

2019-2020

INFLUENCE

Alumni Newsletter

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY



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2019-2020

Alumni Newsletter

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
Mississippi State University

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Reuben Moore Interim Vice President, DAFVM
Scott Willard Interim Dean

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Keith Coble Agricultural Economics

John Blanton Animal & Dairy Sciences

Jeff Dean Biochemistry, Molecular Biology, Entomology
& Plant Pathology

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On the cover: Biochemistry undergraduate student Urita Agana and her father, George Awuni, plant and soil sciences assistant research professor, look over soybean at the R. R. Foil Plant Science Research Center. (photo by David Ammon)

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Letter from the Interim Dean

WHAT A DIFFERENCE a year makes. As we closed 2019 and moved into 2020, our former dean, Dr. George Hopper, announced his retirement. Shortly thereafter, as we began the transition of duties from one dean to the next, the COVID-19 pandemic reached the U.S. and spread rapidly. Immediately following spring break, instruction moved online for the remainder of the semester. This was a big endeavor by our faculty and the first of many obstacles that have come our way during these unprecedented times. And while we have continually found ourselves in challenging times, one thing is clear: our bulldog spirit is unwavering. Faculty, staff, and alumni have risen to the occasion. From financial support to designing courses online during spring, summer, and many this fall, our faculty, staff, and supporters have worked diligently to take care of our students. I am honored to serve alongside so many who truly care about our students and their future.

When Dr. Hopper retired on June 30, I was asked to serve as interim dean. This role is not unfamiliar to me as I have served as associate dean for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences since 2013. Prior to that, I was the Department Head for Biochemistry, Molecular Biology, Entomology and Plant Pathology and a former faculty member in the Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences. I have been at Mississippi State since 1999.

During my time as interim dean, I plan to continue to support the development of our students. I, like Dr. Hopper, believe we are here to ensure the success of our students. I am excited to work with you all to increase opportunities for our future leaders in agriculture and life sciences.

Our college continues to grow, and we were all thrilled to see students return this fall after five months of virtual connections. In fall of 2019, we had 2,559 students enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, a three percent increase over 2018. While our 2020 enrollment information will not be published until later this year, we expect enrollment growth. We are pleased to welcome new students to the CALS family.

While the landscape this fall has been different, faculty are offering face-to-face instruction as well as online lectures to accommodate students that are unable to attend in person. And we continue to attend to all of the projects and tasks set before us.

This year, we welcomed a new department head in Agricultural and Biological Engineering. Alex Thomasson returned to



Mississippi State from Texas A&M. Alex previously worked at the U.S. Cotton Ginning Laboratory in Stoneville and served on the ABE faculty from 1997 to 2004. We are excited to have Alex back home.

We also have a new director of development. Mr. Will Staggers moved into the position of director while Mr. Jud Skelton moved to a new position with the MSU Foundation in Real Estate Giving. We appreciate their extraordinary efforts in raising funds for our college and most importantly, we appreciate all our alumni and friends who continue to support us.

Your support allowed us to award 576 scholarships for the 2019-20 school year. The college raised over \$19 million in FY2019 and FY2020, combined. Your gift makes an infinite impact on the lives of students, supporting scholarships and professional development, along with many other college initiatives. Thank you for your continued support.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of Influence and discovering the incredible impact our alumni and students make each day. There are several interesting features including our alumni who serve as medical professionals, on the front lines during the pandemic. We also feature several prominent alumni in this issue, including our MSU president, Dr. Mark Keenum.

I look forward to the time when we can meet, hopefully soon. *Hail State!*

Scott Willard
Interim Dean



2019 ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

Samuel D. "Sammy" Duda

A 1985 AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS GRADUATE FROM Oviedo, Florida, Duda is senior vice president of national operations of Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc. A fourth-generation company leader, he oversees the business's harvest and vegetable production in the cities of Salinas and Oxnard in California and in Yuma, Arizona. He also oversees growing and harvesting operations in Florida and Michigan and for the company's international partnerships in Australia, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Duda serves numerous boards including the Western Growers Association, which he chaired in 2017. Earlier, he was board president for Yuma Vegetable Shippers and held a seat on the California Leafy Greens Research Advisory Board.



2019 ALUMNI FELLOW

Becky Murphy

STARKVILLE NATIVE BECKY MURPHY EARNED HER Bachelor of Science degree in home economics from MSU in 1983. Her parents were longtime MSU employees, Alice Essig and the late Werner Essig. After graduation, Murphy began her career in the technology field with IBM and held several leadership roles in sales over the next 20 years. For the last six years of her time there, she serviced one of IBM's top partners, Sirius Computer Solutions Inc. By 2007, Murphy joined the Sirius company, where she progressed to senior vice president of sales for the Southwest region before her retirement. A longtime resident of Dallas, Texas, she has been actively involved in the community and has a passion for helping at-risk children.

A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

CALS Dean bids fond farewell

BY KAREN BRASHER



AFTER SERVING a decade as dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and director of the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, **DR. GEORGE HOPPER** retired June 30, 2020.

His role as dean and director for CALS and MAFES were not expected when he returned to his alma mater to assume a role in leadership. After spending over two decades at the University of Tennessee, an opportunity presented itself to become dean of the College of Forest Resources and director of the Forest and Wildlife Research Center. Hopper jumped at the chance to come home and make a difference for the university that he loved. However, the position turned into more than he originally planned.

After just three years as dean and director of the College of Forest Resources and the Forest and Wildlife Research Center, respectively, the financial crisis of 2008 changed Hopper's course.

"We were exploring every avenue to save money," Hopper said. "Our state funding was cut by 25 percent, and there were discussions about merging colleges

and departments, and any other measure that would save funds. It was a difficult time for our university."

At the request of Dr. Mark Keenum, Hopper took the helm of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, or MAFES, first in an interim role and then as permanent dean and director.

"Early in my presidency, during a time of austerity and budget cuts in all state institutions, George was Dean of the College of Forest Resources and agreed to take on the additional role of Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. I will be forever indebted to him for serving his alma mater in that manner," said MSU President Mark E. Keenum.

Hopper embraced his role as dean

of two units and director of two separately funded research units, always ensuring that everyone understood his mantra that student success comes first.

"I truly believe that we are all here for a purpose and that purpose, for our university, is to impact the lives of our students," Hopper said.

His drive to improve student outcomes resulted in enrollment growth from

1,556 students in 2009 to 2,559 students in 2019. Degrees awarded went up 56 percent, and new undergraduate majors, online graduate programs, and certificate programs were added to fill needs in emerging fields.

Hopper also expanded participation in programs such as study abroad and professional experience. He initiated the Undergraduate Research Scholars Program and increased scholarship funding by 60 percent. The development portfolio in the college grew by 133 percent during his administration.

Hopper made numerous upgrades to facilities on- and off-campus. MAFES includes 16 off-campus branch experiment stations. The MAFES repairs and renovations program, aptly named Operation Facelift, saw an injection of



LEFT: Agronomy major Anna Gaudin, Dr. George Hopper, and former agronomy graduate student Salah Jumaa talk about sesame at the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station's Soil-Plant-Atmosphere Research Unit. (photo by April Garon)

BOTTOM LEFT: Drs. George and Missy Hopper at the 2019 CALS homecoming breakfast. (photo by Karen Brasher)

BOTTOM LEFT: Dr. George Hopper (right) and Dr. Reuben Moore serve ice cream at the MAFES Sales Store to celebrate National Ice Cream Month. (photo by Megan Bean)

LEFT: Dr. George Hopper at the opening of the Community Garden. (photo by Megan Bean)



\$6.5 million during his tenure. Included in Operation Facelift was the addition of the West Farm and the National Center for Alluvial Aquifer Research at the Delta Research and Extension Center in Stoneville. Also upgrades to the four Research and Extension Centers occurred during his tenure.

On campus, Hopper led the new animal science complex with construction of the Meat Science and Muscle Biology Laboratory and the Animal and Dairy Sciences building. The Poultry Science building is slated for completion in October 2020. Also, under his leadership, the Custer Dairy Plant, Herzer Building, and both farms saw upgrades, including an irrigation systems project at North Farm and the Blackbelt Branch Experiment Station.

He has also made an impact on the national stage, assuming leadership roles at the state and national level. He has served as chair of the Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy, the governing body of the Experiment Station Section of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities Commission on Food, Environment, and Renewable Resources. He was honored for his leadership in 2017, with receipt of the Southern Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors

ESS Excellence in Leadership Award.

His leadership in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and MAFES has propelled the college and research unit as among the best in the nation. And while the opportunity was unexpected, it proved to be beneficial to the university, colleges, and research units.

In all of his accomplishments, Hopper is quick to acknowledge all of the support he received throughout

his tenure at Mississippi State.

