

# Mississippi Department of Human Services **Beacon**

## February 2013



### *A Message from the Executive Director*

Spring is here! It is a time for renewal and is probably the most beautiful time of the year here in Mississippi.

It is also a very busy time here at MDHS. We are finishing up the general bills and turning our attention toward the appropriations bills in the final weeks of the 2013 Legislative Session. Much effort is being expended to ensure we maintain our current level of funding for services while striving to bolster our resources to meet the requirements of the Olivia Y. Modified Settlement Agreement.

We have received a lot of support from legislators in a most difficult budgetary climate and hope to have positive news to report next month.

Leadership is very important here at MDHS. Some of us may have leadership roles as one of our primary job duties but we all have leadership roles in our families, in the community and especially when working with our customers.

As I have mentioned many times before, **INTEGRITY** is the key to leadership. People will not respect you if they do not respect you. Respect is something that you must earn through hard work; strict adherence to a code of ethics; displaying proper behavior; always telling the truth; and by genuinely caring for others.

In an effort to emphasize the role of leadership and to recognize an employee who exemplifies these qualities, I plan to award the Richard Harris Leadership Award each year.

The first annual recipient will be announced in a general staff meeting here at the State Office on April 2, 2013. The selectee will receive a commemorative award, recognition in front of their peers and lunch with the executive director. There will also be a column in the March BEACON dedicated to the recipient. The award also honors the memory of former Deputy Administrator Richard Harris who exemplified leadership and integrity during his long military career and during his tenure here at the agency.

Each month we will also recognize an employee who demonstrates our core values of: Integrity; Excellent Program Delivery; Self-Development and Outstanding Customer Service as an ongoing component of our Character First initiative.

Congratulations to Shirley Rainey of the Division of Aging and Adult Services for being recognized this month for her compassion and commitment to make a difference in the lives of those we serve.

Richard A. Berry  
Executive Director

### Legal Representation Provided for Low Income Parents in Adams, Forrest, Harrison and Rankin County Youth Courts

There is exciting and innovative news coming out of youth courts in Adams, Forrest, Harrison and Rankin counties.

These courts are participating in a pilot program which provides free legal representation for low-income parents in youth court hearings in which allegations of abuse or neglect could result in court-ordered removal of children from parents' custody.

Rankin County Youth Court Judge Thomas Broome said providing legal representation "helps the parties navigate a very complex system. It helps parties understand the process and get their children back home."

The goal of the program is to expedite the placement of children in a permanent home. That may mean helping the parents correct the problems which brought them into youth court so that they and their children may be reunited.

It may mean finding suitable placement of the children with other family members. Or it can mean termination of parental rights if parental reunification is not possible.

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Harrison County Youth Court Judge Margaret Alfonso said, "The hope is that parent representation will result in better outcomes for children and families. It will provide parents with a better understanding of the procedures and what is necessary to be reunited with their children."

Providing a legal advocate for the parent will curb unnecessary removal of children from parents, Judge Alfonso said. "Ultimately the goal is to prevent removal if possible. If appropriate services can be provided to prevent removal, we are obligated to attempt to provide services that prevent or eliminate the need to separate the child and the family."

Mississippi is one of only two states that do not provide free representation to low income parents in youth court proceedings which may result in loss of custody of children.

Adams County Youth Court Judge John Hudson said, "The fact that government can come in and take a person's children away and that person has to walk into a courtroom where everyone else is represented by attorneys and that person does not have an attorney – I can't think of anything worse than that."

"But if they had committed a misdemeanor (that could result in jail time), they could get a (court appointed) lawyer," Judge Hudson said.

Providing attorney representation for low income people provides fairness, Judge Hudson said. Judges dealing with unrepresented litigants are put in the untenable position of trying to assure fairness without crossing the line into advocacy, he said. While judges can explain the proceedings, they can't advise and help the unrepresented party.

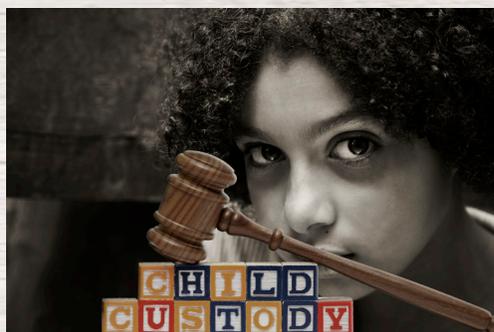
Forrest County Youth Court Judge Michael McPhail said that before the pilot program began, the Department of Human Services, the prosecutor and the court administrator might explain proceedings before a hearing and then he would explain the person's rights and the process from the bench. "These people were hearing everything about their case and their rights from somebody who does not represent them," Judge McPhail said. "They may lose because they didn't know what to do."

Having an attorney representing parents also creates another level of accountability, Judge Hudson said. When the court sets conditions for reunification, parents may procrastinate to meet those conditions. An attorney will push the client to comply with the court's orders.

Having an attorney available to represent the parents will speed up the process so that proceedings don't drag on. "It's going to speed the process tremendously," said Judge Hudson.

Quicker resolution of cases will save public dollars, Judge Hudson said. "It will save money by getting them out of the foster care system quicker."

Part of the funding for the pilot program comes from a \$100,000 grant from Seattle-based Casey Family Programs, the nation's largest private foundation focused on foster care and



improving the child welfare system. The foundation works to reduce the need for foster care by helping the child welfare system to prevent family crises that lead to separation and foster care.

H. Lien Bragg, Casey Family Programs Senior Director of Strategic Consulting, said, "Casey Family Programs is pleased to support Mississippi's efforts to establish

parent representation for families involved in the child welfare system. We believe timely, adequate and competent legal representation is a critical driver in expediting permanency and well-being outcomes for children involved in dependency court proceedings."

Harrison County, which has the largest number of cases, received \$50,000 in Casey Family Programs grant funding for a full-time attorney. Adams and Forrest counties each received \$25,000 in grants to pay for attorney representation. The Administrative Office of Courts provided \$45,000 through a Court Improvement Program grant to fund the Rankin County program.

The arrangements differ among the four pilot counties. A full-time attorney on the staff of the Mississippi Center for Legal Services will begin representing low income Harrison County parents March 1, 2013. Parents in Rankin County since October 2012 have had access to an attorney who works for Mission First Legal Aid Office. Mission First Legal Aid is a partnership between Mississippi College School of Law and Mission First, a neighborhood outreach ministry. Forrest County uses two part-time contract attorneys who started representing clients in October 2012. Adams County in December began appointing a local attorney who takes cases in a part-time contractual arrangement.

Judge Broome said that he does not order parents to contact Mission First Legal Aid Office, but makes them aware of the availability of legal representation there.

Mission First Legal Aid has opened 16 cases for parent representation since last October, said Director Patti Gandy. Mission First attorney Carlyn Hicks, who handles Rankin County parental representation, is there "to be that voice for that parent who may be so distraught that they may not be able to coherently tell the court their side of the story and what's really going on," Gandy said.

"What we are trying to do is shorten the period of time, if that child has to be taken from that home, and to determine if it is really necessary for that child to be taken from the home. Sometimes it's not necessary for the child to be removed from the home," Gandy said.

"Studies have shown if you can get an attorney involved for parents at the beginning of the proceeding, it shortens the time the child is away from home or separated from parents. It's all about making sure the child does not stay in the system any longer than is necessary," Gandy said.

*Article provided by Mississippi Administrative Office of the Courts.*

# SHIP and SMP: Counseling and Informing Mississippians about Medicare



We all recognize the red, white and blue cards seen in seniors' wallets: Medicare—the card that ensures health care for the elderly. Since 1965, Medicare has been in place to serve the aging population.

Most everyone knows someone who is enrolled in the Medicare program. And many of us may be edging ever closer to the day we also qualify for its benefits. This vital government program was put in place to provide health care for Americans who are either 65 or older, certain



younger people with disabilities or people with End-Stage Renal Disease over 65 have access to adequate health care.

Medicare has been in the news quite a bit lately as Washington tries to cut spending and reduce debt. To highlight just how large the program is, for example, in 2011, Medicare covered 48.7 million people and total expenditures soared to over \$549.1 billion. Medicare is vitally important and valuable to many, which is why Medicare fraud must be addressed.

Nationally, reducing Medicare fraud is getting some attention. Recently ABC News did an undercover piece to expose the growing problem in the health care industry of those trying to steal health care dollars. That piece can be viewed at: <http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/video/abcnews-granny-catches-medicare-fraud-tape-15830592>



In Mississippi, the MDHS, Division of Aging and Adult Services works with consumers and volunteers to inform residents about Medicare coverage and spot fraud. Along with the many programs administered through DAAS, there are two specifically in place to assist Medicare beneficiaries and their families:

- The State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) provides information, counseling and assistance to consumers about Medicare as changes to the program develop. During State Fiscal Year 2012, services were provided to over 20,000 persons through presentations, workshops and health fairs. Begun in 1990, the program was launched nationwide and is known as a trusted source for unbiased information about Medicare coverage, supplemental insurance and Medicare fraud and abuse.
- The Mississippi Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) is an educational outreach program designed to recruit and train volunteers to review and analyze medical statements and report suspicious claims, aiding in the fight to prevent and/or reduce fraudulent practices in the Medicare system.



DAAS is helping protect your Medicare dollars, inform consumers and reduce fraud. For more information, go online to: [http://www.mdhs.state.ms.us/aas\\_info.html](http://www.mdhs.state.ms.us/aas_info.html) or to: <http://www.medicare.gov/forms-help-and-resources/report-fraud-and-abuse/fraud-and-abuse.html>.

Get informed, be aware and report abuse. Medicare fraud hurts everyone.



## Lee County Rounds Up Dead Beat Parents

In late January, Lee County sheriff's deputies set out to arrest 24 men who weren't making child support payments and arrested six men, owing what Sheriff Jim Johnson estimated to be \$60,000 in back child support.

Lagging payments are common. In the last week of January, only 19 percent of people paying child support in Lee County had paid the full amount due for the month.

The child support system is monitored and enforced through the Mississippi Department of Human Services to help ensure every child is financially supported by both parents.

Kelley Homan, 34, of Tupelo, is a single mother of two who struggled with the court system to receive child support payments for two years while going to school to get her master's degree in mental health counseling.

"I'm just a graduate student and I was really struggling," she said. "We live with my parents right now because it was so hard to make it on my own in graduate school."

She estimates, without counting transportation expenses, rent and other monthly utilities, it costs about \$500 to keep her daughter clothed, fed and supported. Beginning in August, Homan began receiving her monthly child support payments.

She said knowing there will be money to pay for her daughter's gymnastics, piano lessons, groceries and school supplies instead of relying on financial aid sets her at ease. "It used to be very difficult to wonder when things were going to be paid."

MDHS Child Support Attorney Kristin Belvin spends her working hours trying to make sure legal guardians have financial assistance in raising children. Belvin is tasked with working with the chancery court to make sure each person with a child support obligation pays it and those who don't have incarceration orders. The caseload is so heavy in Lee County that a parent could go without payment for a year before the case reaches court.

The amount of a child support payment is based on a parent's take-home pay. A parent paying child support is required to pay 14 percent of what he takes home (after taxes and any other legal obligations are subtracted) to the legal guardian of their child.

In Lee County, the average amount comes to about \$170 a month and the minimum payment for those drawing unemployment or making minimum wage is \$132. The agency can also intercept wages from parents who collect tax refunds.

Incarceration orders for parents who have failed to pay

child support usually require the parent to pay the full amount owed before leaving jail.

Johnson estimated his department serves two or three incarceration orders each week for delinquent child support payments on inmates brought in for other crimes or during routine stops.

*Excerpts from this story are J.B. Clark, Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal.*

200 Million Flowers to Host Second Annual 5K to Support Adoption

200 MILLION FLOWERS art of adoption

On June 22, 2013, **200 Million Flowers** will host the Second Annual Five K to support adoption. Last year's race in Old Towne Ridgeland had over 350 participants.

200 Million Flowers is a non-profit, Christian organization seeking to connect children with families in Mississippi. 200 Million Flowers works with the MDHS to support and facilitate the adoption of these children.

A secondary focus of the agency is crisis pregnancies which works with those in that situation to consider adoption as a viable, loving choice.

For more information on the race or the agency's activities, go to: [www.200millionflowers.org](http://www.200millionflowers.org). Help support those who want to give every child a chance for a forever home.



## Special Day for Eligibility Workers, Case Managers and Child Support Enforcement Officers Observed



Pike County Child Support Enforcement Officers (CSEOs) enjoyed a Subway sandwiches for lunch and received certificates of appreciation for their service. From left: Zandra Belcher, Erica Patton and Scherry Martin.



In Forrest County, the Division of Field Operations honored their staff on EW/CM/CSEO Day with a luncheon and gifts. Great job ladies.



In Grenada County, EW/CM/CSEO Day was celebrated with a luncheon, gift cards and balloons for the support staff. From left: Sonia Armstead, EWII; Kathy Smith, CM; Sheila Blackwood, EWII; and Brenda Harris, EWII.

Marion County EWs and CSEOs celebrated with pizza and homemade desserts. These workers, with their combined 68 years of state service, are a valuable asset to the agency and state. From left seated: LeeAnn Williams, CSEO; Judy Price, CSEO; and Frenchie Johnson, EWII. Back row, from left: Beverly Boone, EWII; Andrea Pounds, EWII; and Felicia Ingram, EWII.



In Adams County, the child support staff was honored with gifts and thanks by their supervisor, Marie Hall, for their work. CSEO staff includes: Eron "Dianne" Housley, Tammy Wilson and Anetra Bee.



Noxubee County celebrated EW/CM/CSEO Day with a luncheon where ladies were treated to a loaded baked potato bar, goodie bags and certificates of appreciation from County Director Kay Papas, and Supervisors Jolynn Cotton and Shirley Battle. The treat of the day was CSR Minnie Lockett's famous Italian Creme Cake. This group of ladies has a combined total of 133 years of DHS service. From left: Renita Jones, EW; Lindsay Denton, EW; Robin Mason, EW; Paula Miller, EW; Lynn Sellers, CM; Sherry Sandifer, CM; Queen Macon, CSEO; and Kristie Glass, CSEO.



Stone County staff that was treated to lunch at Pizza Inn. Pictured are: Willie Outlaw, Region VI, Program Specialist; Kathy Savage, Case Manager; Rebecca Hester, EW; Elizabeth Bowling, EW and Debra Joplín, CSEO.

# RETIREMENTS



Carolyn Dyar retired from the MDHS, Division of Field Operations on January 15, 2013 with 28 years of service. Coworkers, friends and family attended a farewell celebration hosted in her honor. Carolyn's many years of dedication and support as a Help Desk Tech for Field Operations' county and regional staff are greatly appreciated. From left: MDHS Deputy Administrator for Programs John Davis; Executive Director Rickey Berry; Carolyn Dyar; and Deputy Executive Director Mark Smith.



A great friend and a man who can "tear up" a piano, Stuart Saucier retired at the end of February from the MDHS, Division of Early Childhood Care and Development. Stuart worked with contracts for the division and had spent almost 20 years at MDHS in state service. He was always one with a quick smile and a word of encouragement and will surely be missed around the office.



Jean Henington, Director for Greene County, received a very delightful retirement luncheon on November 12, 2012. Mrs. Henington began her tenure with DHS as a clerk and EW in Perry County. She later transferred to Greene County and moved into the position as case manager and in 2004 became county director. Mrs. Henington always showered her employees, clients and friends with grace and humility. She will be greatly missed by her colleagues and friends at MDHS. Mrs. Henington has plans to spend more time with her family and friends in the future.



*Congratulations to Shirley Rainey for being recognized for her commitment and compassion demonstrated to the clients we serve. "Every day the employees of MDHS are working to improve our core values of integrity, excellent program delivery, self-development and great customer service. I want to take this opportunity to applaud Shirley for exhibiting our core values on a daily basis," said Executive Director Rickey Berry. "Shirley takes her time when talking to people to really hear what their needs are without hurrying them or passing them off to someone else. She exemplifies the mission of the agency and serves the state with grace and compassion," said DAAS Director Melinda Bertucci. Congratulations Shirley!*

# County Corner - Leake and Lee Counties



This month our travels take us to Leake and Lee Counties.

**Leake County** is located in the geographic center of the state and is the only square-shaped county in the state. Go pull up a map and take a look ☺. As of 2010, the population of Leake County was 23,805. The county was named for the third governor of the state, **Walter Leake** who served from 1822 to 1825.

As with many early settlements in the state, Hayesville, which was established about 1821, was the first early settlement in the area but now no longer exists. By 1834, Thomas and Matilda Harris deeded a 40-acre tract to establish the county seat of **Carthage**. The city was named for their hometown of Carthage, Tennessee. Carthage was originally to have been called Leakesville. The first courthouse, a log cabin, was built in 1836, followed by a brick structure in 1845 which served until 1910 when the current structure was erected.

In 2010, the U.S. Census recorded the population of Carthage at 5,075. The area hosts many annual events including an Oktoberfest with arts and crafts, a Wildlife Extravaganza, Christmas Parade, 5-K Run/Walks and Walnut Grove Day the Saturday before Labor Day.

Also within Leake County is the small town of **Lena**. Many Mississippians will recognize that town as the birthplace of Ole Miss and New Orleans Saints football running back **Dulymus Jenod "Deuce" McAllister**. He was drafted by the New Orleans Saints in the first round of the 2001 NFL Draft and played eight seasons. He holds the all-time New Orleans Saints record for most career rushing yards and touchdowns. After sitting out the entire 2009 regular season, McAllister was resigned by the Saints in January, 2010—just one day before their divisional round playoff game, to serve as the honorary captain. Although he did not play, McAllister was on the Saints' roster when they defeated the Colts in Super Bowl XLIV, and was also given a championship ring. McAllister runs a foundation dedicated to underprivileged youth and adolescents in the Gulf South Region.

Notable people from Leake County:

**Van T. Barfoot** (b. 1919) highly decorated U.S. Army officer who served in WWII. At age 90, he was cited by his local homeowners association in Virginia, for flying the American flag. He protested and won.

- **Ross Barnett**, (b. 1898) 53rd governor of the Mississippi
- **Art Gardner**, ML Baseball player, Houston Astros
- **Bill Stribling**, (b. 1927), NFL player
- **Winson Hudson**, (B. 1916), civil rights activist

**Lee County** was established on October 26, 1866 by the Mississippi State Legislature from parts of Itawamba and Pontotoc. It was named for Confederate General Robert Edward Lee. The county has a total area of 453.14 square miles.

The 2010 Census counted 82,910 residents in the county up from 75,755 in 2000, a 9.4% gain. Lee County has the fourth highest per capita income in the state at \$18,956.

**Tupelo**, the county seat, is the seventh largest city in the state with a population of 34,546 at the 2010 Census. The city is best known as the birthplace of **Elvis Presley**. An interesting, little known fact surrounding Presley is, as an infant, he survived the 1936 tornado that was ranked as the fourth deadliest in U.S. history and killed more than 230 people.

Another interesting fact notes that the last known bank robbery by infamous Machine Gun Kelly, a Prohibition-era gangster, took place in Tupelo at the Citizen's State Bank on November 30, 1932. Kelly got away with \$38,000.

Lee County sits in the upper northeastern part of the state and was populated by the Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians. Many historic battles were fought over the settlement of the area including the 1736 **Battle of Ackia** which pitted the British and Chickasaw Indians against the French and Choctaws who were attacking the Chickasaw village of Ackia.

In later years, European-Americans named the town Gum Town due to the numerous **Tupelo trees, also known as Blackgum trees**. The city still hosts the Gumtree Arts Festival.

Guntown, located in rural Lee County and was named for James Gunn, a **Tory** who fled to the region during the American Revolution. Some, however, believe its name was derived from the fact that it was the site of an armory in the Civil War era. It is also widely believed that Abraham Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth, is buried in a private family field cemetery just west of the town.

Notable people include:

- **Diplo**, (b. 1978) DJ
- **Allie Grant** (b. February 14, 1994), Film and television actress
- **Guy Hovis** (b. 1941), Singer
- **Joe Horn** (b. 1972), American football wide receiver
- **Jarius Jackson** (b. 1977), American and Canadian League football player and coach.

Next month, we visit Leflore and Lincoln Counties.



# In this economy, we could all find ourselves in need of a little help.



The Mississippi Department of Human Services has an office in every county of the state with services available to assist you.

To find out what government assistance you may qualify for, call your county MDHS office or go online to: [www.mdhs.state.ms.us](http://www.mdhs.state.ms.us).

The Mississippi Department of Human Services: Come see us. We can help.



## Do You Have a Facebook or Twitter Account?

Social networking is one of the many ways we stay connected with our friends and family. We also use it to find out what's going on in the world. "Like" the Mississippi Department of Human Services Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/msdhs> or follow us on Twitter at [http://twitter.com/MS\\_DHS](http://twitter.com/MS_DHS) to stay up on the latest happenings at MDHS.

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**FREE FOOD**  
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WJMI and MISS103 LIVE Broadcast

Bring your children and enjoy a day of family fun at the park.

**SATURDAY APRIL 13**

**Picnic for Prevention**

10am-2pm  
LeFleur's Bluff State Park  
2040 Riverside Drive  
Jackson, MS

Join us to support Child Abuse Prevention Month

Sponsored by the Mississippi Department of Human Services and the Mississippi Children's Trust Fund. For more info call 601-359-4512 or 601-359-4607.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Join the Prevention Unit on Saturday, April 13<sup>th</sup> to raise awareness while we picnic for prevention of abuse and neglect.

The event will be held at LeFleur's Bluff Park off I-55 in Jackson. Bring your lawn chair and enjoy live radio broadcasts by WJMI and Miss103, food, fun, entertainment and a great day at the park.