

by *BY*
MAGAZINE
Good Deeds... *By U*



Helen Godfrey Smith
Hero of the Year

MISSISSIPPI'S
COMMUNITY HEROES
BLACK HISTORY MONTH SPECIAL EDITION 2013



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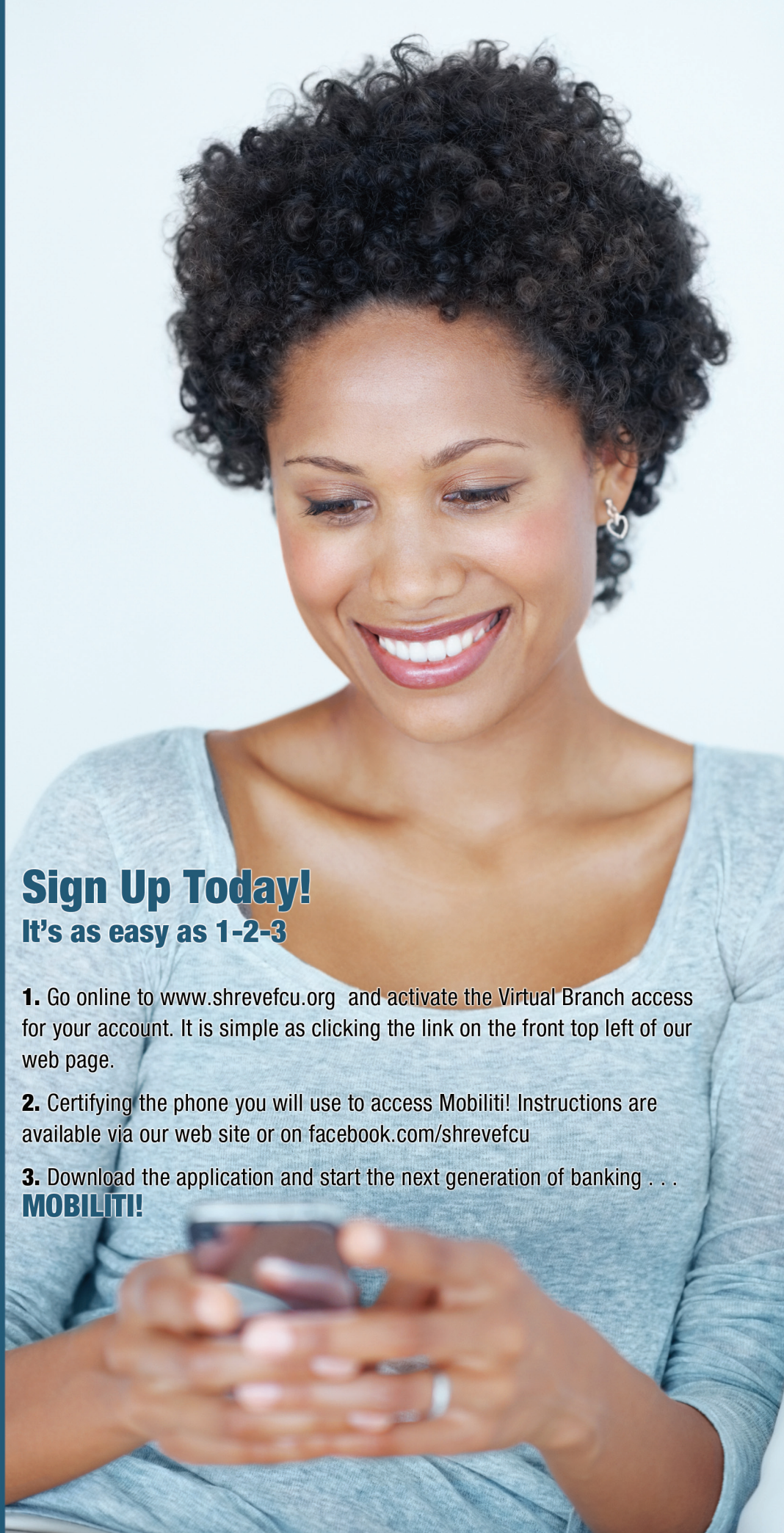
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 Delta Division, Shreveport Federal Credit Union

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Help Someone
TODAY

"...and let us consider how to stimulate
 one another to love and good deeds..."
 (Hebrews 10:24)

publisher's note



Joan Richardson, Publisher
By U Magazine

Photo by Anaiah Davis

The dictionary defines a hero as someone of distinguished courage or ability, admired for brave deeds and noble qualities. However, many of our heroes are those in the “unsung” category, where their deeds do not get recorded in song or story. Nevertheless, they are personal heroes to those who are blessed to know them, have been fortunate to have been helped by them, or have seen what they have accomplished for the benefit of their community. This year we asked you, our readers, to name your heroes and tell us why and how they are heroes in your eyes. We wanted to know whose acts of kindness and good deeds have inspired you and affected the lives of those around them- perhaps for just a few wonderful moments, perhaps forever.

In response we received hundreds of hero referrals from readers all over the State of Mississippi. As we began to dig through the stack of names of those who have changed lives in this state, one thing became clear: Mississippi is filled with heroes. Every day someone is touching the lives of those who live in their community.

Many of us may think of a hero as someone in boots and a cape, who swoops in, does something extraordinary and wonderful, saving the day at the last minute, but those heroes are rather scarce — always have been. The real hero is the everyday hero. Someone who’s putting their time in, day after day, working to make their community a better place by the kind-

ness of their deeds, the generosity of their heart, or the sweat of their brow. A real hero doesn’t seek credit for the great work they do. They do it because they see a need, realize that they have the knowledge or the capability of filling that need, and just roll up their sleeves and get to work.

So many of us take our heroes for granted. We don’t give them the accolades they deserve, often until they are gone, because we can’t imagine what our world would be like without their contributions. However, through By U Magazine we have the opportunity to extend our gratitude and yours to the people who work hard, day in and day out, to improve the lives of others. Their acts may help one person though a crisis, bring blessings and joy to the hearts of an entire family, or benefits to a whole community. After all, a real hero is one of us — part of the crowd, a so-called “regular person” just like those around them. They’re here on earth with the rest of us mortals, and it’s easy to miss them if we aren’t looking.

So we went looking for them- through you, and the stories you brought us were incredible. Our heroes deserve our thanks, and this issue is created precisely for that purpose. So sit back, relax, and enjoy these hero stories. We loved hearing about the people who were changing your life, and we know you’ll enjoy seeing your heroes’ stories in print.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan Richardson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



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Publisher/Editor

Joan Richardson

Contributing Writers

Michelle Jones, Monica Paul, Bernie Rabine,
Bonnie Reda, Mary Wilds

Graphic Designer

Eunice J. Hart

Copy Editing

Eunice J. Hart, Joan Richardson

To Advertise in By U Magazine

Call Joan Richardson — 662-326-3996

Contact

By U Magazine

P.O. Box 44

Darling, MS 38623

662-326-3996

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PRESIDENT Barack Obama

What his election, and re-election, means for
those who have experienced adversity

by u view

By Joan Richardson

Many years ago, at a motel in Tennessee, a gunshot rang out. At the time it screamed of heartbreak, prejudice, and hatred. It was a symbol of the lengths that people would go to prevent equality between blacks and whites. It was a great tragedy and a stepping stone at the same time. While it tragically cost him his life, the words of Martin Luther King Jr. paved the way for the fairness, acceptance, and equality that the United States is moving towards today. It paved the way for a brighter future. A future in which a black man could be elected President of the United States, just four decades later.

President Barack Obama was born in 1961. At the time of his birth, inequality was very prevalent and no one knew what a hero and role model Barack would become. However, many years later, he was elected not once but twice, and became the president of the United States. He is a role model; someone everyone can look up to, no matter what their circumstances or early life experiences may be.

Barack, even as a young child, had what seemed like many strikes against him. He had a rocky life as a youth, and an almost nonexistent relationship with his father. These facts alone are enough to discourage many youths but he did not let it keep him down.

Barack Obama attended Punahou Academy, graduating with honors in 1979. However, it was before his graduation that he started to become more aware of his ethnicity and differences. "I went to the bathroom and stood in front

of the mirror with all my senses and limbs seemingly intact, looking the way I had always looked, and wondered if something was wrong with me," Barack remembers. Luckily, he did not allow that to discourage him from following his dreams, and as a result he graduated from Harvard in 1991. This was just the beginning of many successes for our President.

Many individuals, including our president, remember the events of inequality and unfairness quite clearly, even though it was many years ago. Many remember the days when blacks were sent to sit in the back of the bus. They recall vividly the days when schools, churches, and public restrooms were segregated. Blacks were not welcome and were rudely chased from whites-only businesses and establishments.

This inequality, hostility, and unfairness is something that many people remember, as it is very difficult to forget. Perhaps they also, like their president, gazed into the mirror wondering what was so wrong or different about them. Maybe they also dreamed of a day when everyone would be treated as equals, as they should be.

That day is today and the time is now. We can all take a lesson from our president and follow our dreams. Who knows? You could be the next president of the United States...

References: Whitehouse.org

At the helm of the Shreveport Federal Credit Union,
Helen Godfrey Smith steers the organization towards investment in the Mississippi Delta
and people who need a second chance in life



HERO OF THE YEAR

Helen Godfrey Smith
By Mary Wilds

Helen Godfrey Smith believes in community, and she also believes in second chances.

Her career as President and Chief Executive Officer at Shreveport Federal Credit Union gives her a chance to tend both passions.

“We don’t see [our mission] as anything special,” says Smith, who has been at the helm of Shreveport FCU for 29 years, “We see it as a wonderful opportunity to make life better for people, to bring good, solid, mainstream products and services to folks who truly appreciate what we do.”

Shreveport FCU serves members throughout Louisiana and the Mississippi Delta. The credit union offers partnerships, programs, and services, such as credit score rebuilding, financial literacy, first time home buyer assistance and disaster assistance. One particularly innovative program offers financial training to inmates who are about to be released from prison.

“What we’ve learned how to do is find those folks who by reason of “life” simply need a second chance. Those are the people we build our business around,” said Smith. She spends a lot of time in the Delta visiting local farms and meeting with small business owners to assist them in gaining access to capital to expand and grow their farms and businesses. She has great plans to spur a wave of economic development by encouraging re-investment in family farming.

Smith says she grew up with a sense of community, family and history in tiny Jefferson, Tex. — the oldest town in the state. One of 11 children, she remembers a childhood filled with horseback riding, swimming, adventuring and friends. She credits her father for giving her “a genius for math” and her position as middle child for giving her adaptability. Her life in rural East Texas parallels a lot of what she sees in the Delta.

Smith came of age in the 1960s. “I was a teenager in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement,” she said. After graduating from college as a top student in math and chemistry, Smith was recruited [for interviews] by oil and chemical companies from all over the country.

“I grew up in a home where race was not allowed to be an issue. That does not mean there were no racial challenges. It simply means that we were trained by example to learn how to live in spite of those challenges. I was being interviewed [for jobs] by whites. It never occurred to me they would judge me [by my skin color].”

The jobs she interviewed for kept going to other candi-

dates, and “I finally woke up, said no, I’m not doing this any more.” Even though that door closed, another one opened in the banking industry. She took a job at First National Bank in Kansas City, Mo. and entered the bank’s management program at the age of 23.

She eventually decided to leave the Midwest and move south, but the banking industry in the region did not appreciate her until she fell under the tutelage of a liberal-minded woman at a small credit union in Shreveport, La.

“She was Catholic, and I mention that because I think [because of that] she was more open-minded, she was deeply entrenched in church and family. She did not see me as a project, she saw me as an intelligent person. She taught me how to operate a well run credit union. That training and my banking experience gave me the necessary skills to lead Shreveport FCU to become a \$90 million institution with 8 full service offices.

The financial services industry in the south has come a long way since those days in the 1970’s, and so has she. There had been a time when she was hardly acknowledged as a businesswoman in Shreveport. But now she has been pegged as chairman-elect of the Greater Shreveport Chamber of Commerce. “I’ll be leading [the] organization, and I’m very proud of that.” The business community have grown to appreciate what we bring to the community — jobs and economic empowerment.

Smith is also mindful of the next generation, and provides opportunities for young leaders at Shreveport FCU.

“We have a thriving, next generation of leaders,” she said. “We have a think tank group working in some capacity — high school juniors through college seniors — a group that we utilize in our management team. We expose them to things they’ve never been exposed to. They get to meet with our U.S. Congressmen and other elected officials to explore issues facing young folks.”

Under Smith’s leadership, Shreveport FCU started doing business in the Mississippi Delta in 2010.

“It’s been the best decision [we’ve] made in the past 30 years,” said Smith, noting that Shreveport FCU has invested over \$20 million in loans in the Delta area in those two years to finance homes, autos, and mall businesses as well as small crop farms.

She may be a native Texan, with roots in the bayous of Louisiana but her heart is now in the Delta. When she’s not giving back to the community in some capacity, she likes to relax at her home in Como, Miss.

In Their Own RECOLLECTION

Cora Metcalf, 107 Oakland, Miss.

The year was 1905. Theodore Roosevelt was president, the mighty Mississippi River froze over that winter, Henry Ford was working on something called a Model T Ford and Cora Metcalf Gleeton was born. A woman who would come to be known as “Big Mama,” (an Afro-American term signifying respect and deep affection) by generations yet to come.



Born on April 12 to Rosie Wynn Metcalf and George Metcalf, Cora was the youngest of eight children. Her mother cleaned the homes of white people and her father labored as a sharecropper to keep the family fed, clothed and sheltered. It was a life that taught Cora the importance of God, family, and survival. “Big mama told me that she and her younger brother Clyde, who was a couple of years older, went to a one room school house,” said her granddaughter Barbara Gleeton-DeLoach. “I remember her talking about how bitter cold it was to walk for miles and then have to go outside the school to find wood to put in the pot belly stove.” While in eighth grade, Cora met the love of her life, EQ Gleeton, and in 1925 they became the first couple to ever be wed at the historic Pope Chapel A.M.E Zion Church in Pope, MS.

Although EQ’s father owned property in Pope, the young couple decided to strike out on their own. Moving from town to town, place to place, they rented homes and sharecropped to make ends meet. In 1959, they bought a small farm in Sardis, MS. By then their nine children,

Melzani, Myrtle, Geraldine, Freddie, Elbert, James, and now deceased, Prentiss, Arzell and Eugene were grown up, but always found their way home. It is where Cora still lives. “Papa (Barbara’s name for her grandfather) had a shop and worked as a blacksmith, did some logging and became known as one of the greatest farmers in Panola County. In her younger years Big Mama worked hard around the farm. She’d be picking vegetables, putting them in the freezer, and she also worked in their own cotton fields,” said Barbara. “They were both very strong believers in God, independence, and education. Papa told his children ‘If you’re a sharecropper a man could come along and tell you what to do, and that you couldn’t go to school.’ ” It was a lesson that hit its mark as Cora and EQ’s children went on to become teachers, steel workers, business owners, nurses, and executives.



Tragically, on Dec. 23, 1960, a fatal car accident took the life of Cora’s beloved husband of 35 years. Over the coming years, she would also suffer the loss of three sons and three grandsons. “I only saw her cry once in my lifetime and that was at her grandson Austin’s funeral,” said Barbara. Through it all Big Mama squared her shoulders, prayed to the Lord, and continued to provide loving guidance to her 9 children and a growing family that now includes 40 grandchildren, 81 great grandchildren, and 73 great, great, grandchildren.

In the years following EQ’s death, Barbara’s parents bought the farm next to Big Mama and together they planted and worked the fields; her home becoming a refuge of love and comfort to her growing family. “Somehow it was just much more fun to go next door and play in Big Mama’s yard in the evenings. On the weekends, there were 11 of us in her yard. She would sit on the porch and watch us play; laugh with us; baby us when we needed it, kiss our foreheads and get a skinny little switch and tare us up when we



needed it," said Barbara.

Big Mama's faith in God and the fellowship of the Pope Chapel A.M.E Zion Church, which she has attended for 87 years, have been her guiding lights. Until just last spring, she held a railing and walked up the 16 well-worn granite steps to the church entrance. Now she allows others to assist her.

Throughout her long life Big Mama has never given up and to this day remains the family matriarch. In Big Mama's own words - "Stay Prayed up, don't wait for troubles to come. Pray up for a good time, for those times ahead when you may be too hurt to pray. Pray up for your children, pray up for your grandchildren. Pray up for good health and prosperity. Pray up to the Lord when everyone else walks out."

Amen.

— Bonnie Reda

Marie Leland

Batesville, Miss.

If you ask Marie Leland, now 70, how she feels about spending her childhood picking and chopping cotton on a plantation in Canton, Mo., you might just be surprised. "It was fun. Everybody was like family. The white man who owned the place was like one of us. He took care of us and made sure we took lunch breaks and had something to eat." It is this optimistic outlook on life, fostered by her deep faith in the Lord, which guides Marie. Her father, Earnest Roston also worked in the fields while her mother, Irene Roston, ran the house and took care of their large family of nine children. Every Sunday would find them at church.

After high school, she met and married the love of her life, Charles Leland (aka CW). The young couple soon moved to CW's hometown of Batesville, Miss. in Panola County. Here, he worked as a technician for Heafner Motors while Marie stayed home to care for their children, Arlene, Leland, Rudley, Debra, Larry, Patara, Tawanna, Charles, Curtis, Rhonda, and Norris.

In 1985, her minister had a request. "He literally told me I was going to volunteer at the food pantry and so I did. I began helping out and when the president and vice president retired, I was next in line. Though many call me the Director of the Pantry, I call myself the gopher," she said with a

chuckle.

When CW passed away in 2010, at age 79, Marie redoubled her efforts to expand the food pantry and now works 45 to 50 hours a week — for free. "On the two days we're open we serve about 125 people. I spend a great deal of time picking up donated food from Wal-Mart, Kroger's, and organizing free food we get from the state." Senior citizens, some driving 50 miles round trip, volunteer to help. "It breaks my heart sometimes that neither the town nor county will lend a hand to help us. If it were not for the churches and civic groups, we would have to close the door and let people go hungry. They just don't care! And you can quote me on that," Marie said.



A member of the New Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church for almost 49 years, a cancer survivor for 30, and the last of her nine siblings, Marie said, "It's the almighty that keeps me going, which is God. I have all faith in him that gives me the courage to keep pushing on. Some days, I feel like throwing in the towel, but I keep going. I don't consider myself a hero. I'm just a vessel to do the Lord's work."

— Bonnie Reda

Julius Harris

Sardis, Miss.

In a voice as mellow as a warm summer day, Julius Harris, 67, spoke of his life in a matter of fact way. Given his many accomplishments, one might say he had earned the right to be a bit boastful, but that is not Julius's way.

Born in Sardis, Miss., where he now lives on a 55 acre farm, Julius was one of eight children born to Marvin "Jack" and Alzada Frazier Harris. "We grew up as sharecroppers. I started working in the fields when I was about 5 or 6-years-old and worked in them till I was about 21. Once the crops were picked, my dad would talk to the boss man to determine if we had any money after expenses. Sometimes there wasn't much."

Though the family may have lacked money, they never lacked faith or compassion. Julius, who has been a member of the Shiloh C.M.E. Church in Shiloh, Miss. since childhood said, "My parents instilled in us that some sharecroppers had more food than others. So when we had extra, we'd help people. My dad had a truck and he was always helping people who needed a ride, and my mom always gave to needy people." Lessons that seared themselves into the man that Julius would become.

Following high school, Julius earned his teaching degree



and taught social studies to elementary school children for the next 31½ years. Retiring in 2000, Julius jumped right into his next career — working for North Delta Enterprise Community, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting economic development, stimulating jobs, and assisting individuals with housing discrimination issues.

Retiring from his second career in 2008, he now devotes more time to a variety of projects including working his farm of 28 beef cows and calves, hay fields, and a vegetable garden. In addition, at the beginning of each school year he buys supplies for children without them, and also gives rides to those who need transportation. “I chip in and help people that need help, take them places, help them get their social security. I don’t do it for the notoriety though,” he said. “I live in the community so I see who needs things.”

With a bit of prompting, he shares that he is also the president of the Marvin Hayes (a retired teacher) Scholarship Fund, which has raised more than \$50,000 to assist North Panola High School graduates attend college. He is also the president of the local NAACP chapter (20 years), a Sunday school superintendent and teacher, and the County Election Commissioner since 1986 — the first black to hold this position.

Married to Betty Anderson Harris, with whom he has one daughter, Latoya, 33, a granddaughter, Gabrielle Darbeau, and a son-in-law, Don Darbeau, Julius says that he does not do anything for the notoriety. “Our parents taught us to share whatever you have. So I do.”

— Bonnie Reda

William Pride

Batesville, Miss.

William Pride’s character was born in the rich soil of his family’s farm, and refined under the loving but firm hand of his father.

The Pride family grew cotton, and beans, made their own molasses, and they also grew children. Ten in all, “and my father sure kept up with giving us plenty to do,” Pride chuckled, as he remembered his childhood. Though at the end of the day, no one would have worked harder than

the elder Pride himself, who was a monumental man to his children and all who knew him. He was also a jack-of-all trades, becoming whatever the situation needed him to be: a farmer, a carpenter, or a blacksmith. And, of course, his son says, a husband and father.

William Pride, however, didn’t stay as strongly rooted as his father had — not at the beginning. The work of his young manhood would take him up north, to the U.S. Steelworks plant in Gary, Ind. After four years, he came home and it was time to use the traits that had been honed on the farm and under the hand of his father. Also, the traits that God gave him: Pride could make cars run, coax their engines back from problems and into a state of good health. He also knew how to smile, talk well and enjoy people. He also thought a taste of the independence his father knew, in a place he could call his own, would make him happy.



Putting his traits and talents together with his desire for independence meant that Pride would have to start his own business. And he did, 27 years ago, on a small piece of property in Batesville, Miss. “I started me a little car lot,” he remembers, with satisfaction. Like his father before him, Pride made things work by the sweat of his hard work and his character. He also learned to be the jack-of-all trades his father had been. “I was the clean-up man, the mechanic, and the salesperson in the beginning,” he recalls. “We were a one-horse operation.”

But that “one-horse operation” eventually grew into Pride Hyundai/Pride Auto Sales. His hard work even expanded into a second dealership, Ford Lincoln Mercury Nissan in Clarksdale, Miss., which he sold after 10 years. It also won him numerous honors, including Clarksdale Businessman of the Year, a Black Enterprise Award, and recognition as one of the top 100 most influential black men in Mississippi.

It also gave him the wherewithal and influence to spearhead the Panola County Community Foundation, which was founded in 2008. Its mission is to provide financial help to the people of Panola County through various non-profit groups in the area.

And meanwhile, Pride continues his hard work, hoping to pass it all on to a new generation. His wife, Sarah, works at the dealership, as do his college-educated children, William III and Cynthia.

— Mary Wilds

Mississippi's Community Heroes

The stories in this issue are inspired by the need to intellectually recognize and appreciate the great contributions of Mississippi's most remarkable leaders. The issue will serve as a souvenir and as a worthy gift to young generations to teach them about our heroes.

It is time we tell our children about our heroes. Throughout our communities, certain individuals are fighting against the odds to make a difference for their people. The stories in this issue capture their noteworthy achievements. It is time we bring our heroes into the spotlight, showing our youth what the men and women around them have accomplished.

Florine Miller

CLARKSDALE, MISS.

For more than 27 years, Florine Miller has worked for the Workforce Investment Network (WIN) in Clarksdale, Miss. — a convenient one-stop employment and training service for both job seekers and employers. Given that Mississippi has the ninth-highest unemployment rate in the U.S. — tied with Georgia — one might think this a daunting task, but not Florine.



Born in Clarksdale, Miss., Florine was the seventh of nine children born to Della and Eddie Barnes — both deceased. Her faith in the Lord and the community in which she grew up had a great influence on her life. “I had a good childhood. I lived in a small community where families were

connected. If you were doing something wrong, anyone in the neighborhood could chastise you for it. We were somewhat impoverished, but you didn’t know it because everybody else was in the same place,” she said. “We went to church every Sunday and you walked to school. And I don’t remember encountering any racial tension.”

At WIN, Florine strives to see the faces behind the unemployment numbers, to be a good listener and best determine how to influence that person’s life for the better. “This job gives me an opportunity to make a change. You know, only one person can be president, but anyone can be a change maker. It’s a very rewarding job. Sometimes it takes a high degree of emotional energy, but it’s part of the job.”

A graduate of the University of Mississippi with degrees in public administration, Florine strives to never be complacent about her job and never lose compassion for those she’s helping. “It’s not about me; it’s about making their lives a bit easier. My parents gave me the foundation, when the day is long to just push on a little harder. In my job the potential is there to get frustrated, but there’s really no need to when you realize you’ve got a job.”

In addition to providing job search and job placement assistance, Florine is a member of the Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce Commercial Industrial Board, volunteers part-time as a counselor at a crisis pregnancy center, serves on the Batesville Job Corps Center Industrial Council, and the Friends of the Carnegie Public Library.

If you ask Florine if she’s a hero, she’ll set you straight. “I go to Christ the King Ministries in Clarksdale, Miss., each Sunday and it’s foundational that Christ called us to be his servants and this gives me an opportunity to be of service,” she said. “Christ uses people all the time to do his will and

I can help those people. Me a hero? This is just what we all do. If at the end of the day I’ve impacted someone’s life, it’s like being doubly paid.”

Married to Charles Miller and the mother of three adult children — Tiffany, French, and Alexis — Florine loves to travel, read inspirational books by New York Times bestselling author T.D. Jakes, and interior decorating ... when time allows.

— Bonnie Reda

Rev. Dr. Ronald Myers

TCHULA, MISS.

In a dozen life times, not many could accomplish what the Rev. Dr. Ronald Myers, 56, has.

