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# Wesson News

## SPOTLIGHT:

### Wesson's Birthday in Photos

Pages 6 & 7

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Volume 2, Number 5

*"Good News You Can Use"*

May 13, 2014

# Volunteers keep local baseball thriving

By Bob Arnold

Statistics may suggest that baseball's popularity is on the decline, but close to 400 children ages four-years-old to twelve-years-old in the Wesson area on Saturday afternoons and evenings during April and May tell a different story about the national pastime.

Baseball, softball, and forms of these sports designed for very young children are alive and well at this time of year in the area, thanks to the Wesson Athletic Foundation (WAF). This year WAF is fielding 29 teams that fire enthusiasm for the games among boys and girls who play and their parents and grandparents — nearly 1,000 strong — who are fans and involved with WAF as coaches and in other volunteer capacities.

Every Saturday from early April thru May, the teams play at Hiram C. Newman Memorial Fields on Grove Street about three-quarters of a mile east of Wesson Attendance Center. There are ten T-ball teams — five for boys and girls aged four and five years old and another five teams for children six years old; two coach pitch softball teams for girls aged seven and eight years old and another five coach pitch baseball teams for boys aged seven and eight years old; five regular softball teams for girls — three for nine and ten year olds and two for eleven and twelve year olds; and seven regular baseball teams for boys — four for nine and ten year olds and three for eleven and twelve year olds. T-ball, coach pitch ball, regular softball, and regular baseball are played on four different fields — each one laid out to accommodate the ages and genders of the players.

T-ball is a sport based on baseball, intended to introduce children to baseball skills and have fun. In T-ball, the pitcher is usually used for

defensive purposes only. Batters hit a ball placed on an adjustable tee atop the home plate at a suitable height to strike. Adults play an active role in games, coaching children in the dug-out, in the field, on the bases, and at the plate. Coach pitch baseball or softball (sometimes called buddy ball) is the next step for children after T-ball. In a game, coaches pitch to the batters on their teams with the intent of allowing them to hit the ball or put it in play.

"The season for the varied WAF teams includes twelve to sixteen games," says WAF president Hillry Britt. "Teams from the Copiah County Baseball Association provide competition for them beyond their WAF counterparts. At the end of season, WAF chooses All Star Teams with the outstanding performers in T-ball,

*cont. on page 4*



Photo by Wesson News

The Wesson Athletic Foundation's success and growth demonstrates the strengths of a volunteer system in which participants will do almost anything for their children and become committed to each other as they become friends in their work. Here WAF volunteers (from left to right) Chase Wesbrooks, Brett Selman, Joe Coates, Jerimy Harris, Hillry Britt, Scott Allen, and Bo Allen take a break after preparing a ball field for play.

## Wesson celebrates its 150th birthday



Photo by Wesson News

Wesson's 150th birthday, celebrated last month, featured a parade of floats in which profit and not-for-profit organizations spotlighted their service to the town; carriage rides; quilting and spinning wheel demonstrations; pie baking, beard growing, and hot dog eating contests; goat riding; pig catching; slide fun for children and youth; and musical entertainment. A party held at the Old School community center concluded the two-day Chamber of Commerce-sponsored Founders' Day event with free food, fireworks, and dancing in the evening hours. Here (left to right) Susan Aennington, Frances Taylor, and Linda Dykes cut the special birthday cake. See additional photos of the event on pages 6 and 7.

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# Community Calendar

**May weather forecast:** *The Old Farmers Almanac* calls for an average temperature of 71.5° (one degree below normal) and total precipitation of 4.5 inches (one-half inch below average).

## MAY 13

Senior Awards Night. College scholarships presented to Wesson High School seniors. Wesson Attendance Center Old Gym. 6:30 p.m.

## MAY 15

50-Plus Club. Christy Dunaway and Cynthia Benson on "Living Independence for Everyone." Steak House & Deli, Crystal Springs. 10:30 a.m.

## MAY 16

Junior High School and High School Awards Luncheon. Wesson Attendance Center.

Co-Lin Graduation. Mullen Gymnasium. 9:30 a.m.

## MAY 17, 24, 31

Final days of Wesson Athletic Foundation baseball season. Fundraiser raffle drawing for stainless steel Holland grill on May 31. Games start at 4 p.m.

## MAY 20

American Legion Post 79 & Unit 79 monthly meeting. Selections of delegates for Boys & Girls State, planning starts for 2014-15, and candlelight memorial service for Post members who died since May 2013. Candles are lit for each deceased member. American Legion Post 79 lodge. 6 p.m.

## MAY 21

Institute for Learning in Retirement year-end picnic. Clear Springs Recreation Park in Franklin County. 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

## MAY 22

Lions Club meeting. Co-Lin cafeteria private dining room. 6 p.m.

## MAY 23

High School Graduation. Co-Lin. 7 p.m.

## MAY 28 & 29

Basketball Camp for boys and girls in grades 1-9. \$80 for instruction covering fundamentals of game, lunch, limited

insurance, and camp T-shirt. Pre-register or register on May 28 before camp starts. Download application at [www.colinathletics.com](http://www.colinathletics.com). Contact women's head coach Gwyn Young (601-754-0967) or men's head coach Kenny Bizot (903-920-3003) for information. Co-Lin's Mullen Gymnasium. 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

## JUNE 1

Summer Kickoff Extravaganza for Kids. For children ages three years old to sixth grade. Inflatable water slides and pool. Free hot dogs, watermelon, and refreshments. Wesson Baptist Church. 4 p.m.-7 p.m.

Summer Arts Camp. Mississippi School of Art, Brookhaven. Intensive training in creative writing, dance, theatre, visual art and vocal music for students entering grades eight thru ten. Runs thru June 6.

## JUNE 3

Jumpstart, kindergarten readiness program. Wesson Attendance Center. 8 a.m. to 12 noon. Runs thru June 20.

## JUNE 12

Lions Club meeting. Co-Lin cafeteria private dining room. 6 p.m.

## JUNE 13

Co-Lin summer pre-registration. On campus. 9 a.m.

## JUNE 14

Bikes for Barks to benefit Copiah Animal Shelter. Motorcyclists ride on the Natchez Trace. Starts at the All About Animals Veterinary Clinic (27084 Highway 51, Crystal Springs). \$10 donation. Registration at 9:30 a.m. Ride starts at 10 a.m.

## JUNE 19

50-Plus Club. Kathy McKone on "Genetically Modified Foods." Steak House & Deli, Crystal Springs. 10:30 a.m.

**Email Community Calendar items to**  
[bobarnold@wessonnews.com](mailto:bobarnold@wessonnews.com)

# From the Mayor's Desk

By Alton Shaw, Mayor of Wesson

Over the last several months, there has been a lot of discussion concerning federal earmarks, and the perception of additional government waste. I want to take a moment to clear up some of the misconceptions, and describe how the federal government appropriates funding. Basically, federal spending is divided by the U.S. Treasury into three main categories: mandatory spending, discretionary spending, and interest on debt.

Mandatory spending is divided into different earned benefit or entitlement programs. These are programs that have been created by the federal government, available to any person, and automatically awarded to those who qualify. Some examples are Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Unemployment, the Supplemental Nutrition Program, Veterans Benefits, and retirement benefits for military and federal employees. While several of these receive discretionary spending as well, the mandatory funding is the fixed amount based on a formula derived in law automatically granted each year. It is projected that in 2015, mandatory spending will comprise approximately two-thirds of the total federal budget of around \$3.9 trillion. In contrast, the interest on federal debt is estimated to be approximately 6% of the total federal budget.

The discretionary spending portion of the budget, which is estimated in 2015 to be a little under one-third of the total federal budget, is the portion that is appropriated by Congress each year to the various agencies and departments of the federal government. Among them are the Departments of Defense, Education, Homeland Security, Energy, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development. During the budget process to determine the departmental and agency division of discretionary spending,



Photo by Wesson News

Mayor Shaw

earmarks would arise, directing the various departments or agencies to spend a certain amount of the appropriated funds to a specific project in a specific area.

The confusion is that these earmarks add to the amount of federal money spent each year, when in fact they do not. Each year, the House and Senate Budget Committees come together to form a concurrent congressional resolution to determine how much money the federal government will

spend that particular fiscal year. Respective appropriation committees then divide up how the money will be appropriated into the three categories of mandatory spending, discretionary spending, and interest on federal debt.

What needs to be understood is that the amount resolved by Congress to be spent in a given year will be appropriated and spent, with or without any earmarks. In 2010, when Congress enacted a ban on any earmarks during the appropriations process, the only thing that changed was that instead of your elected Senator and Representatives being able to direct a portion of that funding back to his or her state and constituency, the money is now being appropriated to the various government agencies to spend as they see fit. The decision was taken out of the hands of our elected officials and placed in the hands of the various bureaucrats that are appointed by the executive branch to their respective positions, and are not accountable to voters.

To put into perspective the amount of money earmarks directed: In 2010, the last year that earmarks were allowed in Congress, they accounted for less than one half of one percent of the total federal budget, according to the Citizens Against Government Waste, and only one-third of one percent, according to the federal Office of Management and Budget.

The removal of earmarks from our Congressional system didn't change the amount of money being spent. It

*cont. on page 11*

# Recycling bin moves

Wesson News

The bin has moved, but recycling is alive and well in Wesson.

The Town has relocated the recycling bin from its location on Factory Street beside Ace Hardware to the former site of the Sunflower grocery store on Highway 51.

Wesson residents can voluntarily dispose of paper, metal, and plastic

waste products — magazines, office paper, brown paper bags, paperboard, junk mail, phone books, newspapers, aluminum, tin, and steel cans, cardboard, plastic bottles and containers — at the Waste Management dumpster, which is highlighted by a yellow and green sign. Food waste, films, plastic bags, plastic wrap, foam cups or containers, and glass are not accepted.

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# A "little time" needed for championships

By Mike Christensen

Clay Smith, Copiah-Lincoln Community College's first-year baseball coach, doesn't have a long list of demands for his players. "If you have a good attitude and give a good effort, that's all I can ask," Smith said.

Of course, like every self-respecting coach in every sport, Smith also wants to win — and the Wolves didn't do a lot of that this season. They started slowly, rebounded to post a 5-7 record over the first half of their MACJC South Division schedule, then faded from postseason contention down the stretch.

But give Smith a little time, says Hill Denson, head coach at Jackson's Belhaven University, where Smith served the previous 10 years as the number one assistant.

"He'll make it a competitive program every year," said Denson, who also was Smith's coach in his playing days at Southern Miss.

Smith took over at Co-Lin last summer as the replacement for Keith Case, who retired after 21 years in charge of the program. Case was well known and widely respected around the state, having won over 600 games, four regional championships and four state titles while producing 12 professional players.

"Coach Case did a great job here," said Smith, who is still in touch with his old coach, now working at a junior college in Texas. "I'm just trying to pick up where he left off."

Denson said Smith's decision to take the Co-Lin job was "a no-brainer." He grew up in Wesson, played at Wesson High School, and Co-Lin, and was ready to become a head coach. "When he was playing at USM, he always worked our (youth) camps and liked the teaching part of it," said Denson. "You could tell back then that he'd be a top-notch coach someday. When he came on with me at

Belhaven, he made all the difference in the world in our program. I needed help recruiting. Clay came in, and we got things turned in the right direction."

Smith got a late start in recruiting at Co-Lin for the 2014 season.

"We picked up a few kids late in the summer," he said. "The assistant coaches (Bryan Nobile and Ryne Tutor) with me now were here last year, and they recruited most of the team. They did a good job. We've got some players, but this was a young team. We have 18 freshmen on the roster."

Among the standouts in that class are outfielders Stevie Hubbard (from Mendenhall) and Adrian Brown (McComb) and pitchers Colby Whitfield (Brandon) and Shane Brown (Braxton).

It didn't help the cause this season when the Wolves suffered injuries that gouged their pitching staff.

"We really don't have a dominant starter," Smith said. "We didn't have a lot of depth on the mound either. Pitching is so important when you're playing doubleheaders (the MACJC standard) all the time."

"It's a building process. We've signed some good ones for 2015."

There is a fairly deep pool of high school baseball talent in Mississippi, particularly in the southern part. That's one reason the MACJC South Division, which includes Hinds, Pearl River and Jones County, is so highly competitive every year.

The 2015 edition of Wolves may look different and play differently than the current one. Smith said he isn't locked into a particular style of play.

"Coaches talk about philosophies, but it all revolves around the kind of players you have," he said. "You just want to get the best ones you can get."

"I'm big on fundamentals. If I have a philosophy for pitchers, it's throw strikes. Then, play good defense. Do that, and you'll have a chance to win. With the bats we're using now, you've got to play some small ball."

"I call it 'special teams.' Base running is a big part of the game now. You've got to get runners into scoring position."

As Smith says, it's a building process. And as Denson says, just give Smith a little time.

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cont. from front page

## Volunteers keep local baseball thriving

coach pitch, and regular softball and baseball. They compete with similar All Star Teams from throughout Mississippi at a June tournament in Pearl or Brandon. In 2012, our baseball All Stars of eleven- and twelve-year-old boys competed for the state championship."

The origins of WAF trace to the 1970s, when Co-Lin started baseball and softball programs that involved some 30 to 40 children. By the 1990s, a loose organization of volunteers was spearheading expanding programs, with some 90 to 100 participants.

With land donations that allowed them to develop new ball fields, the need for additional acreage to serve growing numbers of children, and a concessions business that was generating increasing funds, the volunteers, led by Terry Munn, who served as commissioner of the baseball and softball programs, decided to incorporate their organization as the Wesson Athletic Foundation in 2006 and formalize its structure with a board, bylaws, and stricter financial management. By 2009, when Munn left the organization, WAF had purchased 5 acres of the Hiram Newman land and received donated land for its coach pitch field and a parking lot.

Today, WAF attracts children from Copiah, Lawrence, and Lincoln Counties. It operates as a member-owned organization. Its members are the parents or grandparents who pay a \$65 fee for one child and \$40 for each additional child to play on WAF teams. In addition to the fees, which cover uniforms and season-end trophies and medallions for players, WAF generates revenues, which pay for lights, utilities, and umpires, from concession sales and sponsorship of teams by 29 business and civic organizations. Officers and maintenance workers are volunteers.

In addition to Britt, WAF board members are Joe Coates,



Photo by Wesson News

Each year, professional baseball players from the Mississippi Braves visit with Wesson Athletic Association (WAF) players. They autograph balls and provide helpful tips to WAF children and youth aspiring to improve their baseball skills and advance in the sport. Here Braves (left to right) Kyle Kubitz, third baseman; Shay Simmons, pitcher; Barrett Kleinknecht, an infielder; and Michael Jones, an outfielder, meet with Alanna and Kayci Carter (center left and right) and Danita and Myleigh Kate Boyd (far left and far right).

work. "He said I could have the lighting and equipment for \$2,500 if I could haul it off," he recounts. WAF volunteers readily responded to his call for transportation. Another volunteer with expertise in installing lights on poles helped get the new lighting system operating on the Wesson ball fields.

"Our strength is that we are an organization owned by member volunteers who will do anything to benefit the children we serve," says Britt. "Organizations that provide similar services are most often departments of parks and recreation operated by governments, which do not have the kind of stakeholders we have — parents and grandparents concerned about the quality and value of our program."

Munn adds that WAF volunteers become committed to each other. "Coaches, the volunteers who maintain the playing fields, concession stand workers, and the organization's officers bond as they work together. I made some of my best friends through service to the Wesson Athletic Foundation. Even when the work was done, we would hang around the ball fields and talk with each other."

And so the national pastime is alive and well in Wesson.

WHEN YOU, YOUR FAMILY, AND YOUR FRIENDS HAVE FINISHED READING THIS ISSUE, PLEASE RECYCLE IT. THE GOOD EARTH WILL THANK YOU.



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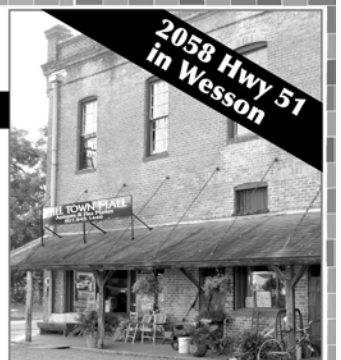
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# Easter yard is an annual spring event

By Bob Arnold

Increasing daylight, warming temperatures, and the rebirth of flora and fauna. Signs of spring. And there is one more unique to Wesson: the Easter yard a quarter mile off the Wesson-Beauregard Road down Timberlanes Road on the left.

The 500 square foot front yard of Agnes and Buck Ratliff features more than 300 colorful hand-crafted wooden decorations and replicas with Easter and spring motifs — bunnies and other characters, eggs, crosses, a church with real stained glass windows, a train, Ferris wheel, and merry-go-round. Colored letters proclaim HAPPY EASTER in front of the array of decorations, which are organized in cartoon-like displays — bunnies at tea parties or peeping out of eggs or over a fence; Jesus carrying his cross or ascending into heaven. White picket fences frame the displays, and silk flower arrangements adorn them. Two displays created in response to requests of grieving parents memorialize a two-year child who played in the

yard before her death and an expectant mother and her unborn child who perished in an automobile accident.

It all started 30 years ago, when the Ratliffs created a special Easter dis-



Agnes and Buck Ratliff

Photos by Wesson News

play in their yard for their first granddaughter to enjoy. They have been creating one, two, or three displays every Easter since then — some that even include replicas of their children, grandchildren, and pets.

Now more than 200 visitors each year — usually parents with children who enjoy the colorful yard as a playground — experience the delight of the displays. Although visitors are free

to traipse through their yard and take pictures when they aren't at home, the Ratliffs prefer to be around to welcome and chat with them. Agnes, who retired from a career in banking, is designer of the yard art and attributes her creative flare to "a love of drawing," which started during her childhood.

In the early days of the Easter yard, Agnes drew the bunnies and characters, eggs, and other pictures and designs freehand on plywood, and Buck cut them out with a saber saw. "Over the years, Agnes has become quite adept with the saw," Buck says of his wife. So Buck, a retired electrician for Entergy Mississippi, has increasingly taken on the specialized electrical, mechanical, and other technical work required to make the yard the delightful experience it is — making the merry-go-round turn, the Ferris wheel spin, the church light up. Today, Agnes works with patterns she creates or purchases.

The Ratliffs set up their existing yard displays and start creating new ones a month before Easter and keep them up until a week after Easter.

## Police Blotter

Special to Wesson News

During April, the Wesson Police Department activity encompassed:

- Response to five general complaints
- 51 Citations:
  - One for possession of beer
  - One for possession of drug paraphernalia
  - 49 for traffic & driving violations, including 15 for speeding
- 8 Arrests:
  - Two DUIs
  - One simple assault
  - Two for possession of marijuana
  - One for disturbing the peace
  - Two for contempt of court

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# Wesson celebrates its 150th birthday with a



Pie baking winners Martha Lightsey (on the left) and Rhonda James (on the right) receive award ribbons from Melissa Meredith (center), Chamber of Commerce board member.

All photos by Wesson News



An historical museum (above) opened with displays telling the story of Wesson, its organizations, and lifestyles over the past 150 years. The museum will continue operations on Spring Street until July 1, and its sponsors hope to find a permanent home for it.

Even Elvis (Ricky Beall of Strong Hope) showed up to help celebrate Wesson's birthday (below).



Marva Goodman (above, at left) showed Joyce Meredith how to use a spinning wheel.

Children found goat riding a challenge (left).

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Chamber of Commerce Founders Day royalty — Queen Alexis Britt (left) and Ambassador Mack Smith (not pictured) — presided over the Sesqui-centennial festivities.

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## Managing allergies and asthma

By Guest Columnist  
Dr. Stephanie Duguid

Spring is allergy season. An estimated 50 million Americans suffer from allergies of all types.

There are indoor and outdoor allergies, skin allergies, food and drug allergies, latex allergies, and eye allergies. They are characterized by an overreaction of the human immune system to a foreign substance that is eaten, breathed into the lungs, injected, or touched. Common ordinary substances that trigger allergic reactions are plant pollen, molds, household dust, cockroaches, pets, industrial chemicals, foods, medicines, feather, second hand smoke, and insect stings.

Symptoms include coughing, sneezing, itchy eyes, runny nose, and scratchy throat; and in severe cases, rashes, hives, lower blood pressure, difficulty breathing, asthma attacks, and even death. An allergic reaction may occur anywhere in the body, but usually appears in the nose, eyes, lungs, lining of the stomach, sinuses, throat, or skin.

Some allergy problems may not need treatment. Others can be controlled with the occasional use of an over-the-counter medication.

If you have chronic allergies or frequent symptoms, you may benefit from visiting an allergist.

You should see an allergist if:

- Your allergies are causing symptoms such as chronic sinus infections, nasal congestion or difficulty breathing
- You experience allergy symptoms several months out of the year
- Over the counter medications do not control your symptoms
- Your symptoms are interfering



Special to Wesson News

with your ability to carry on day-to-day activities

- You are experiencing warning signs of serious asthma

A visit might include:

- Allergy testing
- Prevention education
- Medication prescriptions
- Immunotherapy (allergy shots)

Asthma is an allergic reaction characterized by inflammation of the air passages, resulting in the temporary narrowing of the airways that transport air from the nose and mouth to the lungs. It demands special attention. Asthma symptoms can be triggered by allergens, respiratory irritants, or second hand smoke inhaled into the lungs, exercise, viral respiratory infections, and aspirin. The resulting inflamed, clogged, and constricted airways cause coughing, chest tightness, wheezing, and shortness of breath.

Every day, 44,000 people have an asthma attack, 36,000 children miss school because of asthma, 27,000 adults miss work, 4,700 people visit the emergency room, 1,200 people are admitted to the hospital, and nine persons die due to asthma. It is one of the country's most common and costly diseases. Asthma is the most common chronic condition among children.

A chronic disorder, asthma cannot be cured, but it can be managed:

- See an Asthma or Allergy physician to receive the best treatment possible,
- Learn everything you can about asthma,
- Learn what triggers your (your child's) symptoms and avoid them as best you can,
- Recognize the signs of an oncoming episode, and
- Provide preventive care so that you or your child have the least amount of difficulty with symptoms.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Dr. Stephanie Duguid, Assistant Dean of Academic Instruction and Health, Physical Education, and Recreation Division Chair at Co-Lin, makes regular contributions to Wesson News on healthy living topics.

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## Programs build society's literacy through children

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Local programs that promote the joys of reading among young children are part of an ongoing national effort to build a literary society since the 1950s, when research found Americans spent more time on radios, televisions, and musical instruments than books.

Again this year, Wesson's Longie Dale Hamilton Memorial Library celebrated National Library Week in April with its focus on children following the participation of the Wesson Attendance Center elementary school children in Read Across America Day.

In its National Library Week program, the local library hosted some 300 children from the Wesson Baptist pre-school and kindergarten and first grade at the Wesson Attendance Center. Thirty-minute programs included a seven-minute film, snacks, and guest speaker Bobbie Fay Lea, a dental hygienist.

The American Library Association (ALA) first sponsored National Library Week in 1958. Throughout the nation this year, it built programs around the theme "Lives Change @ Your Library." The celebration encompassed National Library Workers Day to recognize contributions made by all library employees, National Bookmobile Day to recognize contributions of bookmobiles and their outreach in communities, and Celebrate Teen Literature Day to raise awareness among the general public that young adult literature is a vibrant, growing genre with much to offer today's teens.

Read Across America Day occurs in

conjunction with the birthday of Dr. Seuss creator Theodor Seuss Geisel, whose books of imaginative characters, rhyme, and engaging rhythm have proven to be effective teaching tools that engender a love of learning in children. A cartoonist as well as a writer and poet, he wrote and illustrated 46 children's books, including the bestselling *Green Eggs and Ham*, *The Cat in the Hat*, *The Lorax*, *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish*, *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, *Fox in Socks*, *The King's Stilts*, *Hop on Pop*, *Thidwick the Big-Hearted Moose*, *Horton Hatches the Egg*, *Horton Hears a Who*, and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*.

In the local Read Across America Day, special guests, who were invited by teachers in the kindergarten through sixth grades at the Attendance Center, visited children in their classes and read short age-appropriate books to them — in many cases, Dr. Seuss books. Children also dressed like their favorite characters from books they had read and marched around the Attendance Center athletic field and through the school in a Character Parade.

The special readings, parade, and other activities — suggestions by the National Education Association for Read Across America — "send a clear message to children that reading is fun and important," according to the NEA. The NEA started the literacy-motivation program 16 years ago to encourage children and youth to become serious readers. The National Foundation for the Blind (NFB) ties into the program to extol Braille literacy.



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Wesson, Mississippi





# Dance is popular local art

By Guest Column R. Shaw Furlow

Its spring in Mississippi, and it just doesn't get any better than that. The azaleas are beautiful; the dogwoods are in full bloom. At this time of year, it is appropriate to look at dance, which has a special association with spring. Nature's dance. Proms. Spring recitals. Dance is an important part of our local culture — from ballet to clogging, ballroom, and square dancing. There are also venerable dance studios in the area that introduce you to the art.

What does a guy who looks like me know about dancing? I did a pretty mean Twist back in my youth — which probably explains the hip and knee problems I have as an adult. More to the point: Having served as the Director of Bands at Co-Lin for fifteen years, I have been around some awfully good dancers and instructors. As my friend Stanley Stewart said to me: "If you stick around long enough,



Special to Wesson News

you just sort of learn stuff."

The International Ballet Competition (IBC) returns to Jackson's Thalia Mara Hall in June. Yes. Jackson, a few miles up the road, is the center of the ballet world once every four years, with more than 100 dancers from 30 countries competing for coveted Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals in the IBC when it comes to town in a rotation that includes Tokyo, Moscow, and Varna in Bulgaria.

Why Jackson and not New York City, Chicago or San Francisco? Bruce Marks, a New York-born dancer and choreographer, observes: "New York is New York, but Jackson is America."

And then there was Thalia Mara, whose dancing career continues to be honored by the Jackson Municipal Auditorium, which has carried her name since 1994. The Chicago native, who was born to Russian immigrants in 1911, came to Jackson in the mid-1970s to create a professional ballet troupe at the invitation of the Jackson Ballet Guild after she started the National Academy of Ballet and Theater Arts in New York City. Before landing in Jackson, Mara had danced, choreographed, or produced nearly every major role in ballet, and authored or

cont. on page 11

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## From the Mayor's Desk

simply changed who makes the decision on where the money is directed. So smaller states like ours miss out on funding opportunities that are now going to the larger areas such as Detroit, Chicago, and New York.

One other point I would like to make concerns the current dangerous thinking around "absolutely no compromise." This is not how our government was set up to function, and I believe it has led to much of the dysfunction we see in Washington today. I know of no relationship that could survive with the outlook of "I get all of what I want or we get nothing." Former president Ronald Reagan stated: "Die-hard conservatives thought that if I couldn't get everything I asked for, I should jump off the cliff with the flag flying and go down in flames. No. If I can get seventy or eighty percent of what

it is I'm trying to get, I'll take that and continue to try to get the rest in the future." No one is going to agree with every issue on which a particular Senator or Representative votes. But, if that vote were able to gain enough support to bring a much needed project to our state, that is the way our system was designed to operate.

While the decision for whom you choose to vote in the upcoming election is a personal one, I would hope it is an informed decision based on facts, and not based on the rhetoric that inevitably is part of the campaign process. Personally, I believe we are spending too much time discussing less than one per cent of the federal spending, and not enough on how to control the other ninety-nine per cent that continues to grow out of control and increases our national debt. May God bless.

cont. from page 10

## Dance is popular local art

co-authored eleven books on dance in a career that started in 1926 in her native Chicago and included stops in Paris as well as New York City. She became associated with the International Ballet Competition in Varna as a judge after leaving the Jackson company in 1981, but worked with Robert Joffrey, the artistic director of the Joffrey Ballet, and dance writer Walter Terry to create a competition with Jackson on the circuit.

In 1982, the U.S. Congress passed a Joint Resolution designating Jackson as the official U.S. home of the IBC, and Mara served as the artistic director for the triennial USA International Ballet Competition from 1986 to 1994. She died in Jackson in 2003 at the age of 92.

Ballet, of course, is not the only form of dancing popular in Mississippi. A few years ago, Daniel Mahan, a former competition ballroom dancer, choreographer, and coach, taught ballroom classes at Co-Lin with Dr. Shelley Smith, director of the college's Colette. A full room of students was on hand at each session. "You can dance every night if you want," says Mahan. "There are studios in Jack-

son, Madison and Pearl that sponsor dances on different nights for members and non-members." The Magnolia Ballroom Association hosts dances once a month at the Ag Museum on Lakeland Drive in Jackson. There is a small admission fee. Square dancing and clogging, two similar forms of dance, are quite popular in this area as well. During the 150th birthday celebration of Wesson, a clogging troupe performed at the Old School community center.

A survey of the art of dance in these parts would not be complete without looking at Nena Smith and her dance school, which is almost synonymous with Wesson.

Smith's career as a dance instructor started quite unexpectedly when she and her husband Bradley moved to Wesson in 1972. At the time, Dr. Billy Thames, then president of Co-Lin, was looking for someone with dance experience to work with the Colettes — a dancing team associated with the college's band. Thames called Smith on the phone: "Don't you dance?" She fumbled for an answer and finally told him that she, in-

cont. on page 12



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## Upcoming Dance Recitals



Special to Wesson News

The 2014 Senior Class at Nena Smith's School of Dance is performing graduation dance recitals at 6 p.m. on May 17 and 19 at Co-Lin. The nine seniors have participated in many dance workshops and dance concerts throughout the years, most of them since pre-school. They are (in first row from left to right) Ad Sales Princess Madison Williams and Fruit of the Spirit Class Captain Shelbie Crane of Brookhaven, Victoria Skinner of Crystal Springs; (in second row from left to right) Allyson Barry of Brookhaven and Class Captain Elise Whittington of Wesson; (in third row from left to right) 2012 Brandy Sanders Memorial Scholarship Winner Andrea Sims of Gallman, 2013 Jason Counts Memorial Scholarship Winner Taylor Fink, Justice Orgeron both of Wesson and Brandi Tillman of Crystal Springs.

cont. from page 11

## Dance is popular local art

deed, was a dancer. A deal was made, and Smith's life instantly changed. Her college degree was in speech and theater, with an endorsement in acting and directing. Dance had always been her hobby. Her plan was to finish her Master's degree and carry on with the life she thought she had all planned out. It's funny how answering a phone call can change the complete direction of your life.

Smith became the Director of "Mississippi's Original Dancing co-eds" — the Co-Lin Colettes. She started taking dance classes two days a week at Mississippi Ballet in Jackson to equip herself for the challenge and turn her then-hobby into a profession. She attended every workshop she could find. Recognizing a void in the after-school activities, especially for young girls in the area, she started teaching dance part-time. In 1974, she started Nena Smith Dancers, which held its first recital that year. By 1984, she needed another facility for her growing classes and converted a house across from the Wesson Attendance Center into a first class studio with wall-to-wall mirrors, a large dance floor, and a state-of-the-art sound system.

Nearly forty years later, the Nena Smith Dancers are still going strong. Thousands of young ladies have learned life lessons and how to do an "attitude turn" from Smith and her teaching staff. Her students have gone on to dance at Co-Lin, Ole Miss, and other colleges. Not all have continued with dance after high school, but the lessons they learned at Smith's have helped them to become successful in other areas of life and work. Several of her graduates have gone to work for her. Smith, however, doesn't dwell on the past. Looking to the future, she talks fast, excited about ideas and possibilities: another dance floor, perhaps even a piano studio, or a full blown school of performing arts. For Smith, there is no limit. Who knows? Maybe one of Smith's eight-year-old girls with a runny nose today will be competing for gold at Thalia Mara Hall in 2022.

Until we chat again, support live music.

*Editor's Note: R. Shaw Furlow is Director of the Bands Program at Co-Lin and oversees the college's Community Arts Series. He is a regular contributor to Wesson News on the area arts scene.*



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