom.

Participants will also have the opportunity to hear from fellow teachers on instructional ideas or activities that have been successful with their gifted learners. Time for Sharing will include a poster exhibit that includes mini-units, activities, and more.

Teachers of the gifted, general education teachers, and administrators are encouraged to attend. CEUs (0.5) will be offered for \$25. To register to attend, visit www.usm.edu/karnes-gifted. For more information on this event, or to share ideas and strategies that have succeeded in the classroom, contact the Karnes Center for Gifted Studies at 601.266.5236.

WJHS Peer Council Hosts Law Enforcement Breakfast



The West Jones High School Peer Council recently hosted the annual Law Enforcement Appreciation Breakfast to honor and thank the men and women who serve and protect our area. Council members provided a buffet style breakfast combined with lots of fun and fellowship. West Jones High School Administrators and representatives from the Jones County Schools District Office were also in attendance. Peer Council teacher is Denise Graves, who is helped by Angie Bynum, Jones County School District Nurse. Peer Council Members pictured include, front: Kolbi Holifield, Madalyn Stringer, Haylee Walters, Shelby Bean, Melaine McLaurin, Chelsey Dry, Marley Mixon, Allie Rainer, Maria Terry, Victoria Nguyen, Abby Segrest, Rhiannon Williams; back: Tanner Anderson, Conner Coleman, Lindsay Parker, Isabella Brashier.

Photo/submitted

Oak Grove Baptist Church invites you to join us as we try to show appreciation to our musicians for their dedicated service on March 11 at 2:00 p.m. The guest speaker will be Reverend Robert Martin, pastor of Mt. Bethel Baptist Church, Soso.

Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church will be having a Women’s Day program on Sunday March 11 at 11:00 a.m. The theme for this occasion will be “Going Up in Confidence” – Habakkuk 2: 1-4. The speaker for this occasion will be our very own Missionary Dawn Johnson.

March 13

Southern Civitan is teaming up with United Blood Services to help save lives by hosting a community wide blood drive in Laurel. Donate blood Tuesday, March 13 from 12:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. at the Cameron Center, located at 711 North 10th Avenue in Laurel. Donors will receive a free T-Shirt, while supplies last. Visit www.bloodhero.com to schedule an appointment to donate or call 877-827-4376. Walk-ins are welcome.

March 22

The American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life Jones County will hold team captain meetings on March 22 and April 12. The theme this year is “Superheroes!” All teams and members need to be registered by March 12. Contacts: Lisa Winpigler at lwinpigler@laurel-schools.org or relayforlifer6@gmail.com

March 24

Join us for a family fun day at Gardiner Park starting with a 5K and 2 mile walk at 9 a.m. on March 24; the walk will be followed by kids’ activities in the park, food, music, and more! This fundraiser for Choices Clinic will allow us to continue serving mothers and fathers in our community through our free and confidential medical, material, and peer counseling services. You may register for the run or walk on our website friendsofcl.ms. Once you register, it will generate your own fundraising page. Ask everyone you know to sponsor you with pledges for this event. Please help us make this fundraiser a great success while having lots of fun with the whole family!

Rockin’ Autism Acceptance at Slowboat Brewery Company will be March 24 from 5:00-10:00 p.m. This is a free music event with food vendors and a live raffle benefiting TEAAM Autism and Center Ridge Outpost. Special appearances by “Down & Good,” “The Strays,” “Royal Horses,” and “Jones & Pine.”

March 27

Laurel community blood drive sponsored by Southern Civitan will be held at the Cameron Center on Tuesday, March 13 and Tuesday, March 27 from 12:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. The Cameron Center is located at 711 North 10th Avenue. Donors will receive a free T-shirt. To make an appointment, go to www.bloodhero.com (sponsor code: laurelcommunity) or contact Beverly Clark at 601-270-5051.

March 30

The Laurel Shrine Club is holding a rib cooking on Friday, March 30. Racks of ribs will be available from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Rib plates (ribs, baked beans, potato salad & bread) also will be available from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Rack of ribs is \$18 and rib plates are \$10 each. Five or more will be delivered in the local area on request. The location is the Laurel Shrine club at 4751 Highway 15 North. For information and tickets contact Jackie Rawls at 601-433-2282 or Jeff Gardner at 601-323-1609.

Misc.

Te Invito A Mi Iglesia to Iglesia El Faro, 544 East Street, Laurel, MS. Servicios, Sabados: 6:00 p.m., Domingos: 10:00 a.m. Pastores Rafael Y Cecilia Anderson. 601-335-1453.

Garden Clubs state convention to be held in Laurel in April

Submitted

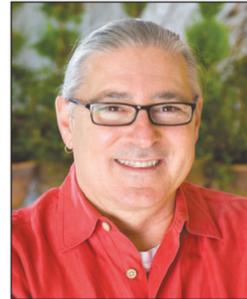
The Garden Clubs of Mississippi is pleased to announce the appearance of three very talented and inspirational guest speakers for their State Convention in Laurel on April 17-18. The theme is “The New State of Jones” and includes award luncheons at Lauren Rogers Museum and at Sanderson Farms banquet hall, garden tours, a design banquet, and workshops available to attendees.

John Grady Burns, renown author and floral designer from Natchez, will be presenting the program at The Design Banquet on April 17 at the Sanderson Farms banquet hall. Burns’ is the owner of Nest, a home décor shop in Natchez where customers can see how to follow nature’s lead in bringing the outdoors inside.

Patty Roper and James DelPrince will do workshops for convention attendees before the awards luncheon on April 18. Roper, an author and the

editorial director of Mississippi Magazine, will present “Entertaining – In and Out of the Garden.” Dr. DelPrince, floral design professor at Biloxi’s MSU Coastal Research and Extension Center, whose philosophy is to spread knowledge and creativity, will do a program on “Hands on Floral Workshops for Children.”

Registration deadline is March 15. For more information, go to TheGardenClubs.org website and click on Convention Call.



John Grady Burns



James DelPrince



Patty Roper

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LHS students excel at regional science fair

Submitted

Laurel High School students recently participated in the regional science fair at the University of Southern Mississippi. Of the 19 projects presented by LHS students, 18 placed with 13 qualifying for the state science fair that will be held in April. Class IV (Freshmen & Sophomores) Class V (Juniors & Seniors)

1st Place

- Class V Engineering - **Brea Smith, Pierre Andrews, & Asia Polluck**
- Class IV Engineering - **Kimberlynn Mai & Thao Tran**
- Class V Earth and Environmental Science - **Simon Shanks**
- Class V Biochemistry - **Kimberton Mai**
- Class V Botany - **Jaylessa Guston & LaKatherine Campbell**

2nd Place

- Class V Engineering (Tie) - **Darrein Hardy & Tessa Ward**
- Class IV Engineering - **Mykel Lee & Antigonus Loper**
- Class V Behavioral Science - **Sha'Cori Ruffin, Jajuan Wade, & Skylar McCann**

- Class V Inorganic Chemistry - **Nyai Turner & Sinai Jones**
- Class IV Engineering - **Mykel Lee & Antigonus Loper**

3rd Place

- Class V Engineering - **John Thomas & Skyliya Bell** - Sweet bulbs
- Class IV Engineering - **Quaveon Arrington & Trey Cocroft**
- Class IV Biomedical - **Jordhan Booth & Jacquelyn Gaines**
- Class V Inorganic Chemistry - **Inari Suggs**

4th Place

- Class V Engineering - **Mireya Yepes, Jourdan Joshua, & Ayainah Brown**
- Class V Earth & Environmental - **Alexandria Seals, Breunna McCann, & Taylor Reed**

5th Place

- Class V Engineering - **Darrius McCullum & Levi Walker**

6th Place

- Class V Engineering - **Aaron Hill & Ja'Marious Odom**



Photosubmitted

JAL host Girl Talk at Laurel Middle School

Submitted

For the past eight years, the Junior Auxiliary of Laurel has hosted Girl Talk at the Laurel Middle School. This day is educational and fun for approximately 75 eighth-grade girls. Girl Talk teaches the girls about the importance of making healthy choices for a brighter future. This year the keynote speaker was Alicia Walker. Five other speakers spoke on various topics.

Alicia Walker is currently the Corporate Quality Control Auditor at Sanderson Farms and chairs the Jones County Chamber of Commerce Board. Walker is an advocate

for her community and spoke to the young women about knowing who they are, knowing their strengths and weaknesses, setting standards, having values, and setting goals.

During the one-day workshop, information was shared on topics such as hygiene by speaker Ashley Simmons NP, cyber-security by Deputy Shannon Koss, bullying by speaker Cindy McKenzie, proper attire and speech by Tanya Gray from Gray Real Estate, and the importance of education by speaker Jennifer Smith. The day concluded with Nick Messersmith teaching self-defense and a performance by JCJC Jones on Stage.



Approximately 75 eighth-grade girls participated in Jr. Auxiliary of Laurel's 8th annual Girl Talk. *Photosubmitted*

NDMS student places in state reading fair

Nora Davis Magnet School first grader Lawson Schipke recently placed second in the Mississippi Reading Fair in Jackson. He qualified for state by winning first place at his school, winning first in the Laurel School District Reading Fair and winning first in the Regional Reading Fair held at the University of Southern Mississippi. His book of choice, "Dragons Love Tacos," was part of the pre-kindergarten through second grade group and family division.

Photosubmitted



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WJMS CenterStage--Nathan Guy Wins Solo Competition



Nathan Guy, member of West Jones Middle School CenterStage Show Choir, recently won first place in the solo competition at the Petal Invitational! Congratulations!

Photo/submitted



Sullivan named Sports601 Jones County Soccer Coach of the Year

By James Pugh

No one is here to deny the success Jones County has seen in high school girls soccer. The list of state championship appearances, and wins, over the past decade, is quite lengthy. Boys soccer was an afterthought.

“Was” being the keyword.

The 2017-2018 season saw two boys soccer programs make it to the semifinal round of the MHSAA playoffs. One such team, West Jones, led by head coach Josh Sullivan, earned its second consecutive semifinal round appearance.

West Jones finished the season, 15-8-1, including playoff wins over West Harrison in a thriller, 2-1, and Forest Hill, 3-1.

What happened is of less importance as to what is happening as a whole. Boys soccer is no longer playing second fiddle. For the second straight season, a Jones County boys program have either tied or outlasted a Jones County girls team in playoff advancement.

Sullivan is partially responsible for the upswing. Sullivan is Sports601’s Jones County Soccer Coach of the Year.

“We’re super excited about the season and our team,” said the West Jones boys soccer head coach. “Returning a team that made it to the Class 5A state title game [the season prior] was exciting. Everyone got to play in that game, but unfortunately, the outcome wasn’t what we wanted.

“We set our standards high this year. We had everyone take their silver medal and put it somewhere they would have to look at it every day. We wanted that opportunity to make it back to Jackson. We gave it a good run, but ran across a hurdle and had to play on back-to-back days. Long Beach is a good team, and they did a great job holding us in check.”

Despite ending the season short of its intended goal, Sullivan kept his team, and himself focused on its success as a whole.

“The season was great,” Sullivan said. “Our guys came out and worked hard. We had eight seniors that did a great job leading. It goes without saying, without great leadership, you can’t compete in the district and region we play in. Class 5A is competitive in the South.

“But I also want to tip my hat to the players that have come before. I always like to thank my seniors from my



WJHS Soccer coach, Josh Sullivan

Photo/James Pugh

first year and last year. They helped get this program in the direction it needed to go.”

During his time at West Jones, Sullivan has racked up quite a resume. In his first season at West Jones (2014-2015), Sullivan stepped in to coach the girls for Craig Winship who was sidelined for a season. The Lady Mustangs, under Sullivan, won the Class 5A title over Germantown, 2-1, in overtime and finished the season with an impressive 17-4-2 record.

When Winship returned, Sullivan resumed head coaching responsibilities but this time over the boy’s program. In three seasons, Sullivan and company have compiled a 38-24-6 record overall. This past season, West Jones claimed its first Region 5-5A title since the 2012-2013 season.

“Coach Winship, who assist me with the boys, gives me a lot of good ideas,” said Sullivan. “The guy has five or six [state title] rings. It’s hard to keep up with them. He obviously knows the game, and he understands how to make kids want to play. He’s helped me out a lot. He was my coach in school. He made me want to be a better coach.

“Through that, I was able to get the guys excited, and they brought into what the girls had already bought into several years ago. If you play as a team, buy into what the coach is selling and understand its not about you then its going to be a good year, even if you don’t win titles.”

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Figueroa named Sports601 Jones County Girls Soccer Player of the Year

By James Pugh

No one soccer player in Jones County had quite the season like Esmeralda Figueroa. Finishing her senior season with 53 goals - the most of any player in Jones County, both girls and boys alike - and tying former teammate Morgan Mansell with 155 career goals - the most ever in school history - the Northeast Jones girls striker says she has her parents to thank for her accomplishments.

"It was a great year," said Figueroa. "But I didn't get here by myself. My mom made me read books because [the game of] soccer is not all physical and tactical, its also mental. And daddy helped me train, and he was a huge impact for me this season."

Figueroa earns the high honor of being named the first-ever Sports601 Jones County Girls Soccer Player of the Year.

"From the time she was a seventh grader, we knew she would be great and had a lot of talent," said Northeast Jones girls head coach Matt Reid. "Especially this year, her senior year, it wasn't just her play on the field. She made huge strides as a [team] captain. Her leadership and her attitude were so good this year that it bled over into the field and caused her to have more success than even she thought she could have."

Figueroa's 53 goals this year broke the school's single-season record. She could have broken, instead of tying, the record for most goals in a career at Northeast Jones had she began her career as a striker in the seventh grade. "Coach Tyson coached her during her seventh-grade



Esmeralda Figueroa

Photo/James Pugh

career," said Reid. "She was an outside defender then. And halfway through my first year of coaching [here at NEJ], I kept her at defender. One game I needed to find another striker, so I moved her because I saw she had the potential. She scored a big goal for us in one of the games I put her in, so I kept her there. And she hasn't looked back."

The JCJC signee said she grew to love the position years ago.

"On defense, you just get the ball and kick it out, or kick it to a forward," said Figueroa. "When I moved to striker, I had to learn a lot more things. You have to learn to connect with people and find the back of the net as well as a lot more things. It's fun though."

Above all, though, Figueroa is a team player. On occasions, Reid has moved her to defender or center-mid, or to the outside edge to isolate her for more one-on-one situations.

"She is so versatile," Reid said. "When you have the talent she has, you can play any position. I guess she'll play striker [at JCJC], but she could really play anywhere."

Figueroa chooses JCJC over several D1 colleges, including Northwestern State and Southern Miss, and four-year universities such as William Carey, SUNY Farmingdale State in New York, West Alabama and West Florida just to name a few.

She will join her sister, Araceli Figueroa, at JCJC. Both made their decision public on Monday inside Northeast Jones' Media Center. A total of eight Northeast Jones players will play soccer at the next level.

"JCJC is a good option because they're good both athletically and academically," said Figueroa. "And I've known Dolores (Lady Bobcats head coach) forever. Hopefully, she can prepare me more, athletically and academically, for a chance at a D1 or SEC school. Plus, to get to play with my sister is amazing."

Sykes named Sports601 Jones Co. Boys Soccer Player of the Year

By James Pugh

It wasn't just the quantity of goals that made Northeast Jones forward Cole Sykes' senior season stand out. It was the timely manner of his goals that made his year unforgettable.

"He scored some really big goals for us," said Northeast Jones boys soccer coach Matt Reid. "You think about the game-winner in the playoffs against Ponotoc. He hit a header in overtime to win that game. He also had several hat tricks, including one against our rivals Laurel. He had a hat trick against Northeast Lauderdale too. He scored big time goals for us."

Sykes finished the season with 30 goals total in 25 games played. He also aided Northeast Jones with three assists. His season totals are the second most recorded in Northeast Jones boys' program history.

"I saw those moments on the field where our heads were down, and I wanted to get their spirits up," said Sykes regarding his ability to score goals in key moments. "I wanted to get things lit and keep it going."

Sykes, who wore number 15 jersey on the field, is Sports601's Jones County Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Both POY awards this season went to players who



Cole Sykes

Photo/James Pugh

wore No. 15 jerseys on the field. Northeast Jones girls senior Esmeralda Figueroa was named Sports601's Jones County Girls Soccer Player of the Year on Tuesday afternoon.

Reid said Sykes success could be contributed to his competitive nature.

"Sykes is one of the biggest competitors I've ever coached," Reid noted. "I wouldn't say he possessed the purest soccer talent of anyone I've coached, but he is so athletic. He's a warrior. He plays with a lot of heart and emotion. It bled over to the rest of the team."

With Sykes at the helm, Northeast Jones boys advanced to its third-ever semifinal round appearance. They fell short, though, losing to Amory in the MHSAA Class 4A North State Championship game by a slim 1-0 margin.

"We started off good on the season," said Sykes. "But then we hit a rough patch. We decided we were tired of going through it and pulled though. In the end, though, it just didn't turn out the way we wanted it too."

Nagging injuries didn't stop Sykes from competing every game says his head coach.

"It was rare for him to need a sub [on the field]," Reid said. "He battled through some injuries this year. But even still, he plays with so much passion and heart. He's by far the most passionate player I've coached, especially this year."

Sykes will not play soccer at the next level, but it's not because he didn't receive quality offers.

"I've been playing varsity soccer for six years now," Sykes said. "In the last few, I've shown and proven what I can do. But I've decided not to go to the next level."

"It's his decision to make," said Reid. "He obviously had opportunities to play. He had offers from several different places, but for his reasons, he's chosen to just go to school."

Golden Eagles finish Cox Diamond Invitational with season-high runs in win over Nicholls State

Submitted

Catcher Bryant Bowen matched career highs with three hits and four runs batted in as Southern Miss closed out the Cox Diamond Invitational by pounding Nicholls State 20-4 Sunday afternoon. The runs were a season-high for the 15th-ranked Golden Eagles, who scored in each the last eight innings of the game, and their 16 hits the second highest total this year.

"We did what we needed to do after a tough game (Saturday) night," Southern Miss coach Scott Berry said. "We looked at this as a weekend series, with an opportunity to come out (Sunday) and win the series, and that's what we were able to do."

The Golden Eagles (8-3) finished 2-1 in the round-robin tournament at Blue Wahoos Stadium, home to the Cincinnati Reds' AA affiliate. USM defeated Eastern Michigan University 9-4 Friday night before losing a four-run lead and dropping a 9-6 decision to Ohio State University Saturday.

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Sideline View: SEC basketball tournament up for grabs

By Dale McKee

South Carolina won their fourth straight SEC Women's Basketball Tournament as they downed undefeated Mississippi State, 62-51, in the championship game Sunday in Nashville. The Lady Bulldogs will definitely be one of the top four seeds in the NCAA tournament along with undefeated UConn. Louisville and Notre Dame could join the Lady Huskies and the Lady Bulldogs. The NCAA bracket will be announced on Monday, March 12, at 6 p.m. on ESPN.



Ole Miss, on the other hand, fired their women's coach Matt Insell after a five-year tenure. The Lady Rebels ended the season at 1-15 in the SEC and 12-19 overall. Ole Miss last made the NCAA tournament in 2007.

The SEC, Big 12 and Big East set their tournament brackets over the weekend. In the SEC, Auburn and Tennessee tied for the regular season title. The Tigers own the top seed in the tournament, which begins Wednesday in St. Louis. Auburn has not won the SEC regular season since 1999, and this was only their third title in school history. Tennessee may be playing their best basketball as they won 11 of their last 13 games in tying Auburn for the regular season crown. Kansas has the top seed in the Big 12, Xavier is the top seed in the Big East, and Cincinnati is the top seed in the American Athletic Conference. Michigan got a big start on the NCAA Tournament as they wrapped up the Big 10 crown with a win over No. 8 Purdue.

The Mississippi State Bulldogs lost to Tennessee and LSU last week to doom their chances of a ticket to the "Big Dance." The Bulldogs will go to the SEC

tournament as the No. 7 seed and will face their final regular season opponent No. 10 seed LSU. The winner meets Tennessee. Ole Miss with their weekend loss to Vanderbilt finished last in the SEC and will battle No. 11 seed South Carolina. The winner moves on to face No. 6 seed Arkansas.

The SEC tournament is up for grabs this year more than ever before. Auburn, Tennessee, Florida, Kentucky, Arkansas, Texas A&M and hometown favorite Missouri all have chances to cut down the nets and earn their ticket to "March Madness."

The C-USA tournament for the guys and ladies are this week in Frisco, Texas, at the Star. The No. 9 seed USM Golden Eagles will face FIU on Wednesday, and the winner will meet No. 1 seed Middle Tennessee. The Lady Eagles are a No. 8 seed and will face UTEP, with the winner meeting regular season champion UAB.

Congratulations to former Jones County Junior College basketball coach Jay Ladner. His Southeastern Louisiana men's basketball team won the Southland Conference regular season title and will be the No. 1 seed in the conference tournament in Katy, Texas, this week. It is the first conference title for the Lions since 2004-05. The Lions (21-10) have secured an automatic bid to the NIT as the top seed in the Southland Conference and will look to punch a ticket to the NCAA tournament with a championship this week.

Blast from the Past

• **March 7, 2008:** Tyler Gardner, Brian Wells, Brandon Holley and Scott Rowland homered as West Jones whipped Richton, 16-5, in high school baseball.

• **March 8, 1978:** Truck Robinson scored 27 points in leading the New Orleans Jazz past the defending NBA champion Portland Trail Blazer, 84-82, before over 29,000 fans in the Superdome.

• **March 9, 1988:** South Jones defeat-

ed South Pike, 82-60, in the State Basketball Tournament. Stephanie Moore led the winners with 23 points while Della Ruffin chipped in with 20 points. Linda Bourn added 16 points, and Teresa Evans netted 15 points.

• **March 10, 1958:** Raleigh fell, 77-68, to Philadelphia in the state Class AA-4 championship game.

• **March 11, 1968:** Forest Copeland nipped C.W. Todd by one stroke to win the Mississippi Seniors golf tournament

played at the Laurel Country Club.

• **March 12, 1988:** Trent Nicholson banged out four hits, and Shane Hill added three hits as Northeast Jones downed Clara, 13-5, in high school baseball play.

• **March 13, 1968:** The Heidelberg Southside girls' basketball team won their second straight state championship, 40-35, over Greenville. The Archie Cooley coached team won 78 straight and was 163-4 over their last six seasons.

Contact Dale at ddmckee18@yahoo.com

Lechuga signs with JCJC



Laurel High School soccer standout Juan Lechuga recently signed a letter of intent with Jones County Junior College. Lechuga was selected to play in the Mississippi Association of Coaches Soccer All-Star game where he was named Most Valuable Defensive Player. Pictured: (seated L-R) are his father Rafael Lechuga, Juan Lechuga, his mother Norma Rodriguez, (standing L-R) LHS Principal Jeannine Agee, Head Soccer Coach Julio Martinez, Assistant Soccer Coach Rick Sager and Assistant Principal Larry Rayburn. Photos submitted

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No. 5 Lady Bobcats capture second straight state championship

By Shawn Wansley
JCJC SID

SENATOBIA – Fifth-ranked Jones County Junior College has done it again. The Lady Bobcats jumped out to a 16-2 lead midway through the first quarter and went on to whip Copiah-Lincoln 78-53 in the MACJC Tournament championship game here Thursday night at Howard Coliseum. It was the second straight state title for head coach Missy Bilderback's Lady Bobcats.

"I'm really proud of our team," Bilderback said. "I thought we really raised the level of our play this week. We beat three really good basketball teams and played well."

It marked the third straight decisive game of the tournament for Jones. JCJC, now 23-3, opened the tournament with an 89-59 win over Itawamba and followed that up

with a 77-53 decision over Holmes in the semifinals.

"We beat three really good basketball teams," Bilderback said. "I thought Co-Lin was one of the hottest teams in the league and Itawamba is very dangerous. They have great guard play. Holmes has been playing great and they had some bigs that could give us trouble."

The Lady Bobcats got off to exceptional starts in each game, outscoring each opponent by a 43-3 margin early in all three games combined. They led Itawamba 18-1 and Holmes 9-0, in addition to the hot start vs. Co-Lin.

"I'm just really proud of the way we elevated our play," Bilderback said. "Our kids are just really good this time of year. They want to win and they are competitors and I'm really proud of the way they have stepped up."

In Bilderback's second season as head coach last year,

the Lady Bobcats captured the state title at home in A.B. Howard Gymnasium. To be able to win it this season in a different environment was quite a feat.

"It's a hard thing to win and to be able to come up here and win it on the road is awesome," Bilderback said. "Last year, we had an advantage at home, but to be able to do this on the road is really special."

Nique Cherry (Heidelberg) scored on the opening possession of the game and the Lady Bobcats were off and running again. An Alexis Tolefree (Conway, Arkansas) trey made it 16-2 with 4:02 left in the first quarter. Jones led 20-8 after the opening period. The Lady Bobcats would take a 41-19 lead into the locker room at halftime when Camryn London (Birmingham, Alabama) scored with 13 seconds showing in the second quarter. JCJC took its longest lead of the game at 54-23 with 3:46 left in the third quarter when Mackenzie Thompson (East Rankin Academy) made a 3-pointer from left wing. The Lady Bobcats led 58-32 after three quarters. The closest Co-Lin got in the final period was 65-45 with 5:57 remaining on a T'Kyra Hicks' basket. Tolefree led JCJC with 21 points, Cherry had 19 and Chrystal Ezechukwu (Stone Mountain, Georgia) added 10.

The Lady Bobcats, 23-3, will now compete in the Region 23 Tournament March 6-9 at Mississippi College. JCJC is set to play Northwest at 3 p.m. Wednesday. The official tournament bracket will be released on Friday. The winner of the Region 23 Tournament qualifies for the NJCAA Division I National Tournament March 19-24 in Lubbock, Texas. JCJC won the region last year and went 2-1 in nationals.

Bilderback said winning the region is the goal now, but she knows it will be tough. "The target is on your back and you are getting everybody's best shot," she said. "I'm proud of our consistency and our daily work and I'm just excited for them that they can be rewarded with a state championship. But we have got one more to go because we really want that region. We are going to give them a day or so off and go back to work and see if we can't get ourselves back out to Lubbock."

Thursday's victory marked the seventh MACJC title in women's basketball for JCJC and it was the Lady Bobcats' third championship in the last five years. The Lady Bobcats have won state titles in 1947-48, 2000-01, 2008-09, 2009-10, 2013-14, 2016-17 and 2017-18.

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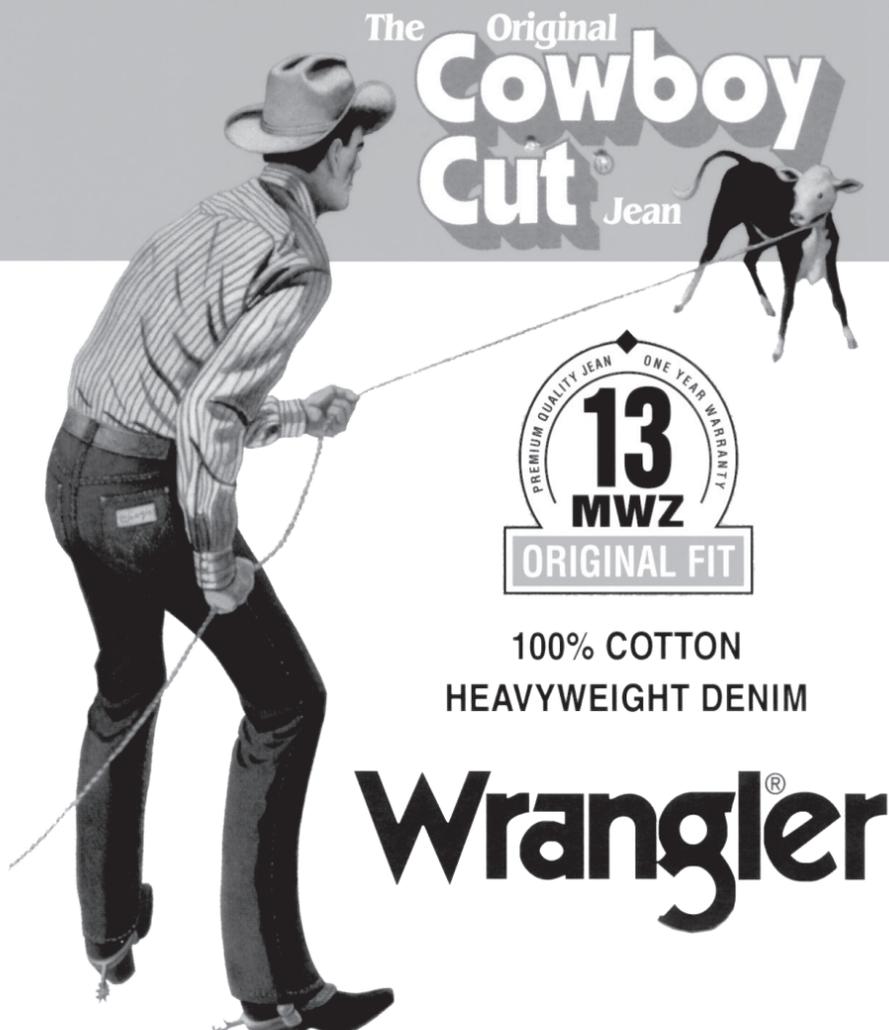
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Land and Homes

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LAND

Jones County +/- 109 Acres. Situated in the Moss Community of Jones County near the Jasper County line, this beautiful wooded property contains a mix of natural pines and hardwoods. With plenty of frontage on Shady Grove-Moss Road, this location offers numerous possibilities for a home site or mini-farm. Its amenities include fenced pasture land with a barn and shed on site. Water sources for area wildlife include a small pond and the Tallahoma Creek which runs along a portion of the property's southeast border. Whoever buys this listing will enjoy the benefits of country living with the convenience of being less than 15 minutes away from Laurel, Stringer and Bay Springs. This property is located in the West Jones High School/North Jones Elementary School area. Priced at \$400,000. Call Walley Properties, LLC at 601-477-3014 or visit walleyproperties.com for maps and more information.

Small acreage for sale, water, power pole, owner finance, NE Jones area. 601-426-3696 or 601-470-7772.

Smith County +/- 120 Acres. This beautiful property offers many possibilities. Various aged merchantable pine plantations make it a great long-term investment and, since there is an abundance of wildlife, you can enjoy hunting the property as your investment grows. If you are looking for a home site or a place to construct your new chicken farm, the property can meet those needs as well. Located on SCR15 just off Hwy 531, this property is priced to sell at \$300,000. Contact Marc at 601-670-6443 at Walley Properties LLC or visit walleyproperties.com for maps and info.

Lamar County Two +/- 3-Acre Lots. Searching for a nice, large wooded lot on which to build a home? One of these three-acre lots may be just what you are looking for. Located on the Purvis to Oloh Road about five miles from Purvis, Lot #4 and Lot #5 offer several sweet spots for a house site. The beautiful trees provide just the right amount of privacy. This is also a great area for young families as it is situated in one of the top-rated school districts in the state. Lot #4 is priced at \$28,900 and Lot #5 is priced at \$31,900. Contact Clifton at 601-606-4336 at Walley Properties LLC or visit walleyproperties.com for maps and info.

+/- 128 Acres Located on CR 31 just North of Hwy 528 and 4 miles West of Heidelberg, MS, Minutes from Interstate 59, this tract has 7 year old planted pines that have been sprayed. Has rolling hills and beautiful vistas. Has a powerline

running through the property with food plots in place. Great Hunting, Recreation, and Investment. Has power and county water, several home or camp sites. Don't let this one pass you by!!!! \$224,000 Call Woods & Waters Realty at 800-526-3961. See more at mfmland.com.

Simpson County +/- 79 Acres. This beautiful property is located just 2 miles off of Hwy 49 South on Mc-Nair Springs between Mt. Olive and Magee. It has open fields currently being used as hay fields, natural timber stands, 2 ponds and a 3BR, 2BA house. This property is ideal for anyone looking for a weekend hunting retreat, cattle farm, or a beautiful setting to build a home. The open fields are great for deer and turkey and could easily be used for cattle farming. The house located on site would make a great farmhouse, hunting camp or rental investment. This property is offered at \$199,500. Contact Bennett at 601-913-0340 at Walley Properties LLC or visit walleyproperties.com for maps and info.

+/- 219 Acres Priced to sell quick!! Located on just outside of Topton, AL, and one hour from Mobile, AL. Has road frontage on CR 19 along with power and water available. Has great secluded House/Camp Site sitting underneath beautiful mature longleaf pines and hardwoods. Dark and Rich Waters of Bilbo Creek runs through the property with Hardwoods make for great wildlife habitat. Has Lake. Has several cleared areas that will make large and plentiful food plots. Has some young pine and some thickets for deer to bed in. This tract truly has it all! Don't miss this one of a kind Hunting/Recreational Tract. Reduced - \$306,600. Call Woods & Waters Realty at 800-526-3961. See more at mfmland.com.

Jones County +/- 47 Acres. Price Reduced!! This is a great home site or mini farm development opportunity! Conveniently located in south Jones County on Rainey Road, this property is only 10 miles from Hattiesburg and 15 miles from Laurel right off the Sanford Road exit on Interstate 59. This piece of land would make for a great home-site/mini-farm investment property with plenty of recreational opportunities and a gorgeous hunting landscape containing a mixture of pine plantation and hardwoods. Priced at \$120,000. Don't delay. Call Bennett at 601-913-0340 at Walley Properties LLC or visit walleyproperties.com today!

+/- 81 Acres Located on Sandersville-Eucuttia Rd and Florence Church Rd. just a few miles from East of I-59 and the town of Sandersville. This property offers Timber Investment, Recreation and Great Hunting along with Several Great



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Jones County +/- 83 Acres A property like this one doesn't come around very often. This prime piece of land joins the west side of beautiful Lake Bogue Homa where the fishing is great! With one-quarter mile frontage on Magnolia Road, this tract boasts a mix of pines and hardwoods making it a gorgeous area for a nice estate, a weekend getaway camp or to subdivide into several home sites. Located in the Northeast Jones School District, this property is priced to sell at \$228,000. Call Walley Properties, LLC at 601-477-3014 or visit walleyproperties.com for maps and more information.

+/- 104 Acres Located on J Walker Rd, just 5 miles West of Wiggins, MS, just off Hwy 26, this tract is one of a kind!!! Property has +/- 50 acres of improved pasture, two 4 acres lakes, four small ponds and the remainder of acreage in Hardwood/Pine Mix timber. Good Fences and Cross Fences in place. Has beautiful house or cabin site looking over the lake with power and water already in place. Equipment shed and catch pin in place. The property has Bahalia Grass growing on it currently but will soon be harvested and Rye Grass planted for winter. This property is also just a few minutes away from Red Creek which offers boating and fishing. Don't let this one pass you by!! Shown by appointment only. \$312,000. Call Woods & Waters Realty at 800-526-3961. See more at mfmland.com.

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+/- 47 Acres Located on Hwy 594, just a few miles East of Leakesville, MS, this tract is perfect for someone looking for a Hunting Place or to Build a House on!!! Power and Water already in place. Good mixture of pine/hardwood timber across the property with a creek running on the West side of the property. Great Hunting and Recreation. Don't Let This One Pass You By!! \$108,000 Call Woods & Waters Realty at 800-526-3961. See more at mfmland.com.

+/- 132 Acres Located on Hwy 57 just North of Leakesville, MS. This tract consists of thinned mature pine and a mix of younger hwd/pine timber. Great hunting and recreation. Good roads in place with food plots. Priced to sale Quickly! \$211,200 Call Woods & Waters Realty at 800-526-3961. See more at mfmland.com.

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