

Meridian Community College connections

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MCC Foundation honoree

Hardy Graham
the real thing

MERIDIAN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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On the cover: Dr. Scott Elliott, left, and Kathy Brookshire, right, join Hardy Graham, this year's honoree at the Foundation membership celebration.

A holiday thought

Making the most of our very limited time

"The time of life is short! To spend that shortness basely were too long."

--WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Henry IV, Part 1, act 5, sc. 2*

The older I get, the faster each school semester seems to pass. Here it is almost Christmastime, and, truly, it seems like just yesterday when we opened the doors for another fall term at Meridian Community College.

Recently, I was reminded of just how relentlessly time does fly. It was another one of my nights to "cook," meaning Claudia (my wife) and I patronized one of Meridian's buffet restaurants. Nothing like those all-you-can-eat dessert bars.

We were warmly greeted at the entrance by a cashier, from whom I requested, "Two buffets, please."

Subsequently, I was provided my bill, which I immediately noticed must be in error – in my favor.

Having a rare twinge of conscience, I informed the cashier, "There must be some mistake. I think you've undercharged me."

"Well, sir, I gave you the senior citizen's discount," she replied, charitably.

"Er, thanks, but just how old do you have to be to qualify?" I asked.

"62," she answered.

My 53-year-old ego crushed flatter than a Route 66 armadillo, I started to mutter a faint reply. But before I managed a syllable, the cashier, winked, "Well, I know your pretty wife wouldn't qualify, but I just gave both of you the discount, anyway."

"Gee, that's awfully nice of you," I said, even more crestfallen.

At that juncture - feeling a little like that disheveled character Arte Johnson used to play on "Rowan & Martin's Laugh-in" who hung out around park benches harassing Ruth Buzzi - I simply paid the doggone bill, shuffled off toward the salad bar, and abandoned any further attempts at honesty. I figured the restaurant's loss of my 10 percent was its penance for such keen observance of my gray, balding dome, crow's feet, and unwanted, wiry hair protruding from various and sundry orifices.

Of course, Claudia, who is six months my senior, just got a big charge out of the whole thing.

"Better watch eating anything too spicy," she jabbed, chuckling. "We're not at home, you know."

"Funny, real funny," I counterpunched.

Yes, it was a rather bittersweet evening – a low bill resulting in even lower self-esteem. And, to reiterate, a backhanded reminder of just how fearsome of a foe is Father Time. As a matter of fact, outside of maybe Enoch and Elijah, he's pretty much undefeated against us mere mortals.

Anyway, as I told a group of MCC honor students the other night, life is short. (Really original, huh?) Therefore, it's incumbent upon all of us to make the most of our very limited time on this planet, to be all that we can be. I think Abraham Maslow might have called that "self-actualization."

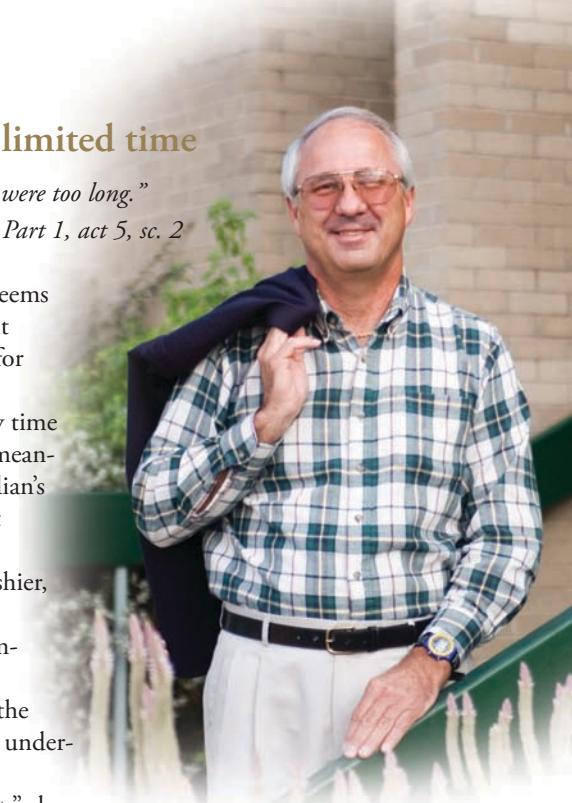
I commended those honor students for being on a bright path and setting a good example for their peers, while also reminding them that my colleagues at MCC – both faculty and staff – had been instrumental in their success.

To be sure, I'm so proud that I work with professionals who have chosen to do something noble with their lives - that is, helping thousands of students realize their maximum potential. As a community college, MCC is a "value-added" institution. First and foremost, we try very hard not to turn anybody away. We accept students at whatever level of preparedness at which they come to us and work to help them to become better-equipped, both educationally and socially. In that process, every individual's continuum is different from the next.

With this holiday season now upon us, the best gift I'll receive, professionally speaking, is continuing to have the opportunity to work with such a truly caring faculty and staff who have invested much of their lives in helping others along life's way. And, if memory serves, that's what we've been commissioned to do by somebody a whole lot stouter than even Father Time.

Happy holidays from MCC!

-Scott Elliott





Van Zyverden, Inc.: A really ‘blooming’ company

It’s fair to say that Van Zyverden, Inc., is one Meridian business that is really “blooming.”

What started as a small family business in the Netherlands has evolved into one of the world’s largest wholesale flower bulb distributors, shipping approximately 450 million bulbs annually to the 50 states and Canada.

Some 135 community leaders heard Van Zyverden, Inc.’s remarkable story at a recent meeting of the Meridian Community College Foundation President’s Roundtable. The company’s chief executive officer, Jacqueline Van Zyverden Hogan, and members of her administrative staff told the gathering in MCC’s Dulaney Room about the company’s origin and dramatic growth, spurred by aggressive and ever-expanding marketing efforts.

“I’m really proud of the heritage and evolution of our company,” Jacqueline said. “We have tried very hard to maintain the same commitment to excellence that my great grandfather, Dirk Van Zyverden, had when he and his brother, Corstiaan, started the company in 1919.”

Meridian is typically identified with several famous figures, ranging from Jimmie Rogers to Sela Ward to Sonny Montgomery to Hartley Peavey, but within its own industry Van Zyverden, Inc., has also helped to put Lauderdale County on the map. Besides operating a 425,000-square foot employee plant in the northeast sector of the county (constructed in 1973), Van Zyverden, Inc., also has two other 60,000-square foot facilities in Burlington, WA, and Sassenheim, Holland.

Considering its annual sales and 480-employee payroll, Van Zyverden, Inc.’s economic impact on the East Mississippi region is easily in the millions of dollars.

It’s big business, but Jacqueline emphasizes that it’s still a family business with strong family values. Robert, Jacqueline’s

brother, serves as the company’s chief operating officer. The brother-sister duo began working in the business under their father, Paul, during school vacations.

Jacqueline and Robert, both of whom are alumni of MCC and Mississippi State University, joined the firm full-time in 1990 and 1993, respectively. Their father retired in 1996, confident that his children were well-prepared to take the company to an even higher level.

They’ve done just that.

Running a firm the size of Van Zyverden, Inc., is a demanding job, to say the least, but it’s not all-consuming for Jacqueline. Besides serving on numerous boards such as the Mississippi Arts & Entertainment Center and the Community Foundation of East Mississippi, she’s found time to birth two children, Alexa and Chandler, and design a new home adjacent to Northwood Country Club, staying close to one of her and husband Tim Hogan’s favorite hobbies – golf.

“Because our company is located out in the county, there are probably some local people who are not aware of the scope of our business,” Jacqueline said. “I doubt many people realize that we employ several hundred individuals, most of whom live right here in Lauderdale County. I love Meridian, and I’m proud that our company is a major contributor to the area economy.”

Jacqueline attributes the company’s phenomenal growth to the quality of its workforce.



Becky Farley and M.L. Waters.



“I’m blessed to work with some truly talented and totally committed professionals,” Jacqueline said. “Many of our key people have been with the company for the duration of their careers. They are very innovative and imaginative. That kind of talent and continuity has enabled us to keep the company on a high-growth path. And our people in the plant have a strong work ethic. They take great pride in getting our shipments out in a timely fashion.”

Jacqueline sees continued growth in the company’s future.

“We are constantly examining new methodologies in promoting our products, looking to add new products, and penetrating new markets,” she said. “Sometimes growth involves buying out smaller, yet successful competitor firms and sometimes it involves utilizing new technologies, such as internet sales. We have been fortunate through the years to have made some astute, well-timed decisions in making acquisitions that have played out nicely for us.”

That may be an understatement. For instance in 2003, the company was producing 18.5 million packages annually. By 2005, that figure had already risen to 20.3 million. Annual sales have taken similar quantum leaps.

So far in 2006, the company has shipped out 1,512 full truck loads of merchandise and 6,345 limited truckloads, utilizing seven different carriers.

Those shipments supply colorful display racks of products all over the nation in major stores such as Wal-Mart, Sam’s Club, Lowe’s and Fred’s. *(continued on page 7)*

Below, Shelby Dement, left and Alfred Rosenbaum share a laugh before the luncheon.



From left, Gina Sharman, Michael Lagendyk, Jacqueline Van Zyverden Hogan, Arjen Lagendijk after Hogan’s talk to members of the President’s Roundtable at Meridian Community College.



Linda Smith

Still cheering for MCC

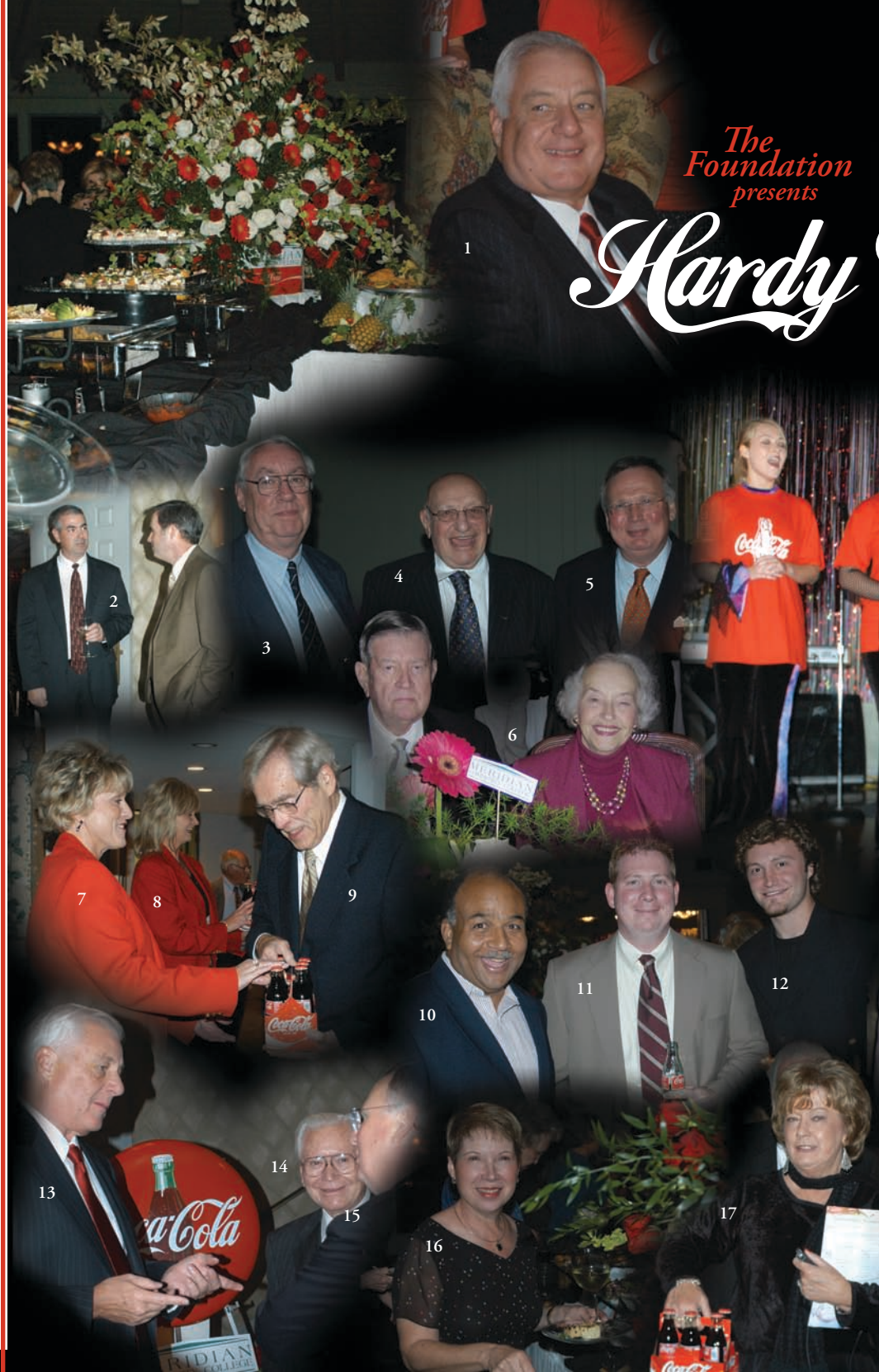
Although not a stranger to MCC, Linda Smith is a newcomer to the campus.

Smith is office of institutional advancement assistant, a new post she's held since mid September. "I'm helping in all areas; the Foundation and Lifetime Quest," Smith said.

Working at Meridian High School for 33 years as a dance, aerobics and cheerleader sponsor, Smith retired in 2005, but wanted something more. So when Kathy Brookshire, director of institutional advancement, restructured her office staff, she looked to Smith to serve as an assistant for the office. "I wanted a job where I could still be productive and I love working here," she said.

With her part-time work at the College, there's time for Smith to devote to her hobbies including tennis, reading and gardening. She sings in the choir and adult ensemble at Meridian's First Baptist Church and enjoys being with her six nieces and nephews, eight great nieces and nephews and her goddaughter who is a physical therapist in Meridian.

Smith, an alumnus of MCC (Class of 1970), she was head cheerleader when the college started its basketball team. In fact, she and Brookshire were on the same squad. "My two years here were my most productive college years," Smith said, adding, "I feel like I got a great foundation."



Meridian Coca-Cola owner Hardy Graham knew he was being acknowledged for something at the Meridian Community College Foundation's annual Membership Appreciation Program but he had no idea how big it would be.

The surprise: Meridian Community College's gymnasium now bears the name, "Graham Gymnasium."

"I'm overwhelmed," Graham said. "This totally caught me by surprise. To have the gymnasium named after me — that's an incredible honor. It's the greatest day of my life."

The night included music, laughter and celebration as Graham was seated in a large chair to be honored. Graham was then treated to

a singing of "The Real Thing" by the MCC entertainment groups, EnCore and Dimensions. After a short video presentation, the new "Graham Gymnasium" was unveiled. And Graham couldn't stop smiling.

Kathy Brookshire, director of institutional advancement, said Graham has been a great supporter of the Foundation. Graham has served on the MCC Foundation board since 1992, including a two-year stint as its president in 1998-1999.

"He has faithfully given of his time and personal resources to make certain MCC students are consistently provided with the highest quality educational opportunities possible," MCC President Scott Elliott said.

Graham the real thing



One of Graham's great loves has been basketball. He was a star player at the University of Mississippi, and a huge supporter of MCC's athletic programs through numerous donations and gifts.

"We are honored to have this permanent association with Hardy Graham," Elliott said. "It is our fondest hope that every athlete who plays in our gym will exhibit the same commitment to sportsmanship, scholarship and fierce competition for which Hardy Graham was known in his own playing days."

Another announcement during the program was the naming of the new Foundation president, Gerry Purvis. He replaces former president, Russell Thompson.

Above, photos from the 2006 Foundation celebration. Hardy Graham (1); David Buckner and Jeff McCoy (2); Tommy Dulaney (3); Alfred Rosenbaum (4); Ralph Young (5); Mr. and Mrs. O. P. Brown (6); Darline Grice of Meridian Coke (7); Cheryl Bunyard of Meridian Coke (8); Albert Weems (9); C.D. Smith; (10); Todd Brand (11); Daniel Boles (12); Hardy Graham (13); Richard James (14); Ralph Young (15); Johnnie Nell Alexander (16); Ann Alexander (17); MCC's Encore & Dimensions with Hardy Graham (18); Joyce Frank (19); Al Mitchell (20); Melissa Mitchell (21); Leia Hill (22); Diane Delk (23); Wallace Heggie (24); Janet Heggie (25); Tanya Thompson (26); Tammy Miles and MCC Encore members (27); Hardy Graham (28); Billy Beal (29); Rep. Charles Young (30); Nellah Webb (31); Ray Denton (32); Veldore Young (33); Tommy and Pam McDonald (34); Sheryl and Jay Davidson (35); Russell Thompson (36); Kathy Brookshire (37).

The Service Company: Full service and dedication to service

The SERVICE COMPANY

Local and area residents frequently are seeing red and that's good for The Service Company.

The Service Company is a full-service heating, air conditioning, electrical and plumbing company with employees providing installation, maintenance, repairs and design. The business has locations in Meridian and Philadelphia. Christy Bennett, the company's marketing/customer service officer, said she frequently gets comments from customers: "I saw your red truck."

Ninety-nine percent of the company's fleet trucks are red. Why red? "That's the color Daddy chose 25 years ago," Bennett said. It was Bennett's dad, Kelly Vaughn, president and owner of The Service Company who started the business with two employees. Today, the company has 50 employees on the payroll and crews can be seen through a good part of Mississippi. "We're wide range – not just in Meridian," Bennett said.

The company's gained a lot of trust from their ever-building customer base. "Service is our strong point, but quality is our best point. It is so very important to us," Bennett said.

"As our customers increased, their needs increased; and, to better serve them, The Service Company added certified technicians and specialists who shared the same values and commitments that Daddy taught my brother and me. He taught us to treat every home or business we entered as if it were our own and every customer as if they were a member of the family," she said.



Looking out for family reaches within the company. Bennett said, "We're one big family here. One employee, Steve Williams, was

Daddy's first technician he hired 24 years ago." Bennett's husband is the company's accountant. The company estimator has three sons working for The Service Company, and Bennett's brother, Chad, is joining the company.

Service is their No. 1 priority.

With that motto ever in the forefront, The Service Company is always educating employees. "If you're not educated on the newest, then you're just like everybody else. We want to be the most qualified to give you the best," Bennett said.

"We're very price competitive; we assure you get the best quality service whatever it may be," Bennett said.

The Service Company is the largest commercial service company in our area, servicing many manufacturing plants, schools and hospitals. Bennett noted The Service Company has preventive maintenance programs for both commercial ventures and the individual homeowner. "There's always somebody who can take care of your needs," she said.

And since no one can predict when they will need that air conditioning service or electrical repair, The Service Company is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. "You can't pick when an air conditioning breaks down or when water pipes burst," Bennett said. So when it's Christmas day or Thanksgiving, The Service Company's customer has some one on call.

And they'll be driving a red truck.

The Service Company is a supporter of The MCC Foundation and its Tuition Guarantee Program. "We want to help," said Bennett.

Bennett and her family are also believers in the College. "I did go to MCC in 1991 and 1992.

I was unsure of what I was going to do; so I got my basics," she said.

After Bennett's mom reared Christy and her brother Chad, she went back to MCC and got her degree in medical records. She works full time at Jeff Anderson Regional Medical Center. "She's happy in the medical field," Bennett said. Her dad, too, is an alumnus of the College.



Pictured at left, Christy Bennett and Kelly Vaughn

Rolling on with business; taking care of people

Specialty Roll Products Inc. President Larry Love speaks volumes when he says, “the strength of our company is in the people we employ.”

Love and co-owner Brad Huff are justifiably proud of the 40 employees. “Each has a responsibility and they are accountable for those responsibilities. And they do a good job. There’s no way we could do it ourselves,” Love said. Everyone’s on a first name basis.

With the mission of “Manufacturing paper rolls ... meeting customer needs,” Specialty Roll Products Inc. is the manufacturer of paper rolls for point-of-sale equipment, offering a total paper roll and printer ribbon program. It is a privately-held corporation with offices, manufacturing, and warehousing located in Meridian.

“Our coverage is all over the country. We ship into Alaska, into Hawaii – all right here behind City Hall,” Love said. And their customer base is broad; rolls of carbonless paper for Stein Mart stores were being prepared while ends of mill rolls were being recycled to become parts of cereal boxes. There’s even custom packing for customers.

Their sales staffers reach beyond the Meridian borders, too, for they live in Chattanooga, Tenn., Monroe, La., and Cincinnati, Ohio, as well as Meridian. And when customers call, they get to hear a friendly voice. “We want you to speak to a live person,” Love said. Orders that come in today, go out today.

Both Love and Huff credit former owner Paul Nuckolls as key to the company and its success. “Brad and I recently completed the purchase of this company from Paul,” Love said, adding, “It was important to Paul that the company stay in Meridian, to be here as a big participant in this town.”

Nuckolls started Specialty Roll in 1970 with one machine and a handful of employees. “He is a people person, and he has impressed those values on Brad and me. It all goes hand-in-hand to get a finished product. Sometimes businesses lose sight of this,” Love said. “It’s the people.”

The attention to people and values pays off. The company has been experiencing a

10-12 percent sales growth. “We can’t sit still; we’ve got to continue to grow,” said Love, adding that it’s a controlled growth mode.

Specialty Roll Products is a supporter of the College and The MCC Foundation. Love said he sees the college as offering many educational opportunities, including that of being a firm foundation toward a four-year degree. “There are a lot of enrichment opportunities around that MCC drives that wouldn’t take place if MCC wasn’t there,” Huff said.

“I used to be in the candy business with my father, brother and sister,” Love said. “My education for business came there. I’ve had two mentors in business – one was my father; the other was Paul, my father-in-law.” Love came to work for Specialty Roll in January 1988.

Huff, who is in charge of the sales for Specialty Roll, joined the team in July 1995. He started his career in Birmingham and worked in the investment arena. “I moved back to Meridian to work with Trustmark Bank and their investment area in 1993. Coming to Specialty Roll was a career change; Paul and Larry were very supportive and they made it easy,” Huff said.

Both Love and Huff have known each other for a long time. “We’re all from here and we’ve known each other for years and years,” Love said.

Love attended MCC in 1971-72. He played on the first golf team under the direction of Coach Jim Redgate. The team won every tournament that season.

(Van Zyverden, continued from page 3)

Landscape contractors, growers, and independent garden centers, such as Meridian’s own Plant the Earth, are also important clients.

To showcase its products in such stores, Van Zyverden, Inc., has built 42,878 display racks in its own in-house lumber shop.

Jacqueline’s success has come as no surprise to people who know her. Kathy Brookshire, as an example, was Jacqueline’s first-grade teacher at Northeast Elementary School.

“She was my little Jackie back then,” Brookshire, now Executive Director of the MCC Foundation, recalls. “She was one of the brightest children I ever taught. I knew she was going to grow up to be something very special.”

Tommy Dulaney, owner of another of Meridian’s most successful businesses, Structural Steel, has worked with Jacqueline on the EMBDC Board of Directors.

“Jacqueline is an example of a highly competent CEO who took the baton from her father and ran with it,” Dulaney said. “Jacqueline, Robert and their team took a great company and made it greater still. It’s been a true blessing for Lauderdale County to have benefited from that kind of success.”

So, somewhere across America today there are people in a theater watching “The Guardian,” Sela Ward’s latest movie. There are other people buying Peavey amplifiers and guitars in far off states and countries, and there are yet others working in buildings supported by beams from Structural Steel. And there are also folks beautifying their homes and gardens with plants and bulbs from Van Zyverden, Inc.

All those people, whether they realize it or not, have an association with Meridian, Mississippi. Now, that’s something very special – thanks to leaders like Jacqueline Van Zyverden Hogan, Robert Van Zyverden, and their winning team.

**SPECIALTY
ROLL PRODUCTS INC.**

*Brad Huff, left and
Larry Love inspect
paper rolls.*

*Specialty Roll
employee, James
Barnett, is an
MCC student
studying Information
Technology and will
graduate this spring.*

Volunteering: A way of life for Thompson

Volunteerism is more than just a word for Russell Thompson. It's his mantra.

"I don't think anything happens if you don't volunteer," said the Meridian native who puts in action his words. "From a personal standpoint, it's important to give back. It's something that I've always liked."

Thompson has given three years of service to The MCC Foundation as president of the organization – a year more than what is normally expected. When Chuck Nicholson was expected to step up to the presidency of the Foundation, his employer transferred him out of Meridian. "And they asked me to serve another year," Thompson said.

He gained the spirit of volunteering the old fashioned way – he learned it. From seeing his parents, Sue and Bud Thompson, active in giving back to the community, Thompson took on the passion of helping others. "It's always rewarding to me," he said.

He finds it especially beneficial giving back to MCC.

"I see how important Tuition Guarantee is," Thompson said.

With the Tuition Guarantee, The Foundation underwrites the cost of tuition for four semesters of study at MCC for any graduate of a Meridian or Lauderdale County High School or any person residing in Lauderdale County who is home-schooled. By enrolling in the fall following their spring graduation, students retain the Tuition Guarantee for four consecutive semesters provided they earn a 2.0 grade point average and maintain at least 12 hours each semester.

Education is the key to grow communities, and Thompson said the support from the community for the Tuition Guarantee is there.

Thompson graduated from Meridian High School in 1981, graduated from Mississippi State University with a degree in business and earned his master's of business administration in finance from Memphis State.

"I worked in Memphis a little while ... experienced the big city life," he said, but returned to his hometown. "My friends were here and I had a family business to come to," he said. It was a move he never regretted. With just minutes from home and work, his hometown provides the amenities he relishes.

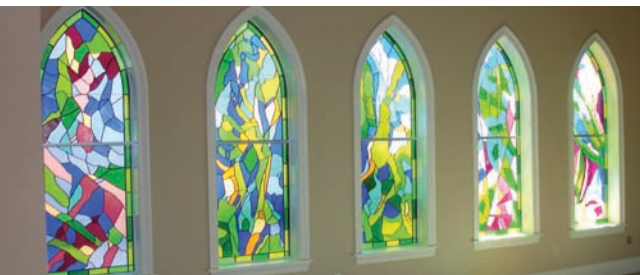
And besides, "the hunting camp is five to 10 minutes away."

Thompson and his wife, Tanya, who is the College's Continuing Education coordinator, have three children, Taylor, 15; Leah, 9, and Tate, 7.

He and his business partner, Bobby Sherrill, recently moved their business, Insurance Advisory Group, to a new location in Downtown Meridian.



Russell Thompson, left and Dr. Elliott talk during the President's Roundtable luncheon.



Light of the world – Newly-installed windows of the MCC chapel filter sunlight into the on-campus structure. Work on the chapel is progressing and a spring dedication is planned.

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