A partial list of accomplishments includes completing his residency in Family Medicine at LSU Bogalusa Medical Center in Louisiana, championing Juneteenth, serving as Artistic Director of the Mississippi Jazz & Heritage Festival and becoming the first ordained and commissioned medical missionary to the Mississippi Delta by the Wisconsin Baptist Pastors Conference and Pilgrim Rest Missionary Baptist Church in Milwaukee, Wis. He has also appeared on NBC’s Today Show with Bryant Gumble, CBS’s Saturday Night with Connie Chung, and has been featured in People Magazine and The New York Times.



Born to Marion and Neoma Myers, he graduated from the University of Wisconsin Medical School in 1985 prior to completing his residency. Medical degree in hand, he listened to the voice of God to direct him. “I always felt there was a calling on my life. That the purpose of my life was to become a physician to help the poorest people. To become a doctor to help those needing care the most, not for the purpose of financial gain.”

In 1988, he and his wife Sylvia used their limited resources to open a family health clinic in Tchula, Miss. where, he said, “A black baby has a better chance of surviving in Bangladesh.” Facts prove him right. In 2011, for every 1,000 babies born in Mississippi, 9.4 died before their first birthday. In Botswana, the average is 10.5 and the U.S. average is 6.0. House calls to impoverished rural communities soon became the norm as he worked nights and weekends in area emergency rooms to make ends meet. “We weren’t looking for payment,” he said. Within short order, he began to demand answers from the government about the deplorable healthcare in the Delta and the media flocked to hear him. Despite being heard however, the struggle for improvement continues today.

In 1989, Myers had a revelation. “I received a divine revela-

tion about the legacy of slavery and the need for healing,” and is now passionate about the passage of Juneteenth (a day to celebrate the end of slavery) as a national holiday.

Today, he travels from Mississippi to Roland, Okla. to care for his ailing mother and works in a clinic advocating for those in chronic pain. For relaxation, he enjoys his five children, Ronald, Jr., Michael, Eric, Joshua and Ron’ald, 11 grandchildren and one great grandchild.

What the next 56 years will bring for this man of God and his earthly angel Sylvia time will tell. One thing is certain, whatever it is will be done in the Lord’s name.

— Bonnie Reda

Dr. Benjamin Thompson

SUMMIT, MISS.

Twelve years ago, Dr. Benjamin Thompson received a divinely inspired vision that would ultimately help him better the lives of elderly, disabled and young people in his community.



“In 2000, the Lord gave me a vision,” Thompson said. The vision led to the construction of Mount Zion Economic Community Center in Summit, Miss., which offers programs, services, and hope to many of those who need it most.

The 26,400 square foot center was built through fundraising that was

spearheaded by Thompson, and via a loan he helped to obtain. Thompson used his training as a pastor and community leader, and his Master’s in business administration to help it all happen. “We raised funds through donations, gifts, all types of fund raisers,” he said. “I knew that if we got 25 percent of the cost of building,” obtaining financing would be much simpler. “We ended up borrowing 75 percent (of funds needed) without any problem.”

Thompson, the pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church, also served as general contractor for the project. Mount Zion Economic Community Center currently has a staff of 16.

The center has many missions, but one of them is to provide adult day care for seniors who live in the surrounding areas. “We pick them up at home, bring them to the facility,” Thompson said. “[Spending the day at the center] gives them a new lease on life. They play games; some play chess, some play checkers. Some go to the exercise room or play with computers. They interact with others, have a good time, then we take them back home in the afternoon.”

“This makes a world of difference,” Thompson added. “We had a lady who was 102 years old. She’d come at least three days a week, and she turned 102 at the center.” Then

there are the arts and crafts classes and programs for the disabled, and a camp and activities geared to local young people. The building also has a computer laboratory, gymnasium, library, first aid room, classrooms and an exercise room.

Thompson has shown his love for service throughout his life. He served as a 2nd lieutenant in the U.S. Army and spent 18 years in the Army Reserve. He is married to his high school sweetheart, Janice. “She is my right hand person,” he said, supporting him personally and professionally. He and Janice have three children and fourteen grandchildren.

— Mary Wilds

Officer Freddie Bardley

STARKVILLE, MISS.

Igrew up on the projects of Columbus, Miss., one of 7 kids (3 girls and 4 boys). I had two pairs of shoes a year — one for church and one for school — and we had to stretch to make do,” said Officer Freddie Bardley, 47, and a 16-year veteran of the Starkville, Miss. police department. “Life was tough, but one of the things our parents taught us was that we had to take pride in everything. They said ‘don’t you ever go out looking bad and be sure you iron your clothes and look neat’ ”

Moved by the incarceration of one of his brothers on drug charges in 2003, Bardley made a vow to help underprivileged youth find hope beyond the poverty and drugs often found in the projects. That year he formed Clover Street Projects, a non-profit organization, and, going community to community, he spoke in churches and schools about life in the projects. “I realized it wasn’t working that way so I tried something else. When we had a troubled youth (at work), we’d sit in my car and I’d talk to them about how I grew up in the projects and that if they were determined they could get out too.” He and his wife Sherrye (who volunteers full-time for the Clover Street Project) also organized an annual banquet in December. Each banquet features an inspirational speaker and each youth receives a present thanks to generous donors like Wal-Mart and the legal firms of Ross Kelly Hosford and Austin Voll. Since 2003, attendance has grown from 238 to 700 in 2011 — 500 of them youths.



Clover Street Projects also distributes free clothes (many donated by Citi Trends), provides scholarships to GED students, has an afterschool program, a mentor program, and holds rummage sales to buy Christmas gifts. A key part of Clover Street Projects is an open discussion of the Lord. “We discuss the Lord and we always open with prayer and we do bible study breaks,” said Bardley.

When he and Sherrye find time to relax, they spend it with their children — Lakesha, 29, Saubarious, 24, Lequawn, 23, Tashmia, 16 — or one of their four grandchildren. And his brother? “He got out of jail, moved to Dallas, got married and just had a son. He’s doing great!”

— Bonnie Reda

Michael Cormack

CLARKSDALE, MISS.

Michael Cormack came to Quitman County 10 years ago to begin his career as a teacher. He thought to stay two years, but life had other plans.



A native of Portland, Ore., Cormack came to Quitman County, Miss. as part of Teach for America. He was fresh out of Boston College, and, as part of the program, committed to teach for two years in Mississippi. “And now I have a wife and two little Mississippi girls.” He also expanded his education, earning a

Master’s from Delta State University and a Doctorate from Columbia University.

Cormack is flattered to be thought of as a hero, but insists it’s a team effort. “I have the pleasure of working with great people.”

Now into his third year as principal at Quitman Elementary School, Cormack’s mission continues to be creating “good readers, writers and problem solvers. That’s our mantra. We want to get elementary school students excited about lifelong learning. We want them to know that kind of joy — of being challenged.” So far, Cormack’s approach seems to be working. Three years ago, Quitman Elementary students had an average to failing rating from the state in the category of reading. This year, they received a state exceptional rating in that same category.

The school is also working hard to reach out to the greater community. Quitman Elementary partnered with Blue Cross/Blue Shield to build a \$35,000 walking trail next to the school. The trail is an investment not only in the present, but the future, Cormack said. For example, regular exercise can help stem the tide of early childhood obesity. With input from two other partners — Mississippi State and Ole Miss — the school created a staff workout room and a healthy curriculum. Students take dance classes and participate in physical education programs, all while learning about how the body’s systems work together to keep a person healthy.

Cormack wants the school to be an open and inviting place for parents. He wants to increase already high levels of involvement via upcoming programs, such as a reading fair. He is also reaching out to area seniors, getting them

involved in an oral history project that partners them with students. Quitman County has a rich history, particularly when it comes to the Civil Rights Movement and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Cormack looks forward to local seniors sharing that history with his students.

— Mary Wilds

Evelyn Jossell

MARKS, MISS.

Evelyn Jossell looked around her hometown and felt discouraged by what she saw. She saw children raising babies without support. She saw vulnerable toddlers receiving no early developmental stimulation, and teen mothers dropping out of school — sometimes even out of life. Further, she was discouraged that the cycle seemed destined to repeat itself unless someone took drastic action.

Thus, in 1998, Evelyn Jossell established Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.) as a community based organization. The actual program model originated in 1992 as a result of a \$3.5 million Youth Fair Chance grant awarded to Coahoma Community College from the U.S. Department of Labor to establish Y.O.U. in Tunica and Quitman Counties.



From 1993 to 1998, the local Y.O.U. program operated under the auspices of the Quitman County School District. In a move to allow for more funding flexibility, the organization separated from the school district and operated as a stand-alone 501 (c) 3 community based organization. This organization, based in Lambert, Miss., strives to improve educational, physical and social outcomes for the youth of Coahoma, Quitman, West Tallahatchie and North Panola Counties. Y.O.U. stepped up to make a difference for the kids of the Delta.

From its inception, afterschool sports and cultural programs have been a part of Y.O.U. Providing positive activities after school hours keeps kids occupied and engaged in healthy endeavors. Everyone knows that bored kids spell trouble. In a rural community like the Delta, kids have a difficult time finding fun, engaging activities. Y.O.U. has made that happen.

Afterschool programming has also included tutoring with the goal of improving graduation rates, and helping students excel on state and national tests. The day care center, GED programming and job skills training programs further assist at-risk families. Providing help early, these young families are able to overcome their rocky start. Education and support moves families into positive citizenship.

Y.O.U. also wanted to impact young men in a positive way.

The Boyz to Men program provides strong, male role models to mentor to teen boys, instill ethical values, and help them to know there is a way out of street life. The boys participate in positive activities like camping retreats, and raise money for different causes like providing food, clothing and other necessities for the elderly. Boyz to Men creates strong, confident young men able to give back to their community and experience personal success through educational attainment and work opportunities.

Teen pregnancy has been at an all time high in Mississippi during the past decade. In 2004, the MADAME Butterfly Project was initiated by Y.O.U. to combat this growing problem through abstinence education.

The DaRing to Excel through Education Advocacy and Modeling (DREEM) program was also established in October 2010 to address this issue. These programs have successfully intervened with young ladies offering mentoring and building self-esteem through abstinence education. In 2010, the program was given a significant grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. DREEM will provide a sex education program to prevent unwanted teen pregnancies, HIV infections, and STDs by making informed, safe choices.

Perhaps the greatest way to describe Y.O.U. is through their vision statement: "To provide positive life options to underprivileged youth and their families through a diverse array of services that will empower participants to become self-sufficient, productive citizens." With a strong group of committed individuals, Y.O.U. will continue implementing programs designed to improve the lives of young people in the Delta.

Emma Harris

ANGUILLA, MISS.

"It is not a 9-5 job, it is 24-7"

This is what Emma Harris says about improving the community and creating a better life for others. She believes that human service is not something that one should be paid for, but something that one has on their mind at all times. She is always thinking about how she can help others and what she can do to provide a needed service to others.



Currently a resident of Anguilla, Miss. in Sharkey County, Emma Harris sees many hardships in her's and surrounding communities. To Emma, the biggest of these appears to be a lack of education, jobs, and resources. She also sees a deficiency in elderly care and the impact of race division.

"If I can help somebody as I pass along, then my living

will not be in vain," she says. She puts action into this belief in many ways. Emma has worked with the Sharkey Issaquena County Improvement Association, Inc. for over 23 years and became the director of the association in the late 1980s. In this association, they were able to train over 60 youths in economic development.

In 1995, Emma was elected School Board Trustee for Sharkey County District 3, and she served in that position for ten years. In 2001, she was elected the first black mayor of Anguilla. Emma served in this position for four years which was a struggle in a small rural community.

Emma believes that anyone can make a change following a few simple guidelines. First, she says that everyone must demand that elected officials be held accountable and perform the duties in which they were elected. The duty of elected officials is to represent the citizens and assist them in becoming more successful, productive individuals.

Emma's secret to her heroic stature is to help wherever and whenever it is possible. She says she loves life and believes in the American dream. She believes that we can all live out the American dream by applying time, resources, and our God-given talents.

— Monica Paul

Emma & Eddie Ward

OXFORD, MISS.

Pastors Emma and Eddie Ward faced an uphill challenge. They were the co-pastors of three small flocks in the Quitman County area. But it's not their work with those three flocks that makes them heroes. It's how they transformed their community by bringing three small churches together and making them into one strong one.

Today, Trinity United Methodist Church sits just outside of Marks, Miss., in the Lambert area. The Wards formed the church in 2002 after they started their street witnessing ministry, which involved witnessing and visiting with anyone they saw on the street, whether they were alcoholics, drug addicts or a family with other needs.



"We had the microphone set up outside in Darling," Pastor Emma said. "The people could hear talking, and a lot of singing took place. We did whatever we could to show that we care, and they began to show interest in being part of the church."

It didn't take long for lives in the community to begin to change for the better, but the Wards were still concerned about the people. Pastor Emma said they would ask her and her husband which of the three churches they should

join and become involved in. She said they didn't want to choose one church over another, so they decided to build one church and unite the congregations of their three churches.

"We needed to build one church in a neutral place where it could benefit us all," Pastor Emma said. "We can do more with one larger church than we could with three churches."

Trinity United Methodist Church started with 121 members after the merger of the three churches and now has more than 300 members. The church is also home to more than 20 different ministries, including a children's choir, male choir, youth ministry, outreach ministry, evangelist ministry, and jailhouse ministry.

— Michelle Jones

Pastor Lorenzo Carter

SHUBUTA, MISS.

Pastor Lorenzo Carter has always tried hard to "reach the lost at any cost" and equip the saved with the tools they need to impact the world.



Carter, pastor of Center Ridge Baptist Church in Shubuta, Miss., pursues his mission via his television ministry, the classes he teaches, the conferences he runs and the counseling he offers.

Carter, who has a Doctorate in theology and a Master's in counseling, shepherds the grief-

stricken, the single, the married, the old and the young.

"He's just a very wise man," said Robin Watts, who met husband Donald through her involvement with the church's Singles ministry. "He's always led by God. He's tactful in the way he deals out information. If you are willing to go to him and ask him, he's not going to [respond too quickly]. He'll pray on it, [then offer] counsel. He teaches us a lot." She and her husband are now part of Center Ridge Baptist's Marriage Ministry.

"He helped me from a man's perspective, with the hands-on experiences that he's had," Donald Watts said. "[Carter] is a man who really practices what he teaches. He turns out to be a great husband and great father while being a pastor."

Carter is happy to ascribe much of who he is to those who influenced him most. "There are two women in my life — my mom, and my wife," he said. Carter's mom was a single mother. "My mother played an active part in my life; my mom was my dad and my mom. She taught me the basics of honesty and to be respectful."

Carter has been married to his wife, Cathy, for 32 years.

"She is a great asset to my personal life and ministry." The pair has three grown daughters, one of whom is deceased, a son-in-law and a grandchild.

As a pastor and leader, Carter always emphasizes the whole person. Too often, people believe that being saved is simply the road to salvation, he said, but that's just the beginning of the story. "Through Christ, those who are lost through Christ can have an abundant life."

Carter wears almost too many hats to speak of, but they include being president of the Clark County Ministerial Alliance, an associate of the Quitman public schools mentoring program, and executive director of the youth department of the Deep Mississippi State convention.

— Mary Wilds

Dr. Hilliard L. Lackey III

JACKSON, MISS.

Dr. Hilliard L. Lackey III's list of accomplishments reads like a who's who of today's most influential African-Americans. He is the Visiting Professor of Higher Education, History and Geography at Jackson State University, where he has worked for 45 years. In 2008, he became the ninth JSU graduate to be enshrined in the National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame — joining icons like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Oprah Winfrey. Beyond the many accomplishments however, is an unsung hero who has spent a lifetime helping the youth of Quitman County, Miss.

Born in Marks, Miss in Quitman County, Lackey was the fourth of 10 children born to sharecroppers. "When I was just 9-years-old, I asked God why I was poor, black, and in Mississippi. I told God that if he let me out I'd try and get the rest of them out." Recognizing that education was the key to a life beyond poverty, he became the first in his family to attend college. "It goes like this," he said, "for 2,000 years, people tried to run the mile in the minute. When it happened, in the same year, a lot of folks ran it. I was the first in my family to attend college and now, all but one has gone to college."



His position at JSU established, Lackey now set his sights on the youth of Quitman County. "My theory is that when people are mired in poverty and hopelessness they just need to be helped by someone they trust. As a member of the Baha'i faith, I believe that service is worship. When you do things unselfishly you're rendering service to your fellow man," said Lackey.

In 1967, he brokered his first scholarship, to Jackson State, for Sarah Benson Pride — the sister-in-law of country singer Charlie Pride. In time, she would become a teacher and

a businesswoman. To date, Lackey has helped more than 400 youths attend college. His hope is that these students will motivate others to succeed. "What education can do for us is fascinating," he said.

Adherents of the Baha'i Faith, Lackey has been married for 46 years to his childhood sweetheart, Lillian Troupe Lackey, a retired teacher. The couple has four children — Katrina Lackey Davis, Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Arkansas; Hilliard Lawrence Lackey IV, Marine Biologist at JSU; Tahirih Charryse Lackey, Civil Engineer, U.S. Corps of Engineers; and Darryl William Lackey, an entrepreneur.

For the near future, Lackey, now 70, plans to continue teaching and motivating. "Over time, disadvantages become advantages. Recognizing who you are and making a negative into a positive is a matter of perspective."

— Bonnie Reda

Minister Kevin Jones

CLEVELAND, MISS.

Born in Oxford, Miss. to Sam and Sarah Jones, Minister Kevin Jones grew up to become an engineer and a minister. Groomed by his parents to play an instrumental role in the church, he said, "I felt the Lord's hand on me at an early age and I remember praying as a little boy to be used by God. I believe that God has influenced me and my life and guided my career and my progression through life from birth."



While studying engineering at the University of Miss., Jones felt called to the Lord and considered dropping out of college. Instead, he accepted the council of advisors who encouraged him to do both — get his degree and serve the Lord. In 1995, he received his engineering degree from the Ole Miss and in 2003 he

completed his seminary work at Reform Theological Seminary in Jackson, Miss.

"At the core of any good engineer is the ability or desire to help people and serve people. As a minister, you want to serve people as unto the Lord. I am working to help humankind manufacture goods that aid the human process and to aid our daily lives. In the ministry, I am serving God and serving souls. At the core of both of these is the basic desire to help people," said Jones.

As an engineer, he uses his talents to research and problem solve when studying the Word of God, especially in the original languages of Greek and Hebrew. "My engineering background has helped me to think critically, problem solve, and be creative."

Jones currently serves alongside Pastor Carl Brown, his friend and kindred spirit, at Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church in Batesville, Miss. To spread the world of the Lord everywhere, he maintains a website, www.believethegospel.org, that includes a podcast, sermons, a bible class, Sunday Schools, inspirational posts, and more.

"I plan to spend the rest of my life serving others in this capacity, whether it be preaching and teaching on Sunday or just maintaining a website or just one on one."

Now living in Cleveland, Miss., Jones, 40, is the proud father of Nicholas, 20, Kevin II, 16, and Brandon, 15.

— Bonnie Reda

Annie Moffitt Lucas

BYHALIA, MISS.

The state of Mississippi is home to many heroes. Among them is Annie Moffitt Lucas, a lifelong resident of Marshall County. She is truly a hero and a blessing to every life she touches.

According to her friend, Betty Crawford, Lucas's love for people and her love for the Lord is an inspiration. She has, "invested 35 years of her life working to improve Marshall County to make it a better place to live and to create new opportunities for residents to work and play."



She was married to the late Joe Moffitt, Jr. for 23 years and the mother of two sons and two daughters — Derrick, Warren, Kimberly and Kasoina. She is currently married to Jerry Lucas and resides in Byhalia, Miss. She organized the Ad Hoc Committee for the Revitalization of North Memphis Street. She is a member of the Board of Directors of Holly Springs Chamber of Commerce, Main Street and Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors Holly Springs Tourism.

Lucas has founded and developed several businesses in Marshall County. These include Annie's Restaurant and Moffitt's Hair Care Center — the setting for a new beginning for young individuals who seek Lucas's help. She has dedicated rooms in the back of the center to house young individuals and assist them in trying to better themselves and their situation. She gives them a job, helps them get off drugs, and helps them get involved with the community and the church. She helps them make a fresh start and become respected members of society.

Lucas also helps the children of Marshall County through a program called, "Diamonds in the Rough." She provides space on her property for the children in the program to plant their own garden full of vegetables of their choice and grow and care for the garden. She oversees the efforts and believes she is encouraging the children to learn to be self-

sufficient. Lucas believes that people are too dependent and need to learn to do things such as this. Many children do not have the opportunity to learn to become self-sufficient so she teaches them.

Currently, the Diamonds in the Rough program includes 10 children who range in age from 6-10 years of age. Each child is responsible for their own garden and each plays a part in the growing, harvesting, and processing of their crops. The children also participate in raising farm animals.

Lucas recognizes that she herself is a great asset to Marshall County but insists that she gives God the credit for all she has done. Her good deeds have been the product of what the Lord created in her and she never overlooks the fact that it could just as easily have been her in the same situations as the individuals she is helping.

— Monica Paul

Senator Robert Jackson

MARKS, MISS.

Senator Robert Jackson, who hails from Marks, Miss., the county seat of Quitman County, anticipates positive outcomes for the area once the fundamental foundations of change have been built or repaired. "It is easier to effect change by building an organization of change."

Born on a plantation in Vance, Miss., Jackson was one of nine children born into a sharecropping arrangement. In Dec. 1967, Jackson's family moved to Marks where he promptly graduated from high school in 1973. He went on to receive a degree in Business from Northwest Community College in 1975, and the University of Southern Mississippi in 1977.



"I received work study job at the campus post office, a Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, and a Basic Educational Opportunity Grant from the Federal government to attend college, and I felt a need to give back as a result of what had been provided to me," Jackson said.

Jackson became involved with the Quitman County Development Organization, (QCDO) and became its CEO in 1987. The QCDO subsequently helped create a credit union, food cooperative, housing organization, investment club, and a day care — among other programs. By doing so, the QCDO hoped to stem the drain of business and job loss that plagued the county.

Hoping to effect greater change, Jackson ran for the County Board of Supervisors three times between 1979 and 1987 before finally winning a seat. In 2003, Jackson became the first African American to win a senate seat in the North Mississippi Delta.

Today, Jackson has four key objectives: to stop the drain of talent and the middle class from Quitman County; create a climate for job growth in the county; improve the support of public education thereby improving the system; and unify people of all colors to work together for the greater good.

Like his own growth from a sharecropping plantation to a powerful seat in the State Senate, Robert Jackson is helping rebuild Quitman County from the ground up.

Dr. J. Y. Trice

ROSEDALE, MISS.

Dr. J.Y. Trice is the man known for "Moving People and Fulfilling Dreams." Trice is the CEO and Founder of the Bolivar County Council on Aging, Inc. (BCCOA).

"We started this program in my one car in 1972 and have since grown to 52 staff members with two locations, one in the Delta and a satellite office in the Central region and have more than 65 vehicles ranging from sedans to 36 passenger buses," said Trice.



In 2005, the BCCOA was selected the Community Transit System Of The Year by The Community Transportation Department. Needed services are provided to the general public, elderly, disabled and low-income persons to employment, educational and medical facilities, nutritional sites, adult day care centers and other social service needs at an affordable rate. Approximately 475 trips are provided daily.

Trice, 91, has lived in Verona, Lee County, Miss., since 1969, and was married to Detris Scales-Trice (now deceased) for 61 years. The couple has two children, J.O. Trice, MD., 65, and Rev. Harriman R. Trice, 62, and nine grandchildren.

He holds multiple degrees including Master of Education in Supervision, Education Specialist in Higher Education, and Doctor of Divinity. He is also a retired minister from the CME Church where he served as pastor for 37 years and as presiding elder for 40 years.

During the past 45 years, Trice has won innumerable awards including the Silver Beaver Award from the Boy Scouts of America, the Governor's Recipient Older American Distinguished Service Award, the Mississippi Public Transit Charles R. Carr Leadership Award, the Community Transportation Association of America Dr. Aaron E. Henry Leadership Award, and the 2011 Mississippi Public Transit Association State Leadership Award.

Looking to the future, Trice would like the BCCOA to become the first brokerage for the State of Mississippi who resides in the state.

“We have been providing transportation services for 40 years throughout Mississippi and surrounding States until we can do it with our eyes closed. I feel we can manage such programs as Medicaid and not only save the State of Mississippi money but also increase the ridership of other public and private transportation providers through a coordinated effort in Mississippi and reduce the amount of traffic congestion on the state highways and city streets.”

— Bonnie Reda

Robert Dennis Hoskins

BATESVILLE, MISS.

For many of the youth living in Batesville, Miss., Robert Dennis Hoskins, the Director of the Boys and Girls Club of Northwest Mississippi, is their hero. Hoskins, who was born Sardis, Miss., lives in Batesville with Linda Draper Hoskins, his high school sweetheart and wife of 35 years. They have two sons, Keith Hoskins and Kerry Hoskins, and are the proud grandparents of 19-year-old grandsons Nicholas and Shuntez.



Hoskins, 57, has been with the Boys and Girls Club since 1999 and takes great pride in the club's safe and nurturing atmosphere. “We offer a four-core program in the arts, computer technology, health and life skills, and sports and recreation for approximately 100 youth, ages 6 to 18, Monday to Friday. For 12 years,

we have served boys and girls, helping them overcome life challenges to achieve their dreams. I see the Boys and Girls Club of Northwest Mississippi growing to bigger and brighter things in the future and serving even more kids,” said Hoskins.

Located in a former National Guard Building, the club includes classrooms, library, computer lab, conference rooms, kitchen, three offices and a large multipurpose room with pool, ping-pong, and foosball tables. The Boys and Girls Club receives community support from active and retired teachers from area schools, the University Of Mississippi's School Of Education, Families First, the Health Department, and local city and county law enforcement agencies. In addition, the Stafford Foundation funds a “Youth of the Year” program to provide five graduating seniors with a \$1,000 scholarship.

Hoskins says that being the director is more than a job. “The joy I receive from my job comes when I see young people improve and excel academically. Many of them have a college education and are now professionals in their chosen field of work. Seeing our youth working hard to be-

come positive citizens and giving back to their community only makes me work harder.”

— Bonnie Reda

William E. Austin

OXFORD, MISS.

William E. Austin was born in Oxford, Miss., and has lived in Mississippi all of his life. He attended the University of Mississippi and received both his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from there.

Austin spent many years giving back to his community by helping to shape the youth as an educator. During his many years as an educator, he was a teacher of reading, music, and Special Education.



Following his 18 years of teaching, Austin was the principal of Coffeeville Elementary School.

He remained in this position for 17 years — until the time of his retirement. He worked as an educator and principal for 35 years before finally retiring in 2012 — 33 of these years were in the Coffeeville School District.

While he was in a position of authority, Austin was much more than a teacher or principal to his students. He truly cared about the students and their education and experiences.

In addition to the impact that he had as a teacher and principal, he spent his own personal time and money trying to help improve the quality of education and also the quality of life of the students in the district. He saw the hardships in the state and community and did what he could to help the students of the district overcome the hardships.

Outside of an educational setting, Austin continues the care and compassion that he has always had for the youth of the community. He is a member of the Philadelphia M.B. Church where he has worked with the tutoring program.

He tries to attend functions in which young people will be involved to show his support and ensure the positive experience of everyone who attends.

As a member of the Philadelphia M.B. Church, Austin serves as a musician and a deacon. He is also a member of Philadelphia Lodge No. 387, and a member of Philadelphia Chapter O.E.S No. 277. He has also served as a secretary of the T.O.M.B. Association for nearly 30 years.

— Monica Paul

Leona Harris

HOLLY SPRINGS, MISS.

Rev. Leona Harris has spent the past 35 years in a passionate drive to ensure that the culture and history of the African American people remains vibrant for the people of today as well as people of the future.



She was the second of four children to Roebinia Wooten, born and raised in Holly Springs, Miss. After her secondary education in Marshall County, Miss., she attended and graduated from Chicago University in 1980 receiving a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education, majoring in Early Childhood Education and

earning a minor degree in Anthropology. In 1990, she graduated from the Memphis Theological Seminary.

Her love of and desire to be home in Holly Springs brought her back to Marshall County, Miss. She has been ordained as a Deacon and Elder of the CME Church in Full Connection as well as being a member of the Hudsonville CME Church in Hudsonville, Miss.

During her studies, Harris came to be introduced to the story of Ida B. Wells-Barnett through Wells-Barnett's daughter Alfreda. Harris was urged to read Wells' first book, where the opening words are "I was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi." An immediate connection to Wells-Barnett was created with Harris. From that fateful day, Harris' life has been dedicated to advancing the ideals of Wells-Barnett.

She is a strong advocate of education at all levels, being active in literacy programs through-out Mississippi. She is as passionate about history, travelling to Europe and Africa, collecting art, literature and history from all over the world to bring back and showcase for all to see, appreciate, and remember.

In 1970, Harris sought to find a place of culture, where art, history and legend can be available for people to experience. She worked to create the Ida B. Wells-Barnett Museum in Holly Springs, Miss. where she is a continuous force in bringing African American culture to Marshall County.

Her passion, much like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, is to challenge the people of today to know their history, to appreciate the sacrifices made for them, to understand the potential for our world to fall if we don't know and learn from our past.

— *Bernie Rabine*

Lera & Nat Jones

TUPELO, MISS.

For Lera and Nat Jones, kindness and caring is all part of the family tradition.

Lera Jones runs Little Angels Learning and Childcare Center in Tupelo, Miss., providing low-cost childcare for low-income families.

Nat Jones, her son, is a mortician who owns N.L. Jones Funeral Director and Sons. He provides discount funerals for people who aren't able to pay. "We have our own cemetery," says his mother. "And we've given free grave plots for people who can't get them anywhere else."



For the Joneses, their good works are just a matter of family values.

"I'm a kind-hearted person," Lera Jones said. "It's my nature. And I'm a Christian, and I'm always speaking to God's own heart."

Lera got her first chance to commit acts of kindness when she became a teacher after graduating from Jackson State University in 1966. She decided to take helping people a step further when she got a job with the Mississippi Department of Human Services as an eligibility worker. She also worked as a Region II therapist for Tupelo City Schools.

She got into daycare in 1991 and opened Little Angels three years later. The center currently serves over 250 children. At times, she provides childcare to families who can't pay her "because I know the needs of the families because of my work as a social worker. I'm very familiar with a lot of the need in the area."

She also works as a liaison for families, connecting them with other resources, such as toward housing and medical assistance. "I try to be there for them for people in need."

Her son followed in her giving footsteps in 1998 when he opened his funeral home. His mother was proud to pass along her values to him, she said. "(It's important) to do good work, because your work speaks for you."

— *Mary Wilds*

Pastor Kevin Wiley

LULA, MISS.

As the spiritual leader of the Seekwell Christian Church in Lula, Miss. for the past decade, Pastor Kevin Wiley has encouraged his congregation to love the Lord with all their hearts and to live a healthy lifestyle. He also has a vision that all young people excel scholastically to reach their full potential so they may attend any school they desire, including Harvard and Yale.

Currently, the congregation of approximately 150 members includes two college students attending Vanderbilt University and University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, Ark.

Born in Lambert, Miss., Wiley has been married to Regina Scott for 28 years. The couple has two grown children and five grandchildren, Kevin Wiley, Jr., 29, Kailyn Wiley, 9, Kamiyah Wiley, 3, and Brandi Wiley-Crawford, 25, Regina Crawford, 7, and Antwan Crawford, Jr., 6.



Wiley, 48, has been in the ministry for 14 years under the leadership of Pastor Larry Eddins, of New Zion MB Church in Memphis, Tenn. Within his congregation, he seeks to see the love

for Christ through people with monthly incomes of \$100 or less, yet who have a deep love of God and wish to serve him.

The church also has a summer feeding program for children and a youth night that includes fun, games, food, and exercise.

Once featured in the New York Times regarding healthy living in the delta, Wiley's church continues his commitment to healthy living via a community garden and a health ministry that offers health screenings.

The church also plays a key role in the well-being of its senior members, including the giving of baskets during the Christmas season.

"I enjoy sharing the word of God and seeing people changed and set to work. I believe we are one of the most loving churches on the face of the earth," said Wiley. To help spread the word of the Lord, Wiley can be heard on the radio at 6:30 p.m. each Monday night at FM 94.5 or www.lordradio.com.

— Bonnie Reda

Mildred Netters White

GRENADA, MISS.

Mildrette Netter-White is a very successful woman. She shows residents of Mississippi, their families, and their children that anything can be done if they put their mind to it. White was born in 1948 and is a Mississippi native. She has lived in Mississippi all of her life and currently resides in Grenada, Miss. with her husband, Willie. They have six children together and are enjoying their retired life together.

White attended West Bolivar High School and began her college career at Alcorn State University. She graduated in 1972 with a Bachelor's degree in Health and Physical Education. White graduated from Alcorn State University once again in 1981, this time earning her Master's degree in Athletic Administration and Coaching.



White coached many different sports in several different schools across Mississippi. During the period of 1972-2002, she coached girls track, girls' basketball, and girls' cross-country. In addition to her head coaching positions, she was also assistant coach to many more teams. Throughout her coaching career, she was nominated and named coach of the year several times. After a very successful career in teaching, White finally retired in 2002.

While her accomplishments are all quite impressive, the most impressive thus far occurred even before she graduated from college. In 1968, White was an Olympic Gold Medalist in 4 X 100 Relay in Mexico City. She was also a torchbearer in the National Torch Relay in Atlanta, Ga. in 1996.

White was inducted into the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame in 2003. She also has membership in many other Halls of Fame such as the Alcorn State Hall of Honor, SWAC Hall of Fame, Alcorn State Athletic Hall of Fame, Rosedale-West Bolivar High School Hall of Fame and the Bob Hayes Track Hall of Fame.

Sources: Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame, SR Olympic Sports, Wikipedia

— Monica Paul

Rev. Obie Fox

TUPELO, MISS.

The Rev. Obie S. Fox had some ideas for himself growing up in Warren, Ark., but as it turned out, God also had plans for him.



“He didn’t give me but one choice,” said Fox, of his call to the ministry. “It was something I couldn’t get around. So I said [to God], if I’m going to preach, you’ve got to come with me. And we’ve been enjoying it ever since.”

Fox, who had first attended Los Angeles Technical College, went

on to attend St. Stephen’s Christian College in the same city. He earned his bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate and also studied at New Providence Theological Seminary.

He pursued his ministry in administration for a while, serving as vice president of St. Stephen’s for fourteen years. He was also Dean of Men at Baptist College, Little Rock, Ark. and president of Morris Booker Memorial College in Dermott, Ark.

Since 1994, he has shepherded Antioch Community Services Courtland out of Tupelo, Miss. The organization spreads its services among the needy in Arkansas, Mississippi and South Carolina; an average of 6,000 families a month.

“We saw the need to do something to help the community,” he said. “We started by passing out food.”

Now Antioch partners with 34 agencies “who come and get food from us.” Antioch provides shelters, a soup kitchen that provides hot meals every day, five days a week.

“We help people from time to time with gas and electric bills, rent.”

Fox, who is also the pastor of Antioch Baptist Church, is married to Mattie Richardson, a retired librarian who once worked for Tupelo High School. Their daughter, Christie Richardson, is a professional singer, their son works as a city manager in New York.

Fox’s ministry depends on the many volunteers who donate of their time and talent. “We’re grateful to the Good lord for laying it on us and grateful to the 25 to 30 volunteers at our site here, who do everything that needs to be done.”

— Mary Wilds

Clayton Wheeler

WEBB, MISS.

Clayton Wheeler is the best kind of a hero... the kind that doesn’t think he’s a hero. “I just listen,” he says. “People just need someone to talk to...”



From his earliest days, on a farm in Webb, Miss. the middle child in a family of eight children, Wheeler was the brother everyone talked to. Clayton’s success as an athlete in high school earned him a scholarship to Mississippi Valley State University, where he studied Business Administration. He later added alcohol and drug counseling education to his skill set.

After college, Wheeler took a position in a place that helped him be a real hero: Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman, Miss. Working with the mentally ill and drug and alcohol dependent inmates, Wheeler gave them something they needed: an open door where they could talk and he could listen. His approach helped balance the inmates’ lost hope for the “people outside”. He helped the inmates see that there are good people beyond the world that put them into drugs, alcohol, and ultimately prison.

Along the way in his hero’s life, Clayton Wheeler took the time to have three children, Jeremy, Sharee, and Marvin. He also moved back to his family’s farm, where he and his siblings continue to work alongside his father to grow grain crops. Being a hero to his children is as simple as, “being there for them and their children. Knowing that mothers and fathers make heroes of their children through their teachings and actions. Knowing that children become what they are around.”

Not surprisingly, Wheeler heads up the Delta Area Advancement Project, a non-profit organization that assists primary and secondary school students excel in education, arts and crafts.

“By the third grade,” Wheeler says, “we want our students to embrace education as the way to be successful.”

When asked what he would say to today’s high schoolers, on how to be a hero, Wheeler gives the following pointers:

- Don’t live to be a hero, be humble;
- Become educated in technology;
- Work together as a community, don’t drift apart.

So, how does a parent grow a reluctant hero? Plant a seed, and shower them with an attitude of gratitude. Don’t hold yourself accountable for the past, but make your present a better place, each day.

Clayton Wheeler is proof that a real hero is made by others

not one's self.

— Bernie Rabine

Verna Lasha Hunter

SARDIS, MISS.

Although she would likely deny the label, Verna Lasha Hunter is a true hero. She demonstrates daily the attributes of a hero, especially in her work as Executive Director for North Delta Mississippi Enterprise Community. Hunter has worked tirelessly and given everything she can to maintain smooth operations and a positive environment. This is a hero; someone who gives of themselves as she does without expecting anything in return.



In 1999, Hunter joined the North Delta Mississippi Enterprise Community; a non-profit organization in Sardis, Miss. With the organization's main mission to provide means to empower communities in the most depressed areas of the state (the Delta areas) to become independent and to improve lifestyles and living

conditions with its main emphasis placed on housing and community development training to assist people in getting into homes, it was a perfect match for her.

"I had a great desire to see underprivileged families find affordable, safe, and decent homes," Hunter said. The organization would provide the outlet she needed to help others.

North Delta works with close to 100 individual and business clients at any given time. They offer services such as budget and credit counseling, rental assistance, and provide loans and grants to startup businesses. However, through a series of unfortunate events, Hunter became a team of one. With funding running out, and the number of needy clients growing, Hunter continues to fight for them — determined to find ways to help. Even while working with no pay, she did not hesitate to dig deep into her own pockets to see that the operations of North Delta continued. She could not turn her back on those who needed her.

"There are so many examples of these people being denied," Hunter says. "They are discriminated against, and just do not know what to do. I can't give up. I have to help."

While she struggled with ways to provide for the organization, Lasha also served as a trustee of the North Panola School Board, in Sardis, after the take over of the state conservatorship. She offers this advice to young people.

"Get a plan, but be ready to alter or make a detour at any point in time," Lasha Hunter says. "Stay focused ... If you fall down, get back up," She continues, "Be determined and treat people the way you wish to be treated."

Her last piece of advice is, "Above all, put GOD first!"

— Bernie Rabine

Roy Lee Watts

GRENADA, MISS.

It was a day like any other day in January — except for one thing. This day was the first time Mississippi residents in any part of the state would be able to see a rodeo that included only African American cowboys. It took some time and some effort, but in 2004 Roy Lee Watts managed to round up enough African American cowboys for an exclusive rodeo.



The first rodeo was a matinee for children held on January 31. Watts decided to hold it in Philadelphia, Miss. because of the sad history there.

"I wanted to bring something positive there," Watts said. There were three men killed in the 1960s in that town when they were trying to enable African Americans to vote.

Watts has been working with horses and going to rodeos in Oklahoma and other states for 25 years, so he knew a lot of African American cowboys from other states. He says Mississippi doesn't have very many African American cowboys, so he brought them in from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana and other states for the rodeo. About 150 cowboys took part in Watts' first rodeo. Approximately 3,000 people attended that first black rodeo in Mississippi, and a few months later, someone in the Jackson area decided to put on a second one.

Currently, Watts' focus is on getting youth involved in the rodeo. He says he has met a lot of young people who enjoy baseball, football, and other sports, but they haven't been exposed to the rodeo until now.

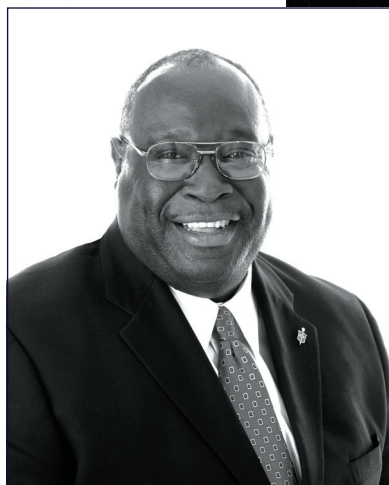
"We're getting kids trained to put on a youth rodeo," Watts said. "We train the kids from peewee age up to junior age so that we can host different rodeos for youth. If we can get a lot more kids involved, it will give them something positive to do. We teach children that cowboys and cowgirls need to have a certain etiquettes because they spend long hours with each other. They must learn to get along with each other, respect one other, and practice the same etiquettes they learn as cowboys and cowgirls at school, home, at church, and wherever they go."

Watts currently has an application for a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization pending with the Internal Revenue Service. After his organization is up and running, he says he will be able to do even more for young people who are interested in learning about the rodeo.

— Michelle Jones



Meet the Bishop



by Michelle Jones

Although Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr. has just arrived in Mississippi, he's already making plans for a great future for the state. Bishop Swanson is the first African American to be appointed bishop to the Methodist Church in Mississippi. He arrived in September 2012 and has been getting acquainted with the Methodist churches throughout the state.

Although he's not from Mississippi, his mother grew up in the Ripley area, and he's currently trying to locate the family property, which he believes to be in the area. Bishop Swanson is living in Jackson, and upon arriving in the city, he began making plans to improve the quality of life in the Mississippi Delta area, which he has learned is where much of the state's poverty is. Bishop Swanson took his first trip to the Delta and

now is developing plans for the next two to three decades. One of his main concerns is the high dropout rate in the area. He said he really wants to try to lower that number.

"I'm thinking if you don't try to help young persons early in life, to help them have a sense of hope and direction, you've doomed another generations to failure," Swanson said. "There's a link to the number of people incarcerated, and at this point we're seeing two to three generations of people incarcerated, generational poverty and generational hopelessness."

He said he's willing to participate with people in the Delta area as they strive for a better quality of life, and he's ready to try to find answers for them because he believes there must be answers.

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H I U M E A W K M O Z A Q O S I H C
S F L R T R X J W E E K S R D H I P
R A B O T G T B O H C N Q E A Q R P
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M J O B R F H S A B B E W X H D M J
D K I R E T I X O S M I E A F R R B
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T J S I Y D F Z U K G M Q D I U N P
Z A I R A L P H J B U N C H E L H W

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