“I am so appreciative to the faculty, staff, alumni, and advisory boards for partnering with me to strengthen and build our programs in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station,” Hopper said. “I am grateful to all of the individuals that have helped along the way and honored to have led these incredible organizations.” 🐾

A LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE

IN HONOR of Dr. George Hopper's legacy of leadership, an endowed fund has been established in the Mississippi State University Foundation to support students. The Dr. George Hopper Student Development Fund for Excellence may be used to support student travel to attend conferences or competitions, student awards, student support for books and tuition, and other student development opportunities.

Interim Dean Scott Willard established the fund to honor Hopper's legacy and his main passion, students.

“Dr. Hopper was a mentor and friend as I served him as associate dean,” Willard said. “I have heard him say so many times that ‘we are here for the students.’ His driving force was the success of our students, at all levels.”

In fact, that driving force led to the addition of programs for undergraduates and the funding of

numerous graduate assistantships, Willard added.

“It is fitting to establish this endowed scholarship in Dr. Hopper's name, to ensure student success well into the future,” Willard added.

Those interested in contributing to the Dr. George Hopper Student Development Fund for Excellence should contact Will Staggars at 662.325.2837 or by email at wstaggars@foundation.msstate.edu.

2019 DISTINGUISHED FELLOWS

IN 2018, THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES developed the Distinguished Fellows award program to recognize outstanding alumni in its nine departments. Distinguished Fellows are alumni who have exhibited significant professional accomplishments and also shown a personal commitment to Mississippi State. Each year, the departments choose Distinguished Fellows from amongst their alumni who have demonstrated qualities and traits we work to instill in our current students. These alumni visit with faculty, students, administrators, and advisory boards to provide direction for the future of our departments and college. The Distinguished Fellows program is an opportunity to recognize outstanding alumni in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and expose students to the rich tradition of service and dedication found within our alumni base.



Tyrone Williams

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL & BIOLOGICAL ENGINEERING

Colonel Tyrone A. Williams (Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering Technology and Business 1988) is the department head for the Raymond High School Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps.

Prior to that, Colonel Williams served as maintenance operations squadron commander for the Mississippi Air National Guard. He has commanded the Air National Guard's first Air Education and Training Command C-17 Field Training Detachment; organized, staffed, directed, coordinated, and budgeted resources to meet operations; and overseen aircrafts and facilities valued at \$3.5 billion.

Colonel Williams served as seminar leader at National Defense University's College of International Security Affairs, Reserve Component National Security Course at Fort McNair in Washington D.C. He is a veteran of several military operations including Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom. He earned his master's degree in military operational arts and science from Air University's Air Command and Staff College in 2009. He completed his doctorate in public administration at Jackson State University in 2020. He is past president of Jackson's Capital Club Board of Governors and has served on the CALS Dean's Advisory Council at MSU. He is a former member of the Mentoring to Manhood (M2M) Advisory Board, alumnus of Leadership Rankin, and life member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., the National Guard Association of the United States, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.



Paige Manning

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

Paige Manning (Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Economics and Master of Science in Agribusiness Management, 2001, 2002) is director of market development and public relations for the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce.

Manning, who grew up on a row crop and cattle farm, always had a passion for agriculture, which led her to attend MSU. Following graduation, she joined the MSU Extension Service in Community Resource Development where she administered programs to assist community water systems.

Manning has been with the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce for fifteen years, serving in her current position since 2012. The market development division administers programs that provide domestic and international marketing opportunities for producers and agribusinesses, operates the Mississippi Farmers Market, and publishes the Mississippi Market Bulletin. In 2018, her team rolled out the state's new branding program, Genuine MS®, designed to promote Mississippi products.

Manning is second vice president of the North American Agricultural Marketing Officials, on the operations committee for the Southern United States Trade Association, and on the board of the Mississippi Women for Agriculture. She is active in the Mississippi District Export Council and the Mississippi Agricultural Economics Association, and enjoys giving back through the Junior League of Jackson.

The Brownsville, Tennessee native and her husband, Ron, have one son and currently reside in Madison, Mississippi.



Ernie Barnes

DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL & DAIRY SCIENCES

Ernie Barnes (Bachelor of Science in Animal Science 1974) is industry services director for the National Pork Board, serving pork producers and state associations nationwide.

Barnes was involved in a highly competitive livestock judging team before taking off in his professional career. He first worked with Bryan Foods and The Upjohn Company prior to finding his real passion of working with pork producers as the first full-time southeastern field representative for the American Yorkshire Club. From there, he has worked to make the industry better by helping pork producers for over 40 years. Barnes helped develop the first World Pork Expo in 1988, an event that he is still involved with today; initiated the Pork Alliance, the National Pork Producers Council's allied industry program; and created the Pork Action Group or PAG.

Throughout the years, Barnes has formed grassroots organizations, encouraged Pork Checkoff involvement, assisted with legislative issues, introduced new production techniques, and coordinated educational events.

"At least once a week, throughout my career, I've met someone and started a conversation that related back to my livestock judging team at MSU," he said. For that reason, he gives back, having officiated at more than 100 livestock judging contests to date.

The New Albany, Mississippi native and his wife, Paula, have two children and five grandchildren. They live on a small farm in Earlham, Iowa where they built and manage Barnes' Place, an event barn that hosts about 50 weddings a year.



Dee Boykin

DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY,
MOLECULAR BIOLOGY, ENTOMOLOGY &
PLANT PATHOLOGY

Dee Boykin (Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Entomology 1981) has served Mississippi Delta producers as an independent agricultural consultant for nearly 40 years. For almost a decade, in addition to his ag consultant business, he has owned and operated Southern Soils Lab, a soil and plant tissue testing lab in Yazoo City, Mississippi.

Boykin credits the diverse curriculum at MSU for giving him the educational foundation which has allowed him to enjoy serving his customers throughout the course of his career. He still maintains relationships with and depends on various MSU Extension Service personnel to assist him with consulting as well as providing current results from the agricultural lab.

In addition to his education, Boykin credits the Mississippi Agricultural Consultants Association, or MACA, for allowing him to continue to improve his service through continuing educational opportunities as well as following the guidelines set forth by the founders of the association focused on responsible and ethical principles. Boykin remains active in MACA having served as president and chairing many committees over the years.

While working as an agricultural consultant, Boykin has also enjoyed the opportunity to employ and influence numerous high school and college students. He always encourages them to explore educational opportunities in agriculture and highlights the need for independent consultants.



Camille Scales Young

SCHOOL OF HUMAN SCIENCES

Camille Scales Young (Master of Science in Agriculture and Extension Education 1996) is principal and director of Cornerstone Government Affairs. She also earned her bachelor's in communication management at Mississippi State. Young helps clients navigate policies, create and drive effective advocacy campaigns, utilize business and development opportunities, and craft successful public affairs efforts.

Prior to joining Cornerstone, Young served as a government affairs representative with one of the state's leading law firms, Watkins Ludlum Winter & Stennis, P.A. She was also with Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation in positions including communications specialist, director of media relations, and government relations specialist where she spent time on Capitol Hill providing support for the agricultural community.

Young has been an alumni leader at MSU and in the broader community. She has been president of MSU National Alumni Association and served on the board for organizations such as 4-H Foundation of Mississippi, BankFirst, and Greater Jackson Chamber Partnership, just to name a few. She was named a Woman of Distinction by the Girl Scout Council of Middle Mississippi and Alumnus of the Year by the Central Mississippi Chapter of the MSU Alumni Association. She was also a member of the 2017 inaugural class of Top 50 Most Influential People in Mississippi.

The Shannon, Mississippi native and her husband, Keith, live in rural Madison County.



Fernando Palacios

DEPARTMENT OF FOOD SCIENCE, NUTRITION
& HEALTH PROMOTION

Fernando Palacios (Bachelor of Science in Food Science, Master of Science in Dairy Science 1983, 1985) spent his career managing supply chains for Fortune 100 consumer products companies.

Upon graduation, he joined Kraft General Foods as a food technologist and progressed through several positions before being promoted to plant manager in Buena Park, California. He then joined Pillsbury where he ultimately led the Haagen-Dazs worldwide supply chain. He continued his career at KPMG as food and beverage consulting director, then served at Land O'Lakes as supply chain executive vice president, at Land O'Lakes Purina Feed as chief operating officer and executive vice president, and at Miller Coors as chief integrated supply chain officer until his retirement in 2019.

Palacios's expertise in optimizing supply chain processes across global locations has resulted in superior customer service, significant cost reductions, and cross functional alignment. He has led organizations of more than \$4.5 billion in cost of goods sold and over 5,000 team members across multiple countries. He enjoys developing talent, challenging the status quo, and aligning diverse cultures toward a common goal.

Palacios has served on numerous advisory boards and multiple joint venture boards in Asia and the United States.

The Venezuelan native resides in St. Petersburg, Florida with his wife Marianne (MSU class of 1985).



Mike Bogan

DEPARTMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Michael Bogan (Bachelor of Landscape Architecture 1987) is CEO of LandCare USA, in San Diego, California. Bogan began his career in the Maryland/Washington, D.C. area with Davis Landscape Contractors. In 1989, he joined The Brickman Group, a commercial landscape business, as a project director, and moved on to subsequent roles including branch manager, regional vice president, and divisional vice president across the U.S. while he grew his career as an inspirational, value centric leader. He forged expansion into new markets, built strong teams, grew revenue, and led mergers and acquisitions as Brickman became an industry leader. Bogan returned to Maryland and joined Brickman's leadership team as executive vice president in 2006, where he served until 2012.

Bogan formed a consultancy in 2013 and joined LandCare USA in 2014, as CEO, where he helmed a turnaround and rebranding of the commercial landscape services business. In 2019, he led a buyout of the company from its private equity owners. Today, the \$200 million company employs 4,000 team members with offices in 23 states. He is most proud of the core values and purpose driven culture that has created fulfilling careers for so many landscape professionals.

The Memphis, Tennessee native lives with his wife of 34 years, Rebecca Bowen Bogan (MSU class of 1987), in Del Mar, California.



Melodee Fraser

DEPARTMENT OF PLANT AND SOIL SCIENCES

Dr. Melodee Fraser (Bachelor of Science and Master of Science Turfgrass Management, 1985, 1987) is the director of research for the eastern division of Pure-Seed Testing, Inc.

Fraser grew up on a golf course in southern Indiana, where her father was superintendent. After summers spent working on the course and playing golf, a desire to become a golf course superintendent and play the sport led Fraser to MSU, where she was a member of the women's golf team from 1981-83. She became the first woman to graduate from MSU's turfgrass management program. After finishing her master's in the same program, she earned a Ph.D. in turfgrass breeding from Rutgers University in 1991.

Upon graduation, Dr. Fraser was hired to start a new research facility for Pure-Seed Testing, Inc. An Oregon-based leader in cool-season turfgrass breeding, PST sought a full-time breeder at a site in the transition zone, in order to improve cool-season turfgrasses for persistence in warm-humid climates and develop warm season turfgrass turf cultivars. Fraser established the research farm in Rolesville, North Carolina, where her primary responsibility has been the development of tall fescue cultivars with improved summer disease resistance and heat tolerance. Secondary research responsibilities are developing seeded bermudagrass and zoysiagrass cultivars.

Fraser and her husband reside near Rolesville.



Steve McLaurin

DEPARTMENT OF POULTRY SCIENCE

Steven McLaurin (Bachelor of Science in Poultry Science 1979) is live operations manager for the PecoFoods complex in Sebastopol, Mississippi. McLaurin has spent 40 years in the poultry industry. He has been in his current position for the last 15 years, overseeing live operations from pullets to production. This includes oversight of breeders, the hatchery, broilers and grow-out operations, and the feed mill. Prior to this position, he served as division manager for Sanderson Farms and live operations manager for BC Rogers before that.

McLaurin grew up on his family's farm in Moselle, Mississippi, just outside of Laurel. His upbringing inspired a love of agriculture and he notes the tremendous opportunity of the poultry science industry as what attracted him to the field.

McLaurin has been an active leader in the Mississippi Poultry Association for the last twenty-five years. In January 2020, he was elected as chairman of the board for the organization. In 2014, McLaurin served as vice-chairman. He has overseen the organization's annual auction, which raises money for scholarships for poultry science students in the state. McLaurin is also active with his alma mater serving as guest lecturer for the poultry science department for the past seven years. In 2013, he and his wife started a landscape architecture scholarship fund in memory of family friend and fellow bulldog, Henry J. Bustin. 🐾

FEEDING A HUNGRY WORLD

CALS alumnus and MSU research professor feeds farmers, inspires family

BY VANESSA BEESON

SOMETIMES FEEDING HUNGRY PEOPLE in your local community takes you nearly 6,000 miles from home. At least, that was the case for **DR. GEORGE AWUNI**, now an assistant research professor in the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences in MSU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Born and raised in Northern Ghana, Awuni has always been passionate about food security for his nation. That drive propelled him to work for Ghana's ministry of agriculture for 10 years and pursue a bachelor's in natural resources management in 2003. It's what led him to the United States—first to Tuskegee University where he earned a plant and soil sciences master's degree in 2009, and then to MSU where he earned a doctoral degree in entomology in 2013.

When it was time to graduate from the land-grant, his wife and two daughters traveled from Ghana to MSU to see him walk across the stage of the Humphrey Coliseum. His two sons, both older, stayed home in Ghana for their own studies. After the ceremony, Awuni traveled to New York with plans to see his family off to Ghana.

During the trip, a phone call from an MSU professor opened the door to an opportunity for Awuni to continue working at MSU, but this time with a focus on feeding farmers from his home country.

"Dr. Dan Reynolds called and said he was looking for someone to apply for a project in Ghana and asked if I would be interested in applying," Awuni remembered.

The project, funded through the USAID

Soybean Innovation Lab at the University of Illinois, focused on providing Ghanaian farmers insight into growing soybeans.

Awuni interviewed for and accepted the position, at the time as a post doctorate. While he has since moved into his current role as an assistant research professor, he still serves on the project where, alongside Reynolds, he has established demonstration farms aimed at providing soybean farmers in Africa with the tools they need to increase yield in an impactful way.

"Soybean is an important cash crop and provides sustenance for smallholder farmers in Africa and increased yield means better income and nutrition for households," Awuni said.

Since the project's inception in 2014, the work has expanded from Ghana into Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia, where researchers have provided resources and best management practices to a total of approximately 6,000 soybean farmers across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Reynolds, who is now interim associate vice president and director of MSU's International Institute, said Awuni brings a unique perspective because he's from Ghana and went to school an hour's drive from where the first demonstration farm was created.

"Dr. Awuni knows the local practices and culture, which has been invaluable in understanding the challenges of soybean production in Africa and has provided unique insights into how to approach workable solutions," Reynolds said.

Reynolds also pointed out that Awuni's

work ethic and ingenuity were both tremendous assets to the team.

"It has truly been a blessing having George on this project. While we may have given structure and plans for the program, Dr. Awuni has given it life and function. Without his efforts I do not believe the program would have been as successful as it is today," Reynolds said.

Awuni said his favorite part of the work is giving back.

"I enjoy helping change lives for the better in terms of nutrition and income," he said, noting the team has partnered with local educators to see how soybeans can be used to provide milk for school nutrition programs there.

He said a combination of hard work, determination, and luck brought him to the place he is today.

"I would encourage anyone to work hard and believe in themselves," he said. "I tell my family, 'You have to trust and believe in yourself and once you do, work hard and be good to others. That is the only way to success.'"

Awuni's words of wisdom have been taken to heart by his four children, including his eldest daughter, **URITA AGANA**, who as a young girl watched her father receive his doctorate from MSU.

Agana has followed in his footsteps and attends her dad's alma mater as a senior biochemistry major in the Department of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology, Entomology and Plant Pathology also in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

While food security drives Awuni,



Urita Agana and George Awuni in a soybean field at the MAFES R. R. Foil Plant Science Research Center. (photo by David Ammon)



a passion for human health propels his daughter.

“Coming from Ghana, I’ve grown up around illnesses including malaria, which turned me to science. I want to work in a health-related field, conducting research and finding solutions for certain diseases,” she said.

While Agana hopes to study human health one day, a research opportunity studying disease in soybeans brought her closer to the work her father does. Under the direction of Dr. Sorina Popescu, an associate professor in the department, Agana is studying taproot decline, a prominent disease found in soybeans.

“If I can figure out what’s wrong with certain plants and we depend on plants to eat, then I’m still working toward human health even though it’s based on plants,” she said.

Agana pointed out that practices to mitigate taproot decline in soybeans might be doing more harm than good.

“Currently, taproot decline is managed through no-till or conservation tillage practices, which are not effective to stop the spread. Since the fungus was found to overwinter on root stubble of soybean and other crops used in a rotation program, current management practices may actually be contributing to the widespread occurrence of taproot decline in Mississippi,” she said.

Agana hopes to help find a biological control that stops the disease.

“The main goal of this project is to explore the potential of beneficial microorganisms isolated from the plant rhizosphere to control the disease,” she said. “Biological control of pathogenic

microorganisms in crop plants is an environmentally safe and effective way of reducing or mitigating disease and minimizing yield loss through the use of natural enemies.”

While she irons out plans for a master’s degree, Agana said she thinks she’ll ultimately wind up studying human health at some point.

“I told my dad a while ago even if I end up getting a master’s studying plant health, I might switch to human health for my Ph.D.,” she said.

In the meantime, she welcomes a chance to collaborate on research with her dad.

“It would be cool if we ended up working together on a soybean research project. If that happens, hopefully I can teach him something he doesn’t know and vice versa,” she said. 🐾

ON THE FRONT LINES

*COVID-19 from the
eyes of those in the medical field*

BY VANESSA BEESON AND REAGAN POSTON

MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS train for worst-case scenarios as they are often required to make life-or-death decisions on a daily basis. While all healthcare professionals know that serving on the front lines, working long hours, and helping people in their hour of need simply comes with the territory, the medical field post-COVID-19 is an altered landscape. Navigating the fluid situation of global pandemic and enduring public health crisis requires a cool and collected disposition under pressure, a big heart, and a fighting bulldog spirit. We checked in with four CALS alumni who are serving on the front lines to see how they've handled the day-in, day-out of practicing medicine amid COVID-19 with poise and grace.

DR. TAMEKA HAIRSTON

Resident Family Medicine Doctor;
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa Family Medicine
Residency Program

HAILING FROM PACHUTA, a Mississippi community with a population of less than 300 people, **DR. TAMEKA HAIRSTON** found her passion for serving the underserved at a young age.

“I grew up seeing firsthand the health-care disparity in rural areas. With these places often also being the poorest communities, some people have to make the decision between suffering the financial burden of driving to a faraway doctor’s office or suffering through their illness. I thought, if there were more rural doctors, then the decision might be easier, and it was that notion of being able to actually help communities that are often overlooked that led me to the medical field,” Hairston said.

The road to residency, however, was winding for Hairston. An internship working for a local physician as a medical scribe made her realize that she didn’t want to be documenting someone else’s medical career; she wanted to have her own.

The 2013 Mississippi State University biochemistry grad went on to earn her medical degree at the University of Mississippi Medical Center and is now in her second year of residency at The University of Alabama Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency Program, where she practices under the guidance of seasoned attending physicians.

In the midst of COVID-19, rural communities have a heightened need for well-equipped and accessible healthcare providers such as Hairston. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a lack of healthcare



infrastructure, including a shortage of health professionals for primary care, and older populations with higher rates of chronic disease are some of the factors that can make rural communities more susceptible to the disease.

Though COVID-19 has had such far-reaching impacts on rural communities like Hairston’s hometown, it has been an especially formative experience for the 29-year-old resident, who still has the vast majority of her medical career ahead of her.

“Before this pandemic, medicine, for me, was clear-cut. A patient came in with symptoms, and we knew exactly what to do and how to treat it. But because COVID-19 is unprecedented both in terms of what the medical field has seen before and the overwhelming scale of it, there’s a layer of uncertainty. It’s caused me to be much more critically-minded when planning the best course of treatment for a patient. Sending someone home with a false-negative strep test probably wouldn’t be life-threatening, but COVID-19 has

the potential to be,” Hairston said.

Hairston, however, firmly believes in the power of optimism and sees this as the pandemic’s silver lining.

“It’s difficult to think long-term when every day is so unpredictable, but I think healthcare is changing for the better in light of the pandemic. Doctors are insisting on even higher standards of care, patients are taking their health more seriously, and medical help is increasingly more accessible. That’s especially true for the care in rural communities,” Hairston said.

Hairston shared that, for those in rural communities, one of the largest inhibitors for receiving healthcare is transportation. With telehealth revolutionizing the way that patients and doctors are able to interact, a previously daunting hurdle for rural patients suddenly seems more manageable.

“Telehealth has been an option for a long time. It wasn’t until COVID-19 turned virtual practice into a necessity, however, that the major insurance

companies began to cover this type of visit, making it a viable option for those who might not be able to afford transportation or to take a full day off work. It's not an all-encompassing solution, but telehealth consultations now being covered by more insurance companies mean that we're one step closer to health equity," Hairston said.

She said that, upon completion of her residency, she hopes to one day return to her community and continue the effort for accessible health care by starting her own practice.

"Family medicine physicians, especially in rural communities, are expected to be able to treat anything. You might see us working in emergency rooms or nursing homes or traditional clinics. For me, coming from and planning to one day return to Pachuta, the ability to serve a community, whatever the need, is important," she said.

While Hairston is certainly aware of the impact one individual can have on a community, she also notes the importance of a combined communal effort in the broad scope of the pandemic.

"To beat this, it's going to require a united effort. I'm extremely grateful and blessed to be able to do my part, but everyone has a role to play in stopping the spread of COVID-19. We all have to do the little things that have been stated by multiple physicians and healthcare staff. Stay home. Wear your mask," she said. "I know the big push has been to thank essential workers, and while they deserve that acknowledgment for all they do, every single person is essential in this pandemic."

DR. ASHLEY HARRIS

Associate Chief Medical Officer
Baptist Memorial
Hospital-Memphis

DR. ASHLEY HARRIS, '04 biochemistry alumnus, grew up in Water Valley, Mississippi, and knew he wanted to be a doctor around age ten.

"My great uncle was a family medicine physician in my hometown and I grew up with him as a mentor. Watching him take

care of patients and seeing his role in the community inspired me to want to do something like that," Harris remembered.

Harris's bulldog roots run deep. When it came time for college, he knew MSU would be the first stop on his journey to med school. His dad, Wayne Harris, an All American, played MSU football from 1979 to 1982 and was inducted into the M-Club Hall of Fame in 1998, so the family was maroon and white through and through. Harris met his wife, Jennifer, in an organic chemistry lab at MSU. She became a nurse and the couple now has two girls, Kenzie and Ella, who Harris

says are being raised to love MSU, too.

After Mississippi State, Harris earned a medical degree at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine in Jackson in 2007, then completed his internship and residency at the North Mississippi Family Medicine Residency Program in Tupelo. A geriatric medicine fellowship took him to Harvard University, where he served as an associate faculty member from 2010 to 2011.

As time went on, the trajectory of his career has shifted from hometown doctor to hospital administration. While Harris has always possessed a physician's heart for healing the sick, that passion led him on the path to administration, to help people he felt called to serve at the system level. Harris was inspired by his mentor—a fellowship-trained geriatrician who was chief medical officer at the hospital where he completed his residency.

"My training during residency opened my eyes to the fact that so much of our healthcare system isn't necessarily tailored to the care of older patients. While I ended up working as a clinician serving older patients in the hospital and nursing homes, I recognized that to significantly impact healthcare delivery for this population I needed to be involved at the administrative level where policies are enacted and decisions are made that can impact the type of care we provide," he said.

After his fellowship, Harris earned a



Dr. Ashley Harris (photo submitted)

Master of Health Administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Now, he is the associate chief medical officer of Baptist Memorial Hospital-Memphis. In that role, Harris is a key liaison between the medical staff and hospital administration. Prior to that position, which began in May 2020, he served as chief medical officer for Baptist Memorial Hospital-Golden Triangle.

Harris helps lead a medical team of more than 2,000 doctors, nurses, and ancillary staff. He describes his role as a bridge between the administrative side of the hospital and the medical staff. His goal is to work with administrators to get medical staff all they need to care for patients, both those who may be sick with COVID-19 and those who are there for other reasons.

"While much of our day may be devoted to addressing COVID-19, we all have the same goal and that's to provide excellent care for all of our patients, whether that care is related to COVID-19 or not," Harris said.

He said the team has taken everything in stride and stepped up to the unprecedented occasion.

"This pandemic highlights the fact that by far the significant majority of people who go into healthcare do it because they genuinely have a heart for caring for others and healing sick people. I think that's

highlighted by what I've seen in the midst of the turmoil surrounding COVID-19 as our healthcare providers face challenges at work and then go home and deal with disruption in their own lives," Harris said.

He continued, "Our teams have responded with a collaborative sense that if we work together we can manage this crisis much more efficiently than if we work in silos. I think that as administrators we support our physicians, nurses, and staff by acknowledging all they do and by making sure they have the tools and resources they need to continue to provide excellent care and protection for themselves as they take care of sick patients."

Harris is board certified in family medicine and geriatric medicine and is a certified hospice medical director. His expertise, specifically in geriatric medicine, offers a unique lens for better understanding COVID-19 as it relates to older Americans.

"So much of what we do in healthcare is caring for older patients and that's certainly truer in the middle of this pandemic, which disproportionately impacts elderly patients from the direct impacts such as higher mortality rates and higher acuity of illness to the indirect impacts of social isolation," Harris said. "I think of my own grandmothers who are largely at home because of this and the impact of social isolation on their long-term mental and physical health. I think for me it's important to think about those individuals and communities that are significantly more vulnerable, while also considering the overall impact of this pandemic."

He emphasized the importance of reaching out to those populations while heeding the advice of healthcare professionals on preventing the spread of the virus.

"We are all tired of this pandemic. While we want the virus to go away, we have to be realistic. We have to adopt the practices advised by our infectious disease experts," he said. "Wear our masks. Socially distance. Leverage technology, so we can still be connected even when we're apart. Obviously, that's challenging for some of our older population but we can be intentional and go out of our way to make sure there is still that connection."

Harris said while overall challenges abound in a pandemic of this scope and size, he's honored to be a part of a team that provides care on the front lines.

"I'm very proud of our physicians, nurses, and staff because I've seen more teamwork in these last four months than I've seen in all the time I've worked in healthcare."

DR. RYAN LOONEY

Staff Physician for MSU John C. Longest Student Health Center; Doctor for Mississippi State Bulldogs

FOR DR. RYAN LOONEY, '07 biochemistry major, a career as a physician was second nature.

The Kennett, Missouri native grew up along the banks of the Mississippi River and remembers spending long hours at the local hospital as a kid alongside his twin sister.

"I was raised by a single mom who was a microbiologist at the local hospital and if she was on call at night or on the weekends, she'd bring us to the hospital," Looney said.

Whether it was coloring in a corner of the lab or walking the halls of Twin Rivers Regional Medical Center, Looney remembers the place fondly as something that inspired

his future pursuit toward medicine.

"My comfort is this profession. For me, medicine isn't a job. It's who you are 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year," said Looney, who earned his medical degree at the Kentucky College of Osteopathic Medicine and completed his residency at Brookwood Baptist Health in Birmingham, Alabama.

For the past four years, Looney—board certified in internal medicine—has been one of the staff physicians at the MSU John C. Longest Student Health Center, serving students, faculty, and staff alike.

"People forget that MSU is like a little city when the students are here on campus. We have more than 20,000 students plus faculty and staff. On a game day weekend, we might have 100,000 people in Starkville," Looney said. "We have a very diverse, condensed community and I might see everything from a runny nose to diagnosing cancer all within a given day."

Looney said while the core mission of the center hasn't changed, the global pandemic of COVID-19 has shifted the way the facility operates on a daily basis.

"Prior to the pandemic, traffic in the clinic flowed with a little more flexibility. Now, we have checkpoints and safeguards at various intervals to ensure greater safety," Looney explained.

Looney said the center has established a separate wing to treat possible COVID-19 cases and currently, possible cases and well visits are staggered so sick



Dr. Ryan Looney. (photo by David Ammon)

and healthy patients enter the clinic at different times. He also said patients are screened prior to and upon arrival, which includes answering a set of COVID-19 screening questions and temperature check at entry. Social distancing measures have also been adopted and personal protective equipment, including masks are required of patients and medical staff alike. The team has also increased the availability of telemedicine visits, which many patients have opted for as a viable alternative to coming into the clinic.

“Everything is a lot more regimented, deliberate, and slower,” he said. “If we have to stop at a checkpoint, we stop and wait until we can move forward.”

Looney noted that the more mitigation factors implemented in any given situation, the easier it will be to keep people healthy.

“Reducing risk through social distancing, the use of masks, meeting together in smaller groups over shorter periods of time, and meeting outdoors or in well-ventilated indoor spaces will help keep yourself and others healthy,” he explained.

He encouraged people to remember that while the virus can be fatal to some, it can also be incredibly challenging to those who survive it.

“It’s not just the mortality of this virus, it’s the morbidity. People with COVID-19 might feel terrible for two or three weeks while others might have six to eight week recoveries. Since it’s such a new virus, we’re also just learning that some patients might have permanent damage,” said Looney, who noted that just because someone has a mild case of the virus doesn’t mean the person they give it to will have the same outcome.

Looney, who also serves as a doctor for MSU athletics and is one of the

head physicians for the university’s football team, said MSU Athletics have implemented layers of safeguards to keep student athletes, coaches, staff, and the greater student population safe.

“We address everything as a public health situation whether it’s in the clinic, an athletic facility, or the campus as a whole. With athletics, for instance, it’s not just keeping the student athletes healthy so they can play and be successful on and off the field. It’s also about keeping them healthy so we can help keep the student population healthy as a whole,” Looney explained.

Looney, a former student athlete himself who ran track for MSU, said going forward MSU student athletes will serve as an example for all students.

“There is more at play here and the student athletes have become a focal point for the MSU community’s public health in general,” Looney said. “For instance, for MSU football players engaging in workouts, we have protocols and strict regulations in place that have been laid out by MSU, the SEC, and the NCAA to make sure it is as safe as possible.”

He said COVID-19 has been unlike anything he’s experienced before as a physician.

“While we train for things like mass casualties, biohazard risks, and emergency medical life support, a pandemic of this size and scope is truly unprecedented,” Looney said. “During my residency, I worked on a tuberculous wing and have been around highly infectious diseases, so it wasn’t foreign to me to wear PPE but that was a patient at a time or an hour at a time. Now, it’s all day, every day.”

He emphasized the importance of slowing down, ramping up communication,

and introducing several mitigation factors to decrease the risk of transmission.

“Slowdown has become our motto and I take extra time with every single patient. Even when someone has no symptoms, we still have to be dressed in varying degrees of PPE like masks, gloves, and eye protection because we have to have personal protection while seeing every single patient but also be continuously protecting every single patient, even if they aren’t being seen specifically for COVID-19,” he said.

While he said the pandemic brought plenty of changes to the clinic and throughout the MSU campus, he said the hardest part centers on the family.

“Our families are the true frontline heroes. My wife, my kids, and the families of other clinicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, lab technicians, people who work our front desk, the people that clean the clinics and campus buildings are the true heroes behind all this and the challenge is that we keep our families safe but also keep our families sane,” he said.

He continued, “Our families are really the backbone behind this because they’re taking on as much risk as us and they are keeping us safe and without them, we wouldn’t be able to do what we’re doing,” he said.

Looney emphasized the importance of the bulldog family stepping up to take care of each other as well as stewards of one another’s health.

“Everything done on campus, whether it’s in our clinic, athletics, or the campus as a whole, it’s all done from a public health perspective. Everyone needs to know we adopt measures like wearing masks and social distancing not just for ourselves but for others,” Looney said.

He continued, “This is a public health

situation and that's why it's important for everyone to make these sacrifices so that everyone as a whole can be healthy. If one of us is well, then we can all be well."

DR. JEFF MOSES

Emergency Services Physician
Greenwood Leflore Hospital

BORN AND RAISED in Greenwood, Mississippi, **DR. JEFF MOSES**, 1980 biochemistry alumnus, followed in the footsteps of his brother not only to Mississippi State but to medical school as well.

"I don't remember ever wanting to be anything other than a doctor, so I trained in internal medicine and moved to Greenwood to build a practice with my brother. When I got here, Greenwood Leflore Hospital was looking for a director of emergency services, and I initially took the position to help pay off student loans," Moses said.

His professional stint in emergency services was only supposed to last a year. Now, 33 years later, he can't imagine himself anywhere else.

"Spending three decades with the same institution has allowed me not only to learn from the incredible doctors and staff here but also to help it grow," Moses said.

Though Moses began his involvement with Greenwood Leflore Hospital as the director of emergency services, he added that, now, the seven fulltime emergency room physicians on staff at the hospital share the responsibility of the role. This includes everything from hospital-wide disaster-response training to direct patient care in the ER.

"Working in the emergency room has been very fulfilling for me. It's an honor to be able to care for people and for them to put their trust in me, especially in times of emergency," Moses said. "In a given night, we might be dealing with a heart attack, a gunshot wound, and a car wreck back to back. Adaptability is something you develop quickly working in emergency services, and it's something

that's proven especially useful, as of late."

As an emergency physician, Moses and his team see their fair share of patients who are presenting COVID-19 symptoms. The task remains the same: figure out what's wrong and determine the best course of care.

Though there are alternatives to the ER for those who are presenting symptoms, such as walk-in testing clinics and screening centers around Greenwood, the emergency room staff serves as the gatekeepers of the hospital. Moses and his fellow physicians determine if a patient needs to be admitted and provides reassurance for those who don't.

"The global scope of the pandemic is what can be boggling, but in the bubble of the ER, we're doing what we've always done by striving for the best possible care for our patients. Now, we just wear more personal protective equipment," Moses said.

He also said that the most challenging aspects of COVID-19 have been a lack of available bed space and staffing deficiencies, both of which they've managed by upholding the caregiving attitude that is intrinsic to medical professionals.

"Hospitals have always tried to help one another in any way they can, but we have all become a lifeline for each other during the pandemic. If a patient comes in and our beds are full but the individual needs to be admitted, we are able to transfer the patient to other area hospitals that have available space. If other hospitals don't have space, then we keep calling until we find it," Moses said. "The same goes for our nursing staff. It's uncommon to share nurses between hospitals, but so many of those on-staff here are going above and beyond, both in terms of their hours and in their investment to the patients."

While this investment to the patients is certainly applicable to those who are admitted, Moses also underscored the importance of reassuring the ones who aren't.

"There's a lot of anxiety and fear surrounding this pandemic because it's something we as a society have never experienced before, but the reality is that, as scary as it is, the vast majority of COVID patients will recover. We try to remind our patients of that, even though we tell them

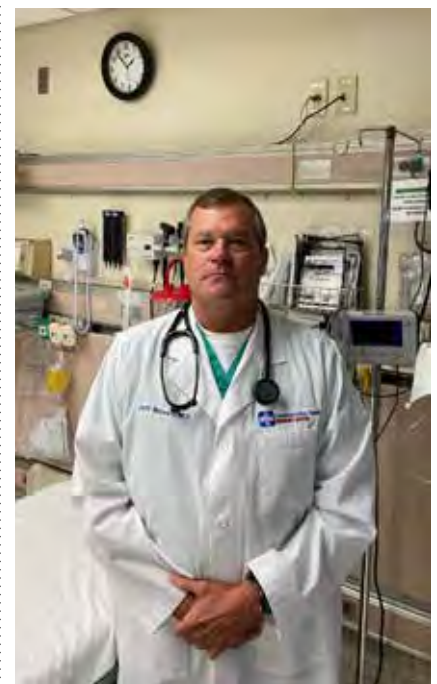
to come back if they get worse," Moses said.

Moses's optimistic diagnosis is closely related to the collaborative attitude of his medical peers. He shared that the hospital's staff holds weekly meetings to discuss the different policies surrounding the pandemic, and that, while the policies are continuing to evolve, it's because they're becoming more efficient and effective at managing it.

"As we go along, we continue to figure out better ways to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and maximize the resources we have. I think one thing that is particularly encouraging about how we're adapting to the circumstances is that none of our seven ER doctors have had the virus, even with daily exposure in the months since the first infected patient arrived in our hospital," Moses said.

For Moses, the key to COVID-19 is remaining steadfast.

"The best thing anyone can do is stay diligent. Keep wearing your masks over your mouth and nose. Keep washing your hands. Keep your distance. Keep your spirits up, if at all possible. There's no doubt in my mind that we're going to get through this, but it's just going to take a little while." 🐾



Dr. Jeff Moses. (photo Submitted)

A LEGACY OF SERVICE

MSU alumnus retires with nearly six decades of service

BY VANESSA BEESON

DR. BOB WILLIAMS has spent the better part of the last sixty years on the MSU campus in Starkville. When he arrived as a transfer student in 1959, Howell was the northern-most building on campus aside from a red livestock barn that stood where the Humphrey Coliseum is today. As he retired in the summer of 2020 after 56 years of service, his most recent role has involved shaping MSU's campus for the future.

Contributing to the MSU campus of tomorrow is all in a day's work for a numbers guy who grew up working on a cotton farm near Alligator, Mississippi.

"Alligator is in Bolivar County, heading north on Highway 61 from Cleveland to Memphis. You won't go through it. You'll go by it," said Williams, who always had his sights on an agricultural career.

Williams has experienced considerable change both on campus and in agriculture.

"When I came here, there were maybe 4,800 students total," he remembered, pointing out that last year's enrollment alone topped 22,000.

He talked about advancements in agriculture as well.

"Changes in equipment and farming practices have been tremendous. In high school, I drove a high boy that sprayed insecticides in cotton four rows at a time, now a high boy sprayer might spray 16 or 24 rows," he said. "Similarly, I remember in the 1980s, we thought 25 bushels of soybeans per acre was a good crop. Now, 50 bushels per acre is considered a decent yield," he said.

Throughout the years, he's kept his finger on the pulse of agriculture, serving more than 32 years as an agricultural

economist with the MSU Extension Service, retiring in 1995. His second act came that same year when he returned as a part-time project coordinator working for Dr. Rodney Foil, who was vice president of the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine at the time.

"My first project for Dr. Foil was helping coordinate a retirement reception for Jim Buck Ross, a CALS alumnus who served for 28 years as Mississippi's ag commissioner," said Williams, who noted that the event garnered around \$100,000 in scholarship funds.

Williams went on to organize other events and special projects throughout the years. Most recently, one of his favorite aspects of the position has been helping assist on several construction projects for the division, having a hand in how future students will experience the campus where he's spent so much of his life.

Over the last five years, Williams has assisted on the planning and construction process for both the new poultry science and animal and dairy sciences buildings. He has been involved in initial discussions to obtain funding approval through the Bureau of Building, Grounds and Real Property Management and the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning through to facility openings and serving as liaison for DAFVM administration in the process.

"I attended meetings on behalf of the vice president and helped communicate the division's needs and vision for a particular building. MAFES Engineer, David Howell, is the key person in this entire process and he tends to keep us all on track," he said.

As for his earlier career with the

MSU Extension Service, Williams was hired as an Extension economist and retired as state program leader for agriculture and natural resources. During those years, he collaborated on a large multistate project with the Tennessee Valley Authority that spanned decades, leading him to receive a distinguished service award from the Tennessee Valley Farm Family Association. He authored several publications on the economics of production and marketing of various row-crop commodities. In 1980, Williams served on Mississippi Governor William Winter's economic task force and in 1982, he testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Agricultural Subcommittee on behalf of the MSU Extension Service. He spent five years in leadership in the Mississippi Association of County Agricultural Agents, serving as president and has been honored by the MSU Alumni Association.

"During my time with Extension, I got to know all the agricultural agents in the state and was invited to speak all over the area including the Memphis Ag Club, which for someone who grew up in Alligator was a pretty big honor since they represented the pinnacle of mid-south agriculture for me," he said.

Williams began his collegiate journey at Sunflower Junior College, now Mississippi Delta Community College, and transferred to MSU after two years. From there, he worked toward his bachelor's, which was not without its challenges. He said he even considered leaving MSU at one time, but a professor helped him see it through.

"I struggled my first semester at Mississippi State and considered leaving



Dr. Bob Williams stands in the connector that joins the Animal and Dairy Sciences and Poultry Science buildings. (photo by David Ammon)



to join the army, but Professor Felix Edwards in the ag engineering department pulled me aside and said, ‘Don’t leave. I’ll try to get you a job and we’ll do our best to get you through the next three semesters.’ I followed his advice and stayed, and I give him a lot of credit for helping me finish,” Williams said.

After the momentum of earning a bachelor’s degree was behind him, a master’s degree seemed possible. The Department of Agricultural Economics had graduate assistantships, so Williams applied. He was accepted into the program and, with Dr. Verner Hurt’s help, graduated in May of 1963. When he was hired fulltime by the MSU Extension Service, Williams slowly worked toward earning his doctoral degree, which he received in 1977. He also served six months active duty in the Army National Guard and left as a captain after 13 years of service.

Williams said his favorite aspect of his career has been the people he’s met along the way.

“We have some good folks in the ag division and at Mississippi State and the

people aspect is really neat. I will miss that,” he said.

His proudest accomplishment, perhaps, has been the people he’s helped—MSU students—through his work to establish six scholarships. One scholarship, the Robert L. Williams Endowed Scholarship in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, was established in 2007 and bears his name.

“That was both a tremendous honor and a big surprise,” Williams remembered.

Williams said he and his wife, Nancy, have been blessed so they’re happy to pay it forward to current MSU students who could use a helping hand. One chance encounter with a member of the Bulldog family sticks out in particular to Williams as motivation to make giving a priority.

He recalled being in line behind a young student in Perry Cafeteria one day many years ago.

“This was back when Perry Cafeteria was the main place on campus to eat. The young man put turnip greens, black-eyed peas, a piece of cornbread and a glass of water on his tray. It seemed like that youngster was sacrificing something to

stay in college. That may have been his favorite meal, but I bet he would’ve liked a little meat, maybe dessert, or a drink. That left a lasting impression on me to help students who have that kind of dedication to get a degree at Mississippi State,” he said.

In 2019, an endowment was established by former vice president for agriculture, forestry, and veterinary medicine, Dr. Gregory A. Bohach, naming the Dr. Robert L. Williams DAFVM Stellar Staff Awards in his honor.

Dr. Reuben Moore, interim vice president of the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine, said Williams has contributed a lasting legacy of service to the division and Mississippi agriculture.

“Dr. Williams has been a valued part of the DAFVM administration. Throughout the years, he took on many difficult assignments and never complained,” Moore said. “While much of his work was behind the scenes, I sought his advice often because of his experience and devotion to MSU. His calm demeanor and wise counsel will be missed.” 🐾

LA GREEN

Fashion Goes

Small business owner spreads the spirit of Starkville throughout the Southeast

BY REAGAN POSTON

FROM AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD SELLING her handmade goods at Greenlee's Shoprite, the grocery store her family has owned for nearly 60 years, to a 24-year-old setting out with her own wholesale jewelry line, to now being the successful founder of the high-scale apparel boutique, L.A. Green, **LAUREN ANN COOPER** has always possessed an entrepreneurial spirit.

Now, the '08 College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' alumna has expanded her small business into a franchise in markets across the South. She credits her success to determination and lessons learned in the School of Human Sciences' fashion design and merchandising major, formerly the apparels, textiles, and merchandising program.

"It was challenging starting my own business, even though I was well-prepared after having worked closely with the faculty at MSU. I was so young when I started L.A. Green, and that made it difficult for me to be taken seriously," Cooper said.

Despite the uncertainties that come with entrepreneurship, once L.A. Green had a physical location, a shop on Starkville's Russell Street, the business's popularity only grew. Cooper shared—with no small amount of gratefulness—how hard it was for them to keep items on the shelf.

"We were selling things out of the back room before I'd even had a chance to put them on display," Cooper said. "That was when I knew we needed more space. We

moved to a storefront on Main Street not long after, and we've been there ever since."

Since opening shop in 2011, the business has been a proud supporter of both the T.K. Martin Center on campus and the Junior Auxiliary of Starkville, among other causes. Cooper and her management team are all active members of their local community, where Cooper serves on the Starkville Main Street Board through the Starkville Partnership. She also teaches Sunday school and volunteers regularly within her church. She shared that this hands-on involvement with the community has allowed them the ability to form more permanent bonds alongside the customer-turnover that's to be expected from a college town. For Cooper, this two-way dedication between business and customer has been the driving force behind the boutique's continued success.

"Sometimes, you hear horror stories about businesses that grow and fail just as quickly. Within our first year, I had several people offer to buy the store, but I wanted to get my roots set in Starkville before I tried to grow further. It was really important to me to build a loyal customer base, and I'm so glad that I did. My customers and my community really are a family to me. They've never let me down, and I work hard to make sure that I never let them down in return," Cooper said.

In order to provide the best retail experience possible for her customers, Cooper maintains a high standard of

service in both herself and her employees. This means everything from helping customers pick out personalized gifts for loved ones to readying a patron's dressing room ahead of their arrival with styled outfits in the correct size.

"I have a servant's heart. If I can make someone's day or make them feel good about themselves, then I've accomplished my goal," Cooper said.

With L.A. Green's inventory being geared towards trendy yet classic women, the service aspect of the boutique also includes a conscientious eye towards the apparel's quality, both in terms of fair-pay origin and well-made longevity.

When COVID-19 arrived in the U.S., Cooper had to change her purchasing decisions.

"When the pandemic started happening in America, we weren't getting our shipments as expected because a lot of our inventory might have a button or threads from China, and they were dealing with their own pandemic. Production significantly slowed, which was frustrating because our customers were still shopping, but we couldn't get our normal selections out on the floor," Cooper said.

Still, never one to give up, Cooper decided to double down with her domestic suppliers and promote the products that were American-made and had a lower chance of being delayed in production. Cooper shared that, even in light of COVID-19, customers have



continued to support L.A. Green.

“We were concerned that requesting patrons to wear masks would turn them away, but our customers have taken it all in stride. They pull on a mask, come in, say hello, and carry on with their shopping like normal,” Cooper shared.

With this unflinching dedication to the L.A. Green name, it’s no surprise that Cooper has successfully franchised the store to three additional locations: Tupelo, Nashville, and Atlanta, each owned and operated by an MSU graduate who worked directly with Cooper during their time in Starkville.

“Each of our stores remains very true to the Starkville L.A. Green standard of service, in part, I feel, because they’re run by MSU graduates. It was something of a coincidence, but it’s become a point of pride for me that the people who are upholding the boutique’s name are people who bleed maroon and white, just like me,” Cooper shared. “Bleeding maroon and white is not only

about the sports. It’s about the spirit.”

Cooper also went on to say that, while each of the boutique’s branches were holding fast to the ideals that made it L.A. Green, they have also developed something of their own personalities.

“As each location caters to its own customers, the product line-up is modified depending on the store. The owners of each franchise do a great job at engaging with their individual communities, getting a sense of what their customers are looking for, and communicating that to me so that we can order the styles we know they’ll like. For instance, the Tupelo store is downtown and tends to see a more classical line, while the Nashville and Atlanta stores get more young-professional and college-aged customers, so the stock is very trendy,” Cooper said.

In addition to the existing Starkville, Tupelo, Nashville, and Atlanta locations, Cooper hopes to one day open more franchise locations across the

Southeast and is always on the look-out for potential franchising partners.

“With our continued expansion, we’re striving to reach a large number of people while still keeping true to who we are as a small business and maintaining the high level of trust and cooperation between myself and my franchisees,” Cooper shared.

For Cooper, it’s all about maintaining the sense of community that comes with small business ownership.

“At the end of the day, I want to be able to help people, whether that’s through retail or through philanthropy or just by being a good community member,” Cooper said. “I love L.A. Green because it gives me the opportunity to do all of those things, and that’s what it takes to make a small business successful. You have to love it, even when it’s hard.” 🐾

L.A. Green can be found online at shoplagreen.com or on Instagram @shoplagreen and @la_lagreen.



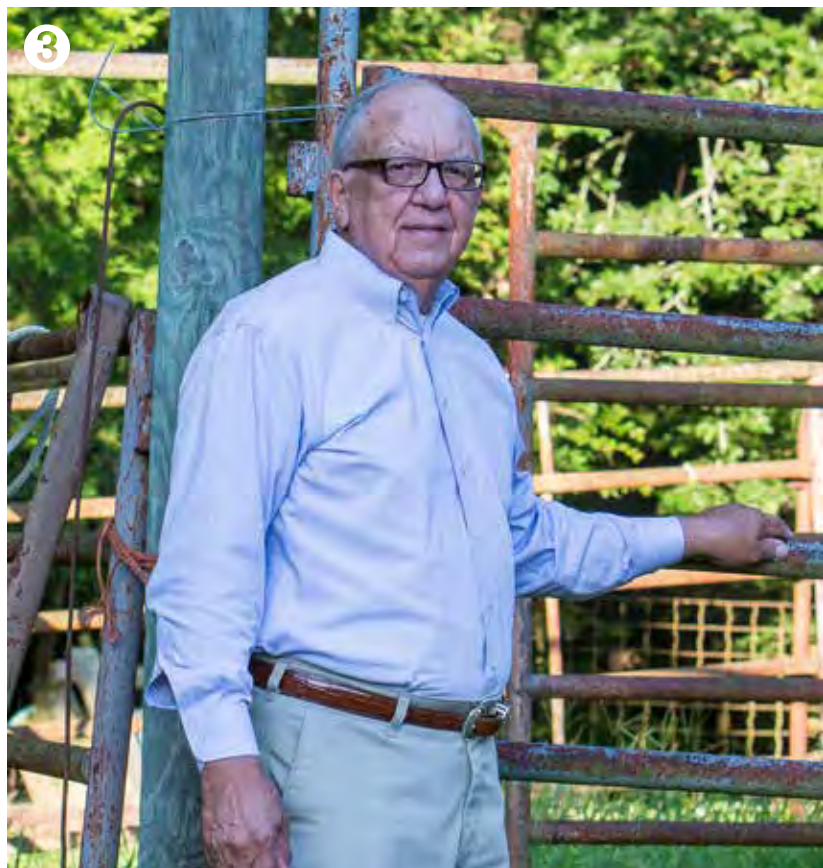
Lauren Ann Cooper at L.A. Green in Starkville, MS. (photo by David Ammon)

LEADERS IN Agriculture

CALS ALUMNI HELP FEED, CLOTHE, AND CARE FOR THE WORLD

BY VANESSA BEESON AND REAGON POSTON

EACH YEAR, we feature CALS alumni who are leaders in their respective fields, doing their part to help feed, clothe, and care for the world. Leaders in agriculture extend far beyond the farm and the scope of private industry. We refer to them as Leaders in Ag, as they all have a degree from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. This year's Leaders in Ag serve in various capacities from helming an institution of higher learning and leading the charge for research to fight global food insecurity to conducting important work for an international agency serving global humanitarian efforts to leading an association that supports the state's livestock producers to growing a crop that offsets the effects of environmental disasters. This year, our Leaders in Ag are **DR. MARK E. KEENUM**, president of Mississippi State University; **DR. PETER KLINCK**, who served as an agronomist and seed specialist for the International Committee of the Red Cross; **SAMMY BLOSSOM**, seasoned cattleman who spent decades as executive director of the Mississippi Cattlemen's Association; and **GABRIELA BRASHER**, longtime farmer who grows a value-added crop to help mitigate oil spills.



1. Gabriela Brasher, a farmer who grows a specialty crop to mitigate oil spills.
2. Peter cleaning apple cider wine bottles with his son, Duncan. The Klinck family maintains 150 wild apple trees used for sweet cider and sparkling cider wine.
3. Sammy Blossom, cattleman and former executive director of the Mississippi Cattlemen's Association.
4. Dr. Mark E. Keenum, Mississippi State University president.



MARK E. KEENUM

FROM PROVIDING CRITICAL INSIGHT for Mississippi's fledging catfish industry in the 1980s to molding MSU into the globally-relevant research engine it is today, **DR. MARK E. KEENUM** is passionate about feeding the world.

The Starkville native, who grew up in Corinth, earned three agricultural economics degrees in MSU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, graduating with bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in 1983, 84, and 88, respectively.

Keenum, who grew up in an ag family with a dad who worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture for 30-plus years, originally sought to earn an accounting degree but chose another major a few classes in.

"A friend told me about the agricultural business major in the agricultural economics department, which intrigued me because it married my dual interests of agriculture and business," Keenum said.

The switch proved auspicious as he would continue on earning his master's and doctoral degrees in the subject while working as a marketing specialist for the MSU Extension Service and a research associate for the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station.

For his master's and doctoral degrees, Keenum studied the economics of aquaculture, specifically, Mississippi's catfish industry, which was just taking off at that time.

"My dissertation resulted in two publications on Mississippi's catfish industry, including an extensive cash flow analysis. We published 20,000 copies of that analysis because there was a huge demand for economic information about the catfish industry," Keenum said.

Upon finishing his doctorate, he joined the agricultural economics department as a faculty member until a role as an advisor for U.S. Senator Thad Cochran took him to Washington, D.C. Keenum

went on to work for the senator for 18 years, eventually becoming his Chief of Staff and noted that his service in this position, in particular, molded him into the leader he is today more than anything else.

"I watched Senator Cochran make decisions in good times and bad, working with him through 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, and other major economic crises in our country," Keenum said. "He kept an even keel, and listened to and treated people with respect and dignity always. I admired his ability to manage and lead and it was a real blessing to get to spend as much time with him as I did."

While working with Senator Cochran helped hone his leadership skills, Keenum's time as Undersecretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, under President George W. Bush, ignited his passion for global food security.

"My role included oversight of the Foreign Agricultural Service and its humanitarian feeding programs, so I traveled to developing countries and saw how our work fed people who, in some cases, would not have survived had it not been for the support of our U.S. citizens and the programs we were administering. That created in me a burning passion to do more to feed people and help them feed themselves globally," he said.

One program Keenum spearheaded in that position was the Stocks-for-Food Initiative administered by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service and the Farm Service Agency. The Secretary of Agriculture at the time asked Keenum to find a way to help California migrant workers who were displaced by a severe drought.

Since Keenum was also in charge of the Farm Service Agency, which manages domestic agricultural programs, he oversaw stores of government-owned commodities including corn, cotton,

soybeans, rice, wheat, and peanuts that had been put up as collateral for marketing assistant loans to farmers. Keenum and his team devised a way to trade these commodities for finished food products, the first transaction of which included trading tons of raw peanuts for thousands of jars of peanut butter.

"The response was overwhelming. We were able to create a barter system where we swapped the raw commodity for a processed finished product that could be delivered directly to a USDA food distribution center," he said.

The Stocks-for-Food Initiative worked so well, \$120 million in bulk commodities were traded for finished food products the first year. Eighty percent of the food was distributed domestically through the USDA while 20 percent was dispersed internationally through the McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program.

"I'm very proud of the Stocks-for-Food Initiative. They say necessity is the mother of innovation. There was a need and we figured out how to meet that need through a unique method that had never been done before," said Keenum, who received America's Second Harvest's highest honor, Hunger's Hope for distinguished public service, in 2008 because of his involvement initiating the program.

As MSU president for the past 12 years, Keenum continues to make global food security a major priority for himself and for the land-grant institution he helms.

In 2010, Keenum helped create a partnership between the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization, or FAO, and MSU. For the past decade, the collaboration has addressed animal and veterinary public health, plant health, fish health, food safety, and nutrition programs while providing the opportunity for MSU students to engage in FAO-sponsored programs around the

Dr. Mark E. Keenum (photo by Megan Bean)



world. In 2014, FAO recognized MSU as a Center of Knowledge and a member of the Global Aquaculture Advancement Partnership. In 2018, the university was selected to be a Candidate FAO Reference Center on Aquaculture Biosecurity and Antimicrobial Resistance. MSU is also engaged in meaningful work with the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, which selected MSU to lead the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish that same year. For several years, the university has been an important partner of USAID's Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Soybean Value Chain Research at the University of Illinois and is engaged in the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems at the University of Florida.

Currently, Keenum serves as chairman of both the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research and the Board of International Food and Agricultural Development.

"It is a real labor of love for me to be involved in working in innovative fields of science focused on how we can produce more agricultural products, including row crops, livestock, and aquaculture in a more efficient and effective way so that we can feed the world," Keenum said.

As he continues to help lead the fight in global food security, Keenum says there is still more to do.

"When I talk to high school and college students today who are products of the 21st century, I tell them while they'll see many exciting advances in science,

technology, and medicine, they will also see the world change and evolve," said Keenum, noting that the world population is expected to increase from 7.5 billion to 10 billion by 2050.

"We have a hard time feeding everyone on our planet in 2020. How we feed another three billion people that will be coming to our global dinner table in the span of three short decades is going to be a huge challenge for these young people. This is their future and what they'll be challenged with."

Keenum said agriculture will continue to be a key aspect in solving that challenge.

"Research our world class scientists are doing right here at MSU will help advance agricultural production to meet these growing needs," he said.

SAMMY BLOSSOM

BEING A CATTLEMAN is a world **SAMMY BLOSSOM** has always known. The 1970 animal science alumnus who grew up on a small cattle and sheep farm in Scott County, Mississippi, would end up serving the state's cattlemen for 16 years as executive director of the Mississippi Cattlemen's Association.

As executive director, Blossom was in charge of the day-to-day operations of both the Mississippi Cattlemen's Association and the Mississippi Beef Council. The association addresses local, state, and federal issues that impact the long-term viability of Mississippi cattlemen while the council administers programs of beef promotion, education, research, and consumer and industry information.

Blossom said his favorite part of the role was the chance to meet with cattle farmers regularly.

"With about 14,000 cattlemen and women throughout Mississippi, I had a chance to meet a lot of them over the years. I loved visiting farms and seeing what the operations were like," he said.

Blossom's work included lobbying for issues important to cattlemen at the state and federal level and helping the 60-plus county cattlemen's associations be successful. The team organized annual meetings and events, published a monthly magazine, and ran the Beef Barn concession stand at the Dixie National Livestock Show and Rodeo and the Mississippi State Fair. Blossom retired in 2016 and received the Distinguished Service Award from the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation, the organization's highest honor, that same year.

He considers his work with the Mississippi Cattlemen's Foundation as one of his proudest accomplishments. In 2000, Blossom helped the organization fund a scholarship for the children and grandchildren of the state's cattlemen and women.

"Through the Mississippi Cattlemen's Foundation, money generated from the Mississippi cattlemen's car tag goes into an endowment that several people have



Mr. Sammy Blossom (photo by Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation)

funded. Earnings from that endowment allow us to award about \$65,000 in scholarships annually that goes to about 50 students each year," Blossom said.

Prior to his time with the Mississippi Cattlemen's Association, Blossom managed cooperative supply stores in Louisiana and Mississippi for 22 years, spending 11 of those years at the Lowndes County Co-op in Columbus. It was there that his journey to executive director began when he volunteered to reenergize his local county cattlemen's association in the late 1980s.

"We moved back to Lowndes County in 1987. Joe Love was our county agent with the MSU Extension Service and he and I revived the cattlemen's association in our area. I went on to stay involved and was an area vice president and then served as state president. In 1998, I joined the staff."

Blossom, who managed cattle operations in Mississippi and Kentucky early in his career, has always kept cows. His participation in the FFA kicked off his journey to Mississippi State, where his time on the MSU Livestock Judging Team is what he remembers most fondly.

"The high point of my years at MSU were my experiences on the livestock judging team. The friends I made there and the trip to the national judging contest in Chicago are my best memories of college," he said. "The judging team is a great way for people to learn new skills, not just judging cattle, but public speaking, decision-making, and how to defend your ideas. I got a lot out of it and I still have friends today that I met during my time on the team."

Both FFA and livestock judging left such an impression on Blossom, that he continues to pay it forward, mentoring youth throughout his life, serving on the 4-H Foundation Board during his tenure with the Mississippi Cattlemen's Association, and still helping with FFA to this day.

"It's important for young people to be involved in these programs. They build a lot of life and leadership skills and gain a knowledge of hard work and dedication. With livestock programs they have to be responsible every day for the care, feeding, and grooming of those animals. It does something to build skills you can carry throughout your whole life," he said.

GABRIELA BRASHER

GABRIELA BRASHER, a 1985 Mississippi State soil science graduate and the proud co-owner of the kenaf-based business, Kengro, relocated more than 4,000 miles to follow her passion for agriculture.

Brasher grew up in Rümlang, Switzerland, next-door to a small dairy farm, where she got her first glimpse of farm life, and as she grew, so too did her desire to cultivate the land.

“Switzerland is very small, about a third of the area of Mississippi; there’s limited farmlands, so if you want to farm, you pretty much have to immigrate. My father and I both wanted to farm, so when he saw a newspaper advertisement for farmