

# GRAMMY AWARD-WINNING EAGLES

GRAMMY WINNER

Adam Box / Brothers Osborne

pg. 14



GRAMMY NOMINATED

Ben Johnson / Songwriter

pg. 19



# CONNECTIONS

MAGAZINE





## MCC ADMINISTRATION

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Vice president for engagement

**Leia Agnew Hill**  
Vice president for institutional advancement and executive director of the MCC Foundation

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Vice president for academic affairs



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# WHY CHOOSE MCC?



I often think about all the reasons students choose to attend MCC. You can imagine the answers. For some, we're local and they need, for whatever reason, to attend a college that is close to home. They might need to work or take care of a loved one or just be nervous about moving too far from home. I'm so grateful for the many students who choose Meridian Community College because we're close to home.

Others choose to be Eagles because we're a great value.

Our low tuition, coupled with outstanding scholarships make attending MCC financially viable for so many. Higher education doesn't have to be financially out of reach and because tuition and fees at MCC are a fraction of what they might be at a typical four-year university, attending MCC is an affordable decision.

Sometimes students choose MCC because we have a special program or area of study they can't find anywhere else. When I talk to students they often tell me about their decision-making process. I realize many choose us because we have excellent programs that prepare them for university transfer or to move straight to the workforce.

Whether a student chooses MCC because we're close, we're affordable, or we have their desired program of study, my favorite part of serving as their president is my front row seat as they discover what drives them; as they discover what they were created to do or be. If you follow any of our social media you notice we encourage our students to "find your wings," and it's awesome when they do!

For some, "their wings" are a skilled trade and a fantastic job, while others want the independence of starting a business. Hundreds of our graduates desire to serve others in the health care industry or dream about being a social worker, a teacher, a preacher, a doctor, an engineer, or a lawyer. It's truly amazing what our students choose to do after they graduate from Meridian Community College.

**In this issue you will read stories about the students on our cover—Grammy Award nominated artist Benjamin Johnson and Grammy Award winner Adam Box - who made it big after finding their wings right here at MCC.**

Their successes follow a long line of outstanding students who find the encouragement, the challenge, and the confidence within our four walls to dream the big dreams and pursue opportunities that make a difference in our world.

I don't know about you, but it's exciting to think that right now a really talented student is making the decision—for whatever reason—to be an Eagle. Maybe it's a scholarship, shared by a generous donor, that opens the door for that student. Maybe it's because we're close to home and our Tuition Guarantee program makes attending MCC too good to pass up, or maybe it's because we have the perfect program that will help that student be perfectly prepared at the perfect moment. Regardless, when that student comes to our campus, sits in our classrooms and interacts with our instructors, something very special can happen. I'm proud to be part of a college where, every single day, students find their wings!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Thomas M. Fisher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



## ▶ NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Things around the College are seemingly returning to “normal”! College 4 Kids was back in full force this year with nearly 600 participants, MCC Foundation Travel is exploring our world again, Lifetime Quest is gearing up for a fantastic year, and Meridian Community College is focused on opening doors for excellent and affordable higher education opportunities. We have so many good things happening on campus; I have no doubt the coming months will be significant as we make important campus upgrades and dream of even bigger and better ways to support our students, faculty, and staff.

In case you haven't heard, the L. O. Todd-Billy C. Beal Learning Resources Center is undergoing some important renovations. The main floor is receiving a significant facelift. The library, a resource rich environment, will continue to strive to increase student learning by offering students and faculty access to materials, computing, and quiet spaces for studying and more. It will also be the home of the SOAR Center--a state-of-the-art, best-practice facility focused on student success and retention. In addition to housing the College's tutoring center, Math and English labs, and collaborative spaces for teaching and learning, it will be the new home of MCC's Advising Center, a one-stop location where students can receive the kind of support, direction, and encouragement they need to overcome a variety of challenges and be successful in their educational pursuits.

Thanks to a generous gift from the Phil Hardin Foundation, significant sections of the first, or ground floor of the building will also receive updating. The back entrance will be renovated to add outdoor seating and gathering spaces for students. Inside the building will be the new location of the Phil Hardin Honors College and will include meeting, classroom, study, and office spaces for the premiere community college honors program in Mississippi.

A special groundbreaking event is scheduled for the new Citizen's National Bank Softball and Tennis Complex, located on the site of the former Matty Hersee Hospital. Demolition on Eagle Hall, which has been vacant for a number of years,



Foundation staffers Amanda Bratu, left, Brandy Hill, Marmion Francis, Leia Agnew Hill, Theresa Hogan, Diane Delk and Diane Wells

will start in the coming weeks. We're excited about providing these new and important venues for our student-athletes.

There is so much more! The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) grant we recently received will transform parts of our campus as we add sidewalks, lighting, and fencing in an effort to make MCC even more, pedestrian-friendly.

With all the upgrades to campus facilities taking place, our commitment to Meridian and Lauderdale County high school graduates is stronger than ever. Our Tuition Guarantee program was the first of its kind in Mississippi, and we believe the first for a community college in the United States. It has provided nearly 7.2 million tuition dollars to thousands of students who graduated from high schools where we live. It's been a significant resource for so many and the results have had a marked impact on virtually every facet of our community. I am pleased to report that we're currently in the exploratory phase of what will be the largest fundraising campaign in the history of the MCC Foundation. The Campaign for Tuition Guarantee will be a gamechanger for MCC, and more importantly, for the city and county in which we live. I look forward to sharing more information with you in the coming months.

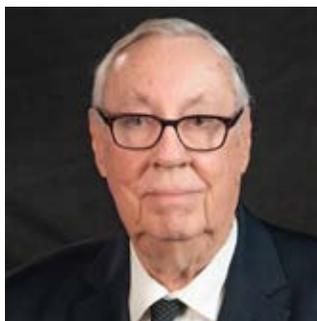
Thank you for your support of the MCC Foundation. Your dollars really do matter!



## MCC BOARD OF TRUSTEES



**Jamie Cater**, chair, a native of Meridian, is an alumna of Meridian Community College and is the owner of Cater's Market in Meridian and Starkville. Cater began her term as a Trustee in 2014.



**Tommy Dulaney**, a lifelong resident of Lauderdale County, is an alumnus of MCC. He is the founder of the internationally-known company Structural Steel Services. The longest-serving member of the Board of Trustees for MCC, Dulaney began his service in 1984.



**Rev. LaBaron Hedgemon**, vice chair, is a native of Meridian and an MCC alumnus. He is the full-time senior pastor for Freedom Rock Church. His service to the MCC Board of Trustees began in 2020.



**C.D. Smith**, community leader, returned to MCC as the newest member of the Board of Trustees in 2020, building on a 17-year tenure. Smith previously served on the Board of Trustees from 1991 to 2008. He is regional director with AT&T Mississippi.



**Alex Weddington**, is a native of Meridian and is president of General Supply and Machine Co. He began serving on the MCC Board of Trustees in 2002.



## MCC FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBERS

R. Jeffrey Smith, president  
 C.D. Smith, vice president  
 Alan Lamar, treasurer  
 Leia Agnew Hill, secretary  
 Robert Smith, past president  
 Drew Edwards, advisor  
 BB Archer  
 Dr. Ray Denton  
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 Greg Slay  
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 Hampton Thames  
 Buster Thomas  
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 M.L. Waters  
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**Joy Smith**  
 Communications coordinator

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FOR MORE INFORMATION  
SCAN HERE



**MERIDIAN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
FOUNDATION**  
*Travel*

**WHERE  
TO NEXT?**

## MCC Foundation Travel is on the go!

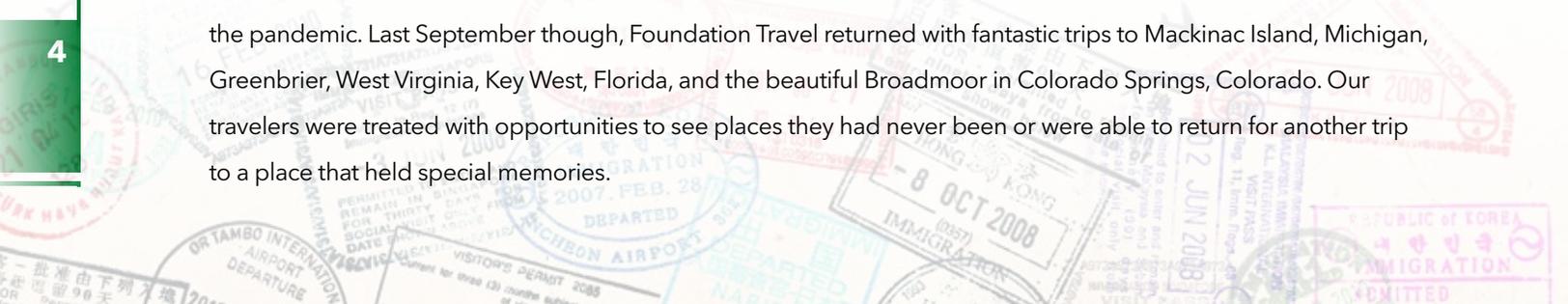
MCC Foundation Travel has always been one of the most fun and interesting programs available in our community. Who doesn't like to make new friends, experience different cultures, and discover parts of our world they might not have known?

We all know how Covid impacted our travel! For many long months, MCC Foundation Travel took a break. We had trips planned to New York, California, Austria, and Switzerland when we had to cancel because of

the pandemic. Last September though, Foundation Travel returned with fantastic trips to Mackinac Island, Michigan, Greenbrier, West Virginia, Key West, Florida, and the beautiful Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Our travelers were treated with opportunities to see places they had never been or were able to return for another trip to a place that held special memories.



Travelers on the Carolina Moon, Key Largo, Florida





Gathered at the Greenbrier, West Virginia



Beverly Smith and Cindy Ott

MCC Foundation Travel announces trips throughout the year through the College's social media account <https://mcc1.co/fb> and the MCC Foundation Travel Facebook group page <https://mcc1.co/travel>.

You can also sign-up to receive emails and mail-outs using our QR code at the top of the facing page.

Plans are under way for a wonderful 2023 summer trip to Austria and Switzerland. "This is a fantastic trip we hated to cancel in 2021, so we are bringing it back for 2023," said Leia Agnew Hill, vice president for institutional advancement and executive director of the MCC Foundation.

"We get ideas of where to go from our travelers," Hill said. "So many people will share with us destinations that have resonated with them or places on their 'bucket-list;' we really try to listen and incorporate those ideas into where we go and the experiences we offer."



Key Largo, Florida



Greenbrier



Mackinac Island, Michigan



Dr. Tommy McDonald and Pam McDonald



Carolina Moon boat captain

# BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT



## Mississippi Power

### MCC AND MISSISSIPPI POWER HAVE A SHARED CONNECTION - COMMUNITY.

In its 97th year of operations, the utility company produces safe, reliable, and affordable energy for nearly 191,000 customers in 23 southeast Mississippi counties. It is a subsidiary of Southern Company.

Mississippi Power received the Community Partner Impact Award from the Center for Energy Workforce Development for its innovative and ongoing efforts to build a diverse workforce.

"We talk about community capacity - investing in the community - all the time," said Michael Harvey, Mississippi Power north division manager, referring to the company's participation in MCC Baseball After Hours event on campus.

Harvey noted the company especially values the relationship with MCC.

Supporting MCC's Utility Lineman Program is vital to the company and its employees. An internship program has begun through the partnership where program students apply and interview. "They work side-by-side with our employees. It gives them a taste of what the life of a lineman really is. It also allows us to see their potential as an employee," Harvey said.

Chris Phillips, Mississippi Power area manager, agreed the partnership between the College and the lineman pipeline program has been "tremendous."

What's next for Mississippi Power and MCC? "For us, it's to enhance the lineman pipeline program," Phillips said. Harvey added, "We look forward to digging in deeper and supporting the program."

# MORGAN MAYATT

## BILLBOARD LEADS MAYATT FROM JOB TO CAREER

As Morgan Mayatt waited her turn at a stop sign, she caught a life-changing sign.

"I saw the billboard, and it said, 'MCC now offering a lineman program,'" Mayatt said. The next day while on her lunch break, she called the College to learn more and enrolled.



Morgan Mayatt

**"It was definitely challenging; and I knew it would be. I also knew if I put my mind to it, I could do it," she said.**

Today, Mayatt, who interned with Mississippi Power Company working on transmission lines, is now working full-time as apprentice lineman with the utility. Her ties with the company have included a month-long internship at the distribution center in Meridian and an internship in Hattiesburg. She also received a Mississippi Power Heritage Scholarship.

Mayatt, 23, went to MCC for a semester out of high school but discovered college wasn't for her. She began working in the food service industry, often handling two jobs daily. "I wore myself out quickly," she recalled. Prepping food and operating the register, Mayatt realized she wanted more. "I knew I could do better than this.

This was not going to provide for my family and me in the future. I got bogged down and didn't know what I wanted to do."

She added, "I was having a hard time."

Then she saw the billboard sign that changed her life.

Mayatt summed up her new career: "It's a great living. You definitely need a good income to provide for your family."



# CONNECTING COLLEGE WITH COMMUNITY

Community-supported and community-driven, MCC can often be found lending a helping hand, raising funds, celebrating holidays, and spotlighting causes both on and off-campus.



Top row: Lily Hatampa, Taylor Croley, Nedra Bradley  
Bottom row: Willie Davis, Whitney Stevens, Lauren Stokes

## OCTOBER 2021

### Queen City Race for Life and Street Strut

MCC's Phi Theta Kappa chapter washed the campus in pink in support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month and hosted the Queen City Race for Life and Street Strut. Funds raised were given to the Anderson Cancer Patient Benevolence Fund.

### Candy Cruise

Hundreds of vehicles rolled through the Ivy-Scaggs Hall loop for the second annual Candy Cruise.



Dr. Tom Huebner and Jocelyn McGillberry



C.D. Smith and fellow veterans

## NOVEMBER 2021

### Veterans Day

The campus joined the community in remembering those who served and sacrificed for America's freedom. Veterans were saluted and recognized for their contributions to the country.

## DECEMBER 2021

### Decking the Halls

Faculty, staff, and students got into the holiday spirit by decorating trees at Merrehope and F.W. Williams historic homes.

## JANUARY 2022

### MLK Celebration and Meridian MLK Parade

The Hon. Sumeka Thomas reflected on the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's legacy at the College's annual celebration. Students, faculty, and staff marched in the City of Meridian's MLK parade.



MCC faculty, staff and students



Brandon Dewease, Rhonda Smith, Nspire Walker, Marlow Turner, Hon. Kenneth Dustin Markham, Kimberly Rush, Laureta Chislom, and Ashley Tanksley

**FEBRUARY 2022**

**Black History Month**

The Hon. Kenneth Dustin Markham shared his MCC story at the Black History Month Celebration.

**MARCH 2022**

**Women's History Month**

MUW President Nora Roberts Miller explored the theme, "A Mile in Her Shoes."



Callie Cowan, Kamry Huy, Caitlyn Gant, Piper Gonzales, Christena Brown-Bradley, and Lizzie Walker

**APRIL 2022**

**Allie Cat Run and Festival | Tanya Renia Ocampo Memorial Walk**

MCCers turn out for the Allie Cat Run and Festival and the first Tanya Renia Ocampo Memorial Walk.

**MAY 2022**

**Excel by 5**

The College hosted a meeting for a new coalition that focuses on community support for young children.



MCCers and family



Todd Tilghman at Tanya Renia Ocampo Memorial Walk

# HAPPY CAMPERS

## COLLEGE 4 KIDS RETURNS TO CAMPUS



From rocket blasting to slime making to lamb feeding, College 4 Kids once again brought children to campus to learn, have fun, and make memories.

Some 588 grade school kids returned to campus for big adventures geared for the pint-size participants, including Cake Decorating, Music Mania, Playing with Clay, Sports Jamboree, Camp Create, and other sessions.



# POWERING UP

## MCC AND ECCC GRANTED \$1.4M LINEMAN PROGRAM FUNDS



Accelerate MS, the lead office for Mississippi workforce development strategy and coordination, awarded MCC and East Central Community College \$1.4 million for their respective Electrical Utility Lineman programs.

This dual award allows the colleges to expand capacity in their training programs by hiring additional instructors and equipment needed for classes.

"This is an exciting investment, an exciting partnership and one that Accelerate MS takes very

seriously," said Ryan Miller, executive director of the workforce development office, as he addressed an audience gathered outside the MCC-Riley Workforce Development Center on the MCC campus.

In the announcement, he explained the state investment is to help increase the number of line workers both in power and connectivity through fiber.

"Linemen are first responders; men and women who put themselves in harm's way to ensure we have power and connectivity. That's no small thing.



These are first responders we need to celebrate and thank," Miller said.

"This is a sector we need to grow, because we know there's a great need in Mississippi," Miller added.

Noting that Mississippi has the most competitive workforce development structure in the country, MCC President Dr. Tom Huebner said, "this award makes me proud. It represents confidence in what we do as a commitment to this region and a belief that we have what it takes to create opportunity for industry and potential employees."

He added, "The best part is that we're awarded this grant jointly with our friends to the west - East Central Community College."

East Central Community College President Dr. Brent Gregory said ECCC is extremely excited about the grant, the new partnership with MCC, and Mississippi's new direction. "This is the first step between these institutions - and not the last - in working together to provide workforce education - for this area of Mississippi," he added.

Accelerate MS was created in 2020 by legislation signed by Gov. Tate Reeves. Its purpose is to serve as the lead office for Mississippi workforce development strategy and coordination.



# MCC ALUM ADAM BOX

## LIVES HIS DREAM ONE BEAT AT A TIME

*Brothers  
Osborne*

As drummer for one of country music's hottest acts, Brothers Osborne, Meridian Community College alum Adam Box is living his best life in Nashville.

Recording sessions, album tours, songwriting collaborations, music video shoots, and awards shows - life for him these days is often a whirlwind.

When not on tour with Grammy Award-winning Brothers Osborne, he is busy in his own recording studio trying to help up-and-coming performers catch a break in the business.

His success is climbing higher than his dreams ever imagined as a little boy growing up in the Zero community of Lauderdale County.

"I only saw from point A to point B," Box said of his ambitions as a teenager to be a drummer. "I am so glad I did not land on point B because with my dream, I did not dream big enough."

When he first landed in Music City USA in 2010 at the age of 25, his goal was simply to find a good band who needed a drummer.





"Instead, I am in one of the most relevant bands in Nashville," he said in a phone interview from his home in Nashville. "I am the touring drummer, but I am also their recording drummer, which is not how Nashville usually does it."

These days, he is expanding his interests with his recording studio, Gilded Palace, which he built four years ago. With invitations to music showcases, he gets to scout new talent to record or invite them to collaborate on writing a song.

"Being in Brothers Osborne gives me the opportunity to work with some high caliber up-and-comers," he noted.

The goal is to either break a new recording artist or help songwriters get their music recorded or into Hollywood movies, blockbuster trailers, and top-rated television shows.

Box, 37, showed signs of becoming a drummer early. He received his first drum set at age 2 or 3 and would mimic the drummer at Evangel Temple, a local non-denominational church where his father, Thomas, has played in the praise band since the late 1970s.

"I get asked all of the time when I started playing drums, but it would be easier to try and remember when I started walking because I think drums came before that," he said.

At age 5, Box displayed his talents on the Evangel Temple stage. He became the band's drummer by age 15.

He opted for athletics instead of music at Clarkdale High School, where he was a member of the soccer and football teams.

Before his senior season in 2002, Clarkdale's football team was on a 20-year run of losing seasons.

The team had compiled a record of 21 wins against 143 losses and two ties since 1982. But a new coach, Bubba Hathorn, arrived the preceding year and taught the players about determination, drive, and perseverance.

Suddenly, Clarkdale was winning and ended the 2002 season with a 7-4 record and a district championship.

"We were the same dudes. We were the same size. Nothing was different except someone came in, and he turned us into winners in our minds. We believed it, and we were," Box said.

"I really learned what the power of your mind can do," he added. "I can be a victim, I can be a loser, or I can be a winner, and whichever I become is in my hands."

Box joined a Jackson-based rock band, Absence of Concern, his senior year and juggled dedication to it with football, soccer, classes, and the church band.

"I had all of the energy in the world to do it and was very hungry to do it. It wasn't that I was determined to play drums; it was more of a beckoning," he said.

He told his mother, Susie, that he was going to quit high school and move to California and play music.

"She said, 'You are getting your diploma,'" he laughed.

To please her, he enrolled at MCC after graduating in 2003 and studied in the Graphic Design Program.

"I was already versed in Photoshop because I had been making band flyers, so I thought I might as well do that," he recalled.

The photography and graphic design skills he acquired still

come in handy when working on marketing for his studio.

While at MCC, Box also played drums in the Dimensions show band.

"Playing for Dimensions helped me big time because I played songs by artists that I would not have played otherwise," he said. "It really got me seasoned in playing genres outside my comfort zone."

In 2005, he graduated from MCC with an associate degree and was named a Circle of Excellence recipient.

He continued to play with his Jackson band and picked up a little graphic design work.

He also took a job laying floors for a local business, Carpet Junction.

Along the way, he met Chris Ethridge, a Meridian native who was a well-known country rock bass guitarist and a founding member of the band, The Flying Burrito Brothers. Ethridge had worked with numerous acts during his career, including almost eight years as a member of Willie Nelson's band.

The legendary bass player became a mentor to Box and encouraged him to follow his dreams.

"He made that big abyss between Meridian and the worldwide stage look really small to me," Box said. "He really boosted my confidence. He believed in me and made me believe in myself."

Box would later honor Ethridge, who passed away in 2012, by naming his Gilded Palace Studio after the Burrito Brothers' first album, "The Gilded Palace of Sin."

The year 2010 ushered the turning point in Box's life.





"I cut my hand really bad with a carpet knife, and I was sitting in the van keeping my hand from bleeding," he remembered. "My hands would bleed a lot then when I was younger. I would get calluses, and they would open up while I was playing, and blood would splatter on the drumheads.

"As I was sitting there watching my hand bleed, all I could think of were drumheads splattered with blood and that I should be pouring my blood into something else besides laying carpet," he added. "It really was a pivotal moment because I told myself that I am willing to go through whatever it is I have got to go through to make a career as a drummer."

So, he moved to Nashville.

Finding a cheap place to rent, he struggled to land gigs the first six months. Then, he entered a Drum-Off competition at a local bar and won. The bar's owner hired him to be the house drummer working an eight-hour stint until 3 a.m. Thursday through Saturday for \$100 a night.

Coming from the world of rock music, Box would discover the new job challenging.

"I had never really listened to country music," Box recalled. "I was really into heavy metal at the time." He had to learn quickly to keep up with the band.

"Not only was the job physically demanding, but it was mentally demanding because the owner really laid it on

me hard. It was very intimidating," Box said.

But, he said, "I knew when I got done with that gig that it would be the hardest gig I would ever have in my career."

His big break came in 2013 when he landed his job with Brothers Osborne, led by brothers John and T.J. Osborne.

The duo has earned six awards from the Academy of Country Music, five awards from the Country Music Association, and nine Grammy Award nominations. They picked up their first Grammy win this past April for their hit "Younger Me."

Box has been the drummer on all of Brothers Osborne's albums.

"This was our ninth Grammy nomination, and that is something to be proud of in itself," he said. "But to perform on the Grammys and to win a Grammy the same night, that is definitely a milestone."

Box makes it home to Meridian on holidays to visit family. It is always a nice break from his hectic Nashville life.

"I turn off the interstate and get on the 45 bypass to go to Zero, once I turn on Causeyville Road, time finally slows down," he said. "I can drive 30 miles an hour, and the day feels like it is 48 hours long 'cause when I get to Nashville, and I get on the road, the days are so fast it all just flies by. But Mississippi, going to Zero, time just slows down. It is simpler, and I can feel some peace."





# MCC ALUM BEN JOHNSON

## FINDS SUCCESS IN NASHVILLE

A decade after moving to Nashville to pursue a music career, Meridian native Ben Johnson is finding success as a songwriter, producer, and the male voice in his family's country trio Track45.

Johnson, an alum of Meridian Community College, seems to be everywhere these days, whether flying across the country to collaborate in writing sessions, performing on stage with his band, or watching as singles he has co-written climb the charts.

He has written songs for artists such as Lee Brice, Dirks Bentley, Charlie Puth, Parmalee, HARDY, Meek Mill, Justin Timberlake, Jake Owen, Lauren Alaina, and the list goes on.

"I feel very blessed to be alive in a time when writing songs is even a viable option for a career," Johnson, 29, said during a phone interview from his home in Nashville.

Music City USA is a competitive market for songwriters with thousands of writers trying to get a cut published. The competitiveness keeps Johnson motivated, and he loves the challenge of knowing he may be writing that next big hit.

"I love it because every day you wake up it is a new challenge," he said. "You could write a song that millions of people hear at any given moment, and any idea could change everything, so it is never a dull moment."

Johnson received his first Grammy nomination earlier this year when Weezer's recording of "All My Favorite Songs" was nominated for best rock song.

"Very few songs get nominated for a Grammy, so it felt pretty surreal," he said. "When you are a kid, that is something you dream of because the Grammys are the biggest award you can win in music. So, it was a dream come true."

Music has always played an essential role in Johnson's life and the lives of his sisters, Jenna and KK, who together make up the band Track45.

Their parents, Joel and Susie Johnson, always encouraged their artistic talents. His mom serves as director of MCC's Arts & Letters Series. She is a founding director of Stage 2 theater group, and is a lifelong supporter of the Meridian Symphony Association.

Johnson showed musical talents at an early age. His grandmother, Sylvia McEachin, began teaching him the piano at age six.

"My mom was like 'all of you are going to take a few years of piano at least to have a foundation in case later on in life you want to do something else with music.' I am very thankful she did that and that my grandma taught me, even though I think I about drove her crazy because I was horrible at practicing," he laughed.

"She would be like 'read the music,' and I would be like, 'I don't like the way the music sounds, or I don't like the way it is written. I would just rather make it up myself,'" he added. "She was not a big fan of that, but it ended up helping me out later in life."







Johnson's grandfather, Dr. John McEachin, drove him to Hattiesburg for weekly cello lessons, a trip that would continue for seven years.

Johnson began playing other instruments, including the guitar, mandolin, and bass. His sisters played various instruments, and the siblings learned to harmonize while sitting around the kitchen table.

"Between my grandma, my granddad, and my mom teaching us to sing harmony, that is how we got started," he said.

The trio began playing at local nursing homes, churches, weddings, events, and bluegrass festivals.

"We played a show at the Temple Theater, and a man named Marty Gamblin came up to us afterward, and just kind of said, 'Hey have you ever thought about moving

to Nashville? I think y'all could really make it,'" Johnson remembered. "He had worked with Alan Jackson and Glen Campbell, so we kind of felt like he was qualified to give us advice. So, that is when we decided to start working towards that goal of moving to Nashville."

During his junior year of homeschooling in the fall of 2009, Johnson began attending classes at MCC as a dual enrollment student. A year later, he entered MCC as a freshman along with his older sister Jenna. A University Transfer student, Johnson took several music classes, including classical piano, guitar, music theory, and jazz piano.

"I absolutely loved my time at MCC," he said. "Some of my favorite teachers that I ever had were at MCC."

The College's Tuition Guarantee program was also part of his overall plan to reach Nashville.

“One of the reasons MCC was so appealing and important was its Tuition Guarantee,” Johnson said. “It helped me save up money to get to Nashville.”

After completing his sophomore year in spring 2012, Johnson and his two sisters moved to Nashville. He attended Belmont University on a cello scholarship. Jenna transferred to Lipscomb University. KK, age 15 at the time, continued homeschooling for another year before enrolling at Belmont.

All three lived together in a small apartment, struggling to stay on a budget.

“When we moved into our apartment, we had a blank wall, and we got sticky notes and wrote down all of our goals in order of biggest to smallest. The big goals at the top and the small goals underneath it. Every time we would hit a goal, we would cross it out,” he said.

“One of our goals was to get writing deals, and to do that we knew we had to get better at songwriting,” he added. “We decided we are going to write a song every day, and we did. We probably wrote almost a thousand songs in our first three and a half years here.”

Johnson went on to earn his Bachelor’s Degree in Commercial Music from Belmont in 2014 with an emphasis in composition and arranging. More importantly, he met his wife, fellow graduate Lauren Conklin Johnson, who composes and arranges scores for films and television and also is a talented musician who has performed on stages from the Grand Ole Opry to the Royal Albert Concert Hall in London.

While Track45 was performing shows and trying to secure a record deal, Johnson began seeing success in songwriting, especially after Charlie Puth liked his demo for the song “Patient.” Johnson signed a worldwide co-publishing deal with Tape Room Music in Nashville and Artist Publishing Group in Los Angeles. He has now started his own publishing company, Turntable Music.

“As soon as I signed my first publishing deal, I was like okay I have made it because I am getting paid to do music,” he said.

He continued to see success from his hard work, especially from a 2019 songwriting collaboration with country artist Lee Brice and songwriters Ashley Gorley and Dallas Davidson. Brice’s song, “One of Them

Girls,” hit #1 on the country chart in fall 2020 and provided affirmation for Johnson’s career path.

“Whenever you write a song, it has to go through so many different gatekeepers and hoops to even get out in the world,” Johnson said. “We wrote that in maybe April 2019. It wasn’t released until April 2020, and it wasn’t on the charts until June 2020. It was a full year and seven months before it went to #1.

“That is the interesting thing about writing,” he added. “You finish, and you think we did good, but we won’t find out for a couple of years.”

“One of Them Girls” went on to win Country Song of the Year at the 2021 BMI Country Awards, SESAC Nashville Music Awards, and ASCAP Country Music awards. It was the first time that one song had taken all three awards in the same year.

While he has enjoyed the success of his songwriting, Johnson’s favorite thing about the music business goes back to where it all started with Track45.



KK, Ben, and Jenna Johnson

“My favorite thing to do is to perform with Jenna and KK. That has always been my main goal,” he said.

“It has been really cool to have number ones and to get nominated and to win whatever, but I think that whenever the three of us are on stage singing together, that is probably when I am most happy.”

# HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES TAKE THE SPOTLIGHT



Anne Dowdle and Leia Agnew Hill

"MCC has a long-standing history of successful graduates and employees, and the Hall of Fame ceremony allows us to celebrate the contributions of the best of the best." That's how Leia Agnew Hill, vice president for advancement and executive director of the MCC Foundation, explained this annual recognition program hosted by the Foundation.

A public reception held in the McCain Theater honored the 2022 inductees: Wilhelmine Damon, Dr. Ray Denton, Anne Dowdle, and Dr. Tajudeen Soyoye. Damon, Denton, and Dowdle, are retired employees. Damon served as a fitness instructor;



Denton held the associate dean of learning resources post; Dowdle was the first director of institutional advancement. Soyoye is an emergency room physician. All were thankful for the recognition.

"I consider myself very fortunate to have spent so much of my life working, learning, and growing at this community college where big dreams can indeed come true," said Dowdle.



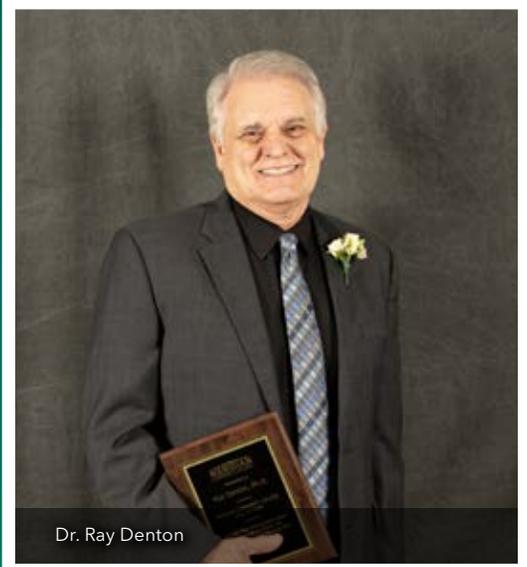
Anne Dowdle

Damon, a nonagenarian, said, "I'm so thankful at this age, and at this stage, I'm able to say a public thank you for letting me be connected to this College. It's been indeed a pleasure, and I'm most appreciative." Damon, an alumna of MCC, taught at the College for more than 30 years



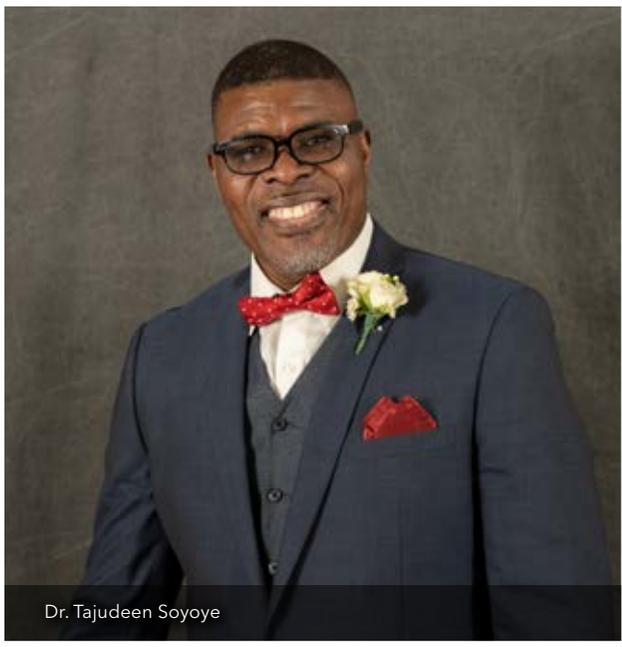
Wilhelmine Damon with her family

Dr. Denton, an alumnus, acknowledged his MCC colleagues for his success. "You really made me do what I did to get here," he said. Dr. Denton also serves a member of the MCC Foundation board of directors.



Dr. Ray Denton

Dr. Soyoye graduated from MCC in 1999 and today, he is a physician who holds licensures in Georgia, Missouri, and New York. He said, "most of the dreams that are brought to this campus are being fulfilled. And I have to be very, very grateful for that."



Dr. Tajudeen Soyoye



Larry Martin, the newest member of the MCC "Talon Club," which honors employees with a minimum of 30 years of service, was also recognized. Martin is a building custodian.



Pam Harrison, MCC chief financial officer, and Larry Martin



TO WATCH  
THE EVENT  
SCAN HERE





Shon Willis and Dr. Tom Huebner

# BASEBALL AFTER HOURS

## WITH Mississippi Power HITS HOMERUN WITH FANS

Before the Eagles baseball game started, Shon Willis could be seen on the edge of Scaggs Field, throwing and catching baseballs with MCC President Dr. Tom Huebner.

Willis was warming up to deliver the first pitch for Baseball After Hours with Mississippi Power. This MCC-hosted event allowed the utility company employees a chance to come to campus, watch a baseball game and enjoy family-friendly activities that included free popcorn and photo ops with MCC mascot Victor the Eagle and Mississippi Power mascot Louie the Lightning Bug.

An MCC alumnus, Willis is a lead lineman for Mississippi Power, working with the utility for 22 years. He trains and develops the apprentice lineman. (He also gets in throwing practice because his son plays baseball for Southeast Lauderdale High School.)

Willis was pumped after the perfect pitch.

"I love it. I love the occasion. I love that the ball went across the plate, and I love representing the company," he said minutes after his throw.

He continued, "It's a win, win, win."



Louie the Lightning Bug



Others shared his enthusiasm to be at Scaggs Field ballpark. "All of our employees have commented on what a beautiful facility this is," said Chris Phillips, Mississippi Power area manager. "We're always looking for ways to bring our employees together to fellowship," he added.

Phillips noted that employees spend a lot of time in the trenches to get the power back on. "So, to lower that stress needle and spend some quality time and share camaraderie in this environment is special."



Chris Phillips, Michael Harvey, Dr. Tom Huebner, and Shon Willis



Leia Agnew Hill, David Quave, and Dr. Tom Huebner



Sidney Coleman, Jamila Brown Coleman, and Dakota Coleman

# FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP AND ENDOWMENT DONOR APPRECIATION LUNCHEON



As Arkemia Greer was nearing completion of her MCC Associate Degree Nursing Program, she received the Doris and Cecil Seale Memorial Scholarship, which is funded through the MCC Foundation.

"It was heaven-sent," Greer said. "My job had recently closed, and I had reserves in the bank, but it wasn't much," she said. The scholarship and a federal grant



Arkemia Greer

## FOUNDATION THANKS DONORS, SPOTLIGHTS SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



allowed the 32-year-old Hattiesburg resident to pay for her studies. "It was right on time."

The scholarship enabled Greer to achieve a long-standing goal.

**"And maybe someday, I can give a scholarship to help others," she added.**

Greer's story was just one shared during the MCC Foundation Scholarship and Endowment Donor Appreciation Luncheon.

The event was the first one held in 15 years. "We wanted to personally thank you for all the years you have been giving," said Leia Agnew Hill, vice president for institutional advancement and executive director of

## APPRECIATION LUNCHEON CONTINUED...

the MCC Foundation. "We have over 200 scholarships now," Hill noted.

Access and opportunity for students do not happen without the generosity of donors. "When you invest your precious resources in a student who chooses Meridian Community College, you are telling them (the student) you believe in them. And we want to thank you for believing in them," she added.



Dr. Tom Huebner and Bruce Martin



Justin Hopkins, Dr. Tommy Greer, and Joy Greer



Jayla Smith



Larry Goodman, Julia Best, MarLynne Goodman Moore, and Brett Gordon



Leia Agnew Hill, Pete Willis, and Jean Willis



Gary Moore and Arkemia Greer

# STUDENT FINDS ANOTHER CHANCE AT MCC

## TINA DUKES KNOWS WHAT IT'S LIKE TO START OVER.



Married for 25 years living in Arizona, her marriage ended in divorce, and she came to Meridian to live with her mom. During the tumultuous time, she developed a vision to begin a mindfulness program. "When I was exposed to mindfulness the first time and really started implementing it in my life, I realized I had more emotional regulation; I noticed I could learn things about myself in those quiet, still moments," she said.

Specifically, it's led her to work to create a mindfulness program for inner-city schools. "You



can take an entire school and give the students three little mindfulness moments a day and have them quiet their mind and their body ... think of a beautiful thought about somebody or themselves, and it changes their whole disposition. It helps them to emotionally regulate," she explained.

Pursuing a social work degree from Mississippi State University-Meridian, Dukes sees social work as an avenue. "I knew social work would teach me the skills that were necessary to work with kids as well as the behavioral health aspects which mindfulness is a part. And I do have a passion for mental health," she added.

She also credits MCC as being instrumental in crafting a new life for herself. "There is no way I could ever fail here at MCC. Every instructor has been right there helping me. All I had to do was to ask for what I needed, and they have done everything they could," she said.



Tina Dukes, Dr. Bobby Adams, and Andi Adams

Dukes turned to the MCC Foundation after her financial aid was denied. "My tuition needed to be paid, and they helped me find the money. I put in my general application for the semester, and they helped me," she said.

"So MCC is making it possible for me to get my degree," she added. But she's gaining more.

"I've learned how to network. I've developed lifelong friendships through the College," she said. Dukes is on her way to a new life.



Tina Dukes



# SPRING USHERS IN GRADUATIONS

Two commencements put the limelight on graduates from both the University Transfer and Career and Technical Education programs.

The ceremonies, held at the Evangel Temple, celebrated the academic achievements of the Class of 2022. Nearly 400 students were candidates for graduation.

Dean of Student Affairs Deanna Smith said the college community looks forward to this milestone-making event. "Our students come from all different areas, backgrounds,

potential barriers, and have pushed through. I cannot wait to see them cross the finish line," she said.

Smith added, "they have worked hard, and I am excited about their future and proud that MCC gets to be part of their story."

University Transfer

Career and Technical

**TO WATCH  
THE EVENTS  
SCAN HERE**







# CIRCLE OF EXCELLENCE HONOREES REACH THE TOP

Forty-two graduates were chosen as members of the Spring 2022 Circle of Excellence. The students, who studied in the College’s University Transfer and Career and Technical Education programs, were saluted for their academic achievement, leadership, community service, and spirit.

MCC President Dr. Tom Huebner said MCC has a long history of outstanding graduates, and the Circle of Excellence is one way the College recognizes these students who have excelled during their time at MCC. “These students have made an impact on this place, and we look forward to watching them take flight and impact the world,” Dr. Huebner said.

# THEIR TURN IN THE SPOTLIGHT

## TOP STUDENTS NAMED IN AWARDS NIGHT PROGRAMS



Joy St. Clair

Outstanding MCC students were saluted for their academic and athletic achievements during the College's annual Awards Program.

Two ceremonies, University Transfer Awards Night and Career and Technical Awards Night, were held this year - a first in the College's award presentation history.

Campus officials said the students worked hard this year, and wanted to recognize their achievements, so two programs were presented.

Meridian Community College sophomore Joy St. Clair received the H.M. Ivy Outstanding Student Award. This



Megan Oliver



Colin Hartman



Anna Card

award is given to the most outstanding graduating sophomore active on campus and has positively impacted the school and surrounding area. St. Clair, of Collinsville, is a University Transfer Program student who plans to major in mechanical engineering.

MCC Foundation award winners include Megan Oliver, the Royalty Education Scholarship; Joy St. Clair, Lucile Reisman Rosenbaum Memorial Scholarship; Colin Hartman, the Wilton B. (Bill) Johnson Scholarship; and Anna Card, Robert F. Cochran Memorial Scholarship.

# GRADS RECEIVE SCHOLARSHIPS TO FURTHER EDUCATION



Harper Bryan



Caleb Clearman



Jacob Vance



Alexandra Rangel



Henry Zheng

Five MCC graduates earned prestigious scholarships for their academic achievements and campus and community involvement.

Harper Bryan, Caleb Clearman, and Jacob Vance received the H.M. Ivy Scholarships. The scholarship is named after Dr. H. M. Ivy, the founding father of MCC. Ivy Scholars are selected based on academic excellence, extra-curricular participation, financial need, and faculty appraisals. All three scholars will receive \$3,600 for their junior year of study at senior institutions and, provided their academic excellence continues, \$3,600 awards for their senior year of study.

Bryan, 20, of Collinsville, is a poultry science/pre-veterinary major who plans to continue her studies at Mississippi State University. Clearman, 20, of Meridian, will continue his studies at MSU, studying astrophysics. Vance, 20,

of Collinsville, who seeks to pursue a career in civil engineering, will continue his studies at MSU.

Alexandra Rangel and Henry Zheng were named Phil Hardin Foundation Scholars. The scholarships come with a \$5,000 grant for each to attend the college of their choice. The two were selected on academic excellence, financial need, and passion for attaining higher education. This scholarship pays tribute to the former Meridian entrepreneur and his philanthropic endeavors in support of education.

Rangel, 20, of Ripley, plans to continue her studies at MSU and seeks a career in occupational or physical therapy. Zheng, 19, of Meridian, intends to study at MSU in computer engineering. He hopes to create computer hardware and software.

# SPORTS ROUNDUP

## MCC LANDS SIX TEAMS IN THE TOP 20 TO FINISH THE SEASON

LIVE

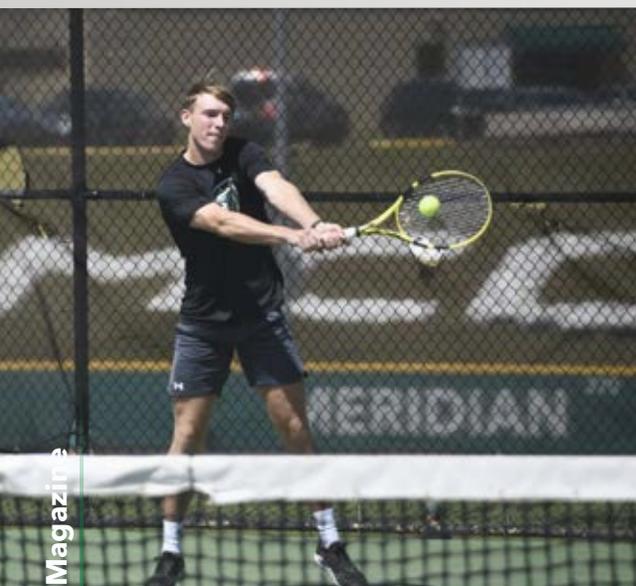
### ATHLETICS LIVESTREAM

Since the beginning of 2021, there have been 250,000 views.



**BASEBALL** The Eagles ended the season 34-13 and ranked 6th in the NJCAA. In conference play, the Eagles finished second in the MACCC at 21-7. Bo Gatilin (Ole Miss signee) and Brock Butler were named first-team All-MACCC, while Braden Luke (Ole Miss signee) and KeShun Collier (South Alabama signee) were named second-team All-MACCC. Alec Sparks (LA Tech signee) Cole Boswell, and Jalen Cowan were MACCC honorable mentions.

**GOLF** The MCC Golf Team finished 7th at the NJCAA Golf National Tournament after winning the MACCC Championship. This is the 6th year in a row MCC golf has finished the season in the top ten. Ethan Dyess (William Carey signee) was named second-team Ping All-American for the 3rd year in a row. Diego Leslie (William Carey signee) and Joseph Berry join Dyess on the All-Region team. Berry was named to the All-Freshman team, which is the top five freshmen in the country.



**TENNIS** The MCC Lady Eagles tennis team finished 11th in the NJCAA National Tournament in Tucson, AZ, -- higher than every other Mississippi community and junior college.

The Lady Eagles earned their trip by finishing second in the NJCAA Region 23 championship. MCC had an overall record of 22-9 and 15-2 in the MACCC. Ana Julissa De Mata was the women's No. 1 singles player of the year in the MACCC with a record of 14-1.

The Men's team finished 15th at the NJCAA National Tournament in Tyler, TX, after finishing third in the NJCAA Region 23 Tournament. The men were 21-12 overall and 13-4 in the MACCC. Anton Surunic was the men's No. 1 singles player of the year in the MACCC with a record of 15-0. Sebastian Hernandez joined Surunic, and they won the MACCC No. 1 doubles team of the year with a record of 13-1.

**TRACK AND FIELD** The Men's outdoor track team finished 14th at the NJCAA national meet in Hutchinson, KS. This makes eight years in a row the men have finished the year in the top 25 nationally. The Eagles were led by the University of Georgia signee KeShaun Black, who won the national championship in the 100m with a time of 10.02. The men's indoor track team finished 12th at the NJCAA Indoor national meet in Pittsburg, KS.





**SOCCER** The Lady Eagles finished the season at 7-8-2 overall and 5-3-2 in MACCC play. They finished 3rd in the MACCC south division and made it to the first round of the playoffs. The Eagles finished the season at 8-6-1 overall and 3-6-1 in MACCC play. The Eagles spent five consecutive weeks ranked 15th in the NJCAA Top 20 DII Soccer Poll.

**SOFTBALL** The Lady Eagles softball team finished the season 14-29 overall and 4-24 in MACCC play. The Lady Eagles sent seven to the next level. Abigail Smith from Florence, signed with Millsaps; Sydney Sizemore from Satsuma, AL, signed with Methodist University; and Melanin Jimmie from Choctaw signed with Xavier University. Four Lady Eagles signed with the Mississippi University for Women, including Emilee Slade from Amory, Avery Byerly from D'Iberville, Mayia Joe from Choctaw Central, and Baily McClellan from Madison.



**BASKETBALL** The Eagles finished the season as the NJCAA Region 23 Tournament runner-up with a record of 23-6 overall and 11-3 in MACCC play. Brandon Ellington and Chris Terrell were named ALL MACCC and All-Region Tournament team. Brandon was the Region 23 Tournament MVP. The Lady Eagles finished the season 10-12 overall and 7-7 in MACCC play.

## RALPH NAMED TO STATE SPORTS HALL OF FAME

MCC soccer standout Damani Ralph was inducted into the Mississippi Community College Sports Hall of Fame at the Hinds Community College Muse Center in Pearl.

Ralph began playing soccer as a boy in Jamaica. Before moving to the United States, he played with Harbour View and St. George's College. His professional career spanned five years, two with Chicago Fire S.C. (2003-2004) and three with FC Rubin Kazan (2005-2007). He also earned 18 caps with the Jamaica national football team from 2002 to 2005.

Ralph began his career in America playing college soccer at MCC. He scored 59 goals in 45 games and is the all-time goal record holder for the Eagles. Ralph led the Eagles to their only National Championship in 2000, where he was named NJCAA tournament Most Valuable Player. Ralph was inducted into the NJCAA Hall of Fame in 2005.

After two years with Meridian, Ralph left for the University of Connecticut, continuing his dominant play. During his two years at Connecticut, he scored

28 goals and added 11 assists and was a Hermann Trophy finalist his senior year.

Ralph was then drafted 18th overall by the Chicago Fire in the 2003 Master of Library Science SuperDraft. Ralph was the MLS rookie of the year scoring 11 goals and 6 assists in 25 games and broke the MLS record for goals scored by a rookie.

In 2005 Ralph moved to Europe to play for Rubin Kazan, a Russian Football Club team.

The following year, Ralph had the first of three surgeries on his injured left knee. Ultimately this injury would be the end of his playing career.

Today, Ralph is a licensed FIFA player agent with ICM Stellar Sports and is its vice president of soccer in North America.



# FOUNDATION CONGRATULATES AWARD WINNERS AT LUNCHEON



Faculty and staff gather to celebrate

Meridian Community College celebrated its own at the MCC Foundation and MCC Faculty Staff Association End of the Year luncheon.

The highlight: The announcements of the winners of the T.J. Harris, Dr. Clarence W. Roberts "Teacher of the Year," John A. Johnson Outstanding Staff, Holladay Family Professional Development, and the MCCer of the Month for May awards.





Margarette Cole



Sheila Johnson



Terrell Nicholson-Taylor



Gloria Adams



Lynne Carey



Stephanie Holifield



Erin Richardson



Dr. Angie Carraway



Janet Farrow Parrett



Victoria Liddell



Madison Warren Taylor



Rebecca Higginbotham



"Your level of dedication to our College is always humbling. You make it possible to accomplish what others deem impossible, to think outside the box, to pivot when necessary, and sometimes to overcome overwhelming obstacles," said Leia Agnew Hill, vice president for institutional advancement and executive director of the MCC Foundation, as she addressed the luncheon audience of faculty, staff and administration.

The Holladay Family Professional Development Awards provide professional development opportunities for College faculty and staff. Margarette Cole, Adult Education Smart Start instructor; Sheila Johnson, Medical Laboratory Technology Program coordinator and instructor; and Terrell Nicholson-Taylor, art instructor, each received this award which comes with a \$2,500 stipend.

The MCC Foundation's Enrichment through Travel Awards, which are \$2,500 each, are given to recipients to enrich their lives and further MCC's mission through travel. Recipients were

Gloria Adams, Medical Assisting Technology Program coordinator, and instructor; Lynne Carey, Workforce project manager; Stephanie Holifield, business office accounting manager; Susie Johnson, Arts & Letters Series director; and Erin Richardson, instructional design specialist.

Dr. Angie Carraway, Science and Wellness division chair and chemistry instructor, was named the T.J. Harris Award recipient. This award spotlights the work of an MCC employee who has made contributions beyond their regular job description to the community and College. Dr. Carraway, a 23-year employee, has organized the annual Pre-Professional Student Day and You Be the Chemist events and currently serves as MCC's Mississippi NASA Space Grant Consortium campus coordinator and the NASA Community College Aerospace Scholars coordinator.

Receiving the John A. Johnson awards were Janet Farrow Parrett, Victoria Liddell, and Cher Warren. Parrett is records clerk; Liddell is the Out of School Youth (Eagles SOAR) Program director, and Warren is Eagle's Nest Bookstore manager. The awards come with a \$500 each honorarium, and recipients are nominated for their demonstrated enthusiasm for the community college mission, college spirit, commitment to service and job, and interest and participation in community and campus activities.

The Dr. Clarence W. Roberts "Teacher of the Year" Awards celebrate outstanding work, innovative techniques, and service to the College and community, and a \$500 gift is presented to each recipient. Rebecca Higginbotham, Health Education Division chair and Health Information Technology Program coordinator and instructor, was a recipient. The award was also presented posthumously to Tanya Ocampo, Medical Office Management Technology Program instructor.





# APPLAUSE

THE MCC FOUNDATION RECOGNIZES TOP FACULTY AND STAFF MEMBERS WITH THE MCCer OF THE MONTH AWARD. A \$250 HONORARIUM COMES WITH THE RECOGNITION.

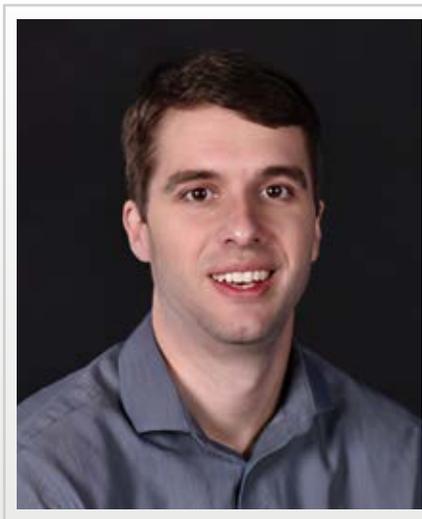
Honorees are asked, "what do you like most about MCC?" Here are their answers:



JANUARY | **WHITNEY STEVENS**

Assistant Financial Aid Director

*"My favorite part of work is being able to help alleviate some of the financial burdens from the shoulders of my students and their families."*



FEBRUARY | **DREW EDWARDS**

Assistant Chief Financial Officer

*"The people. Working at a place where everyone has the same goal: improving lives."*



MARCH | **REBECCA HIGGINBOTHAM**

Health Information Technology Program  
Coordinator and Instructor

*"Transforming students' lives by helping them earn a degree to have a fulfilling career and a way to support their family is important."*



APRIL | **AMANDA BRATU**

Administrative Assistant to the Vice President for  
Institutional Advancement and Executive Director  
of the MCC Foundation

*"It is the people I work with every day. The people in the office who have become like family and the new people I get to meet through the College, the Foundation, and Lifetime Quest."*



MAY | **TIA'WANA PRINGLE**

Assistant Women's Basketball Coach

*"The best thing I like about MCC: it feels like home."*



JUNE | **LAUREN CLAY**

Executive Assistant to the President

*"The best decision I've ever made in my many years of working was coming to work at MCC. My fondest memories are of the friendships I have made here."*

# COLLEGE BECOMES A PART OF ACHIEVING THE DREAM NETWORK

MCC is joining the 2022 cohort of Achieving the Dream (ATD) Network to holistically advance equity, access, and student success. By joining the ATD Network, MCC is committing to a tailored engagement in whole-college transformation and gaining access to a nationwide network of peer support and expertise.



MCC is part of a cohort of seven colleges joining the ATD Network during a time of continued enrollment challenges for two-year institutions across the country, when equitable access and community engagement are more important than ever for the students that colleges serve.



Dr. Tom Huebner

President Dr. Tom Huebner said, "As evidenced by decades of data, a college education can help an individual get a job, find a better job, and create upward social mobility that changes lives, improves families, and can even rescue communities. Achieving the Dream partners a student-centered approach with best practices to equip institutions to meet the challenges associated with providing transformational educational opportunities that overcome barriers and open doors. We are so excited about being chosen to work with ATD and look forward to how that partnership will make a genuine difference in our college and the community."

"Community colleges, and particularly colleges in the ATD Network, recognize that they serve as engines of opportunity not just for their students, but for the entire communities that they serve," said Dr. Karen A. Stout, president and CEO of Achieving the Dream. "ATD's work is centered

on equity, and I am excited to see how the new Network colleges in the 2022 cohort start generating transformational change that lifts up their communities and advances the field."

Joining the ATD Network with MCC are Brookdale Community College, New Jersey; Central Carolina Technical College, S.C.; Community College of Aurora, Colorado; HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College; Northwood Technical College, Wisconsin; and Reynolds Community College, Virginia.





# JOE CHARLES AND MAI KEEN SANDERS MEMORIAL ENDOWMENT

Honoring their parents' memories, Marcia Sanders West and Leila Sanders have established the Joe Charles and Mai Keen Sanders Memorial Endowment through the MCC Foundation.

An alumnus of Meridian Junior College, Joe Charles attended the University of Mississippi and went on to achieve a highly successful career in business as president of Sanders Gas Co. He served in many leadership roles in the church and community and was a long-time member of the MCC Foundation Board of Directors. He was selected as a member of the MCC Hall of Fame in 2013. He passed away in February 2022. Mai Keen received a bachelor of science degree in nursing from the University of Southern Mississippi and worked for many years as a nurse at Weems Mental Health Center. She, too, devoted many hours to civic organizations and charities. She passed away in February 2011.

The scholarship, which will be awarded to an MCC health care student based on scholastic ability and financial need, will be awarded this fall.

## THE CARTER FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP

With its mission to inspire our youth and bring unity to our community, the Carter Foundation is funding an MCC scholarship this fall.

The scholarship will be awarded to a new or returning MCC student who plans to pursue a career in marketing.

The Carter Foundation, established in 2014 by James Carter to educate, motivate, and elevate children and young adults in the community to achieve their full potential, serves some 100 youths throughout East Mississippi. The foundation provides academic mentoring activities, character development, one-to-one relationship building and tutoring, entrepreneur workshops, career readiness skills, sports, recreation, and other activities promoting physical fitness and teamwork.

# BASEBALL SCHOLARSHIP HONORS EAGLE FAN

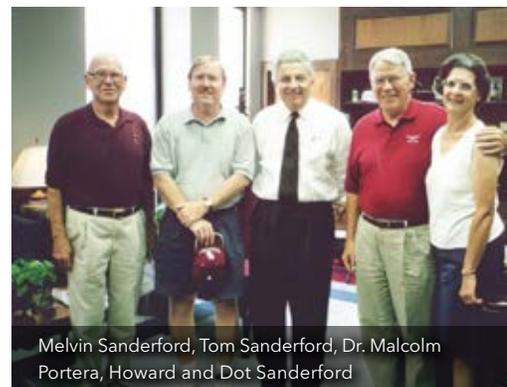
The game is almost everything for ardent baseball fans.

Tom Sanderford remembers how his dad, Melvin, would come to Scaggs Field to watch the Eagles, sit in his regular spot, and root - and sometimes remark to umpires - for the home team. "I lived and worked in Texas and came back to Meridian. I started going to the games with my dad when I came back," Tom said.

"So, we have some good memories out there," he said.

Tom said Melvin had always been a sports fan, but baseball was paramount. Melvin served the City of Meridian as a fire captain and retired, became fire chief for the Waterways Experimental Station in Vicksburg, and after retiring, returned to his Meridian roots. "When he came back, he started watching MCC baseball religiously. Almost everybody at the game knew my daddy because he was so vocal," Tom said.

**Melvin cheered on his future grandson-in-law, Cary Luke, who played for the Eagles in 1993 - the same year the Eagles earned their first trip to the Junior College World Series.**



Melvin Sanderford, Tom Sanderford, Dr. Malcolm Porter, Howard and Dot Sanderford

Before Melvin passed away in August 2002, he would meet his great-grandson Braden Luke, born in April of that year. Braden would follow in his dad Cary's footsteps and play for the Eagles. As an infielder, Braden finished his tenure with the team in May.

This year, Tom's uncle, Howard Sanderford, an MCC alumnus from the Class of 1955, created a scholarship to honor the memory of his brother Melvin. "We came up with doing something with baseball," Tom said. One of the criteria for the scholarship is that the student must have played baseball in high school.

Tom added, "We thought that was the best way to honor my dad's name."



# LYNN BRUNER COMBEST MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

## LEGACY OF FRIENDSHIP CONTINUES

In the early 1980s, a few Meridian Junior College Lady Eagle Basketball players formed an enduring bond that continues today even after 40 years off the court.

Basketball was how the friendship melded and bonded. "There were seven of us who hung out, and we named ourselves the Sexy Seven. The name had been a joke ... people have asked if others called us that, and we said, 'No, we called ourselves that,'" said Debbie Galyean Mathis, one of the seven.

Mathis' sister, Annette Galyean Cook, another one of the seven, said she, Lynn Bruner Combest and Cathy Doerner came to MJC on a basketball scholarship in the fall of 1980. Though Combest and Cook played against each other in high school ball, they became good friends when they came to the MJC court. The following year, Mathis, Teresa Daily Davis, Cindy Peterson Kasper and Rhonda Miller McRae, joined the Lady Eagles on a basketball scholarship as well, completing the Sexy Seven.



All seven players came from successful high school programs, but it would be a different story at MJC. "For college basketball, we were a very short team. We got mutilated. It made us bond," Cook said. "We had a lot of blood, sweat and tears together," she added.

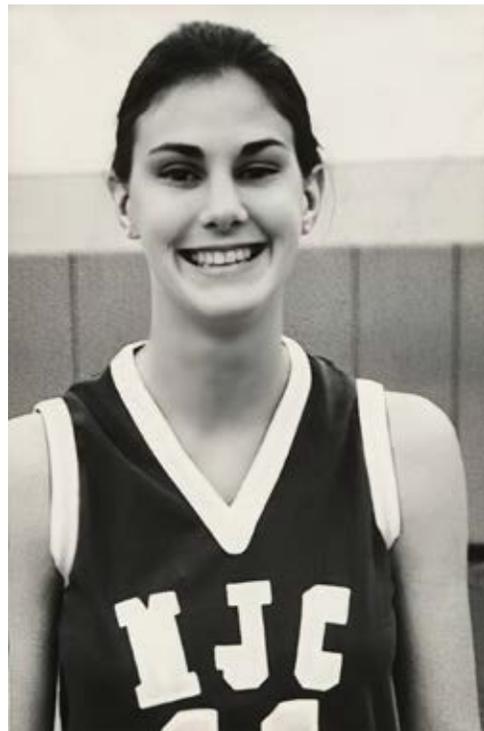


Traveling together to the away games and returning to campus in the morning's wee hours helped seal the friendships. "We spent all kinds of time together even when the seasons were not going on," Cook remembered.

"We formed lifelong friendships," Mathis said.

The different seasons of life - colleges, marriages, families - didn't diminish the friendships. It was Combest, though, who made sure the group stayed together, often spearheading the gatherings throughout the years.

**"Lynn was the glue. She was the nucleus of the group. She was very giving, loving, and generous. Lynn was always the one who made sure we got together," Mathis said.**



When Combest passed away in February 2020, her friends wanted to honor her in a lasting way. "The best way we could think of was a scholarship at MCC. That's where the friendship for all of us started," Mathis said.

"Lynn was a unique person. She would do anything in the world for her friends and family," Cook said. "We had to do something special because Lynn was special. Lynn deserved something bigger and better than just giving flowers or a donation."

Now fully endowed, the Lynn Bruner Combest Memorial Scholarship, which is funded through the MCC Foundation, will be awarded this fall. Cook noted it took less than two years to endow the scholarship. "That strictly speaks to Lynn and not to us," Cook said. "Because everybody loved Lynn."



# FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS



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Emily Louise McDonald Nursing Scholarship

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Ruth Van Dyke Nelson Memorial Scholarship

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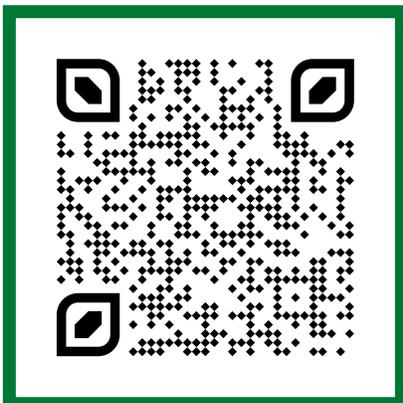
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"We give to what we value, to what tugs at our heartstrings; we give to what we connect with, where our passions lie," said Leia Agnew Hill, vice president for institutional advancement and executive director of the MCC Foundation.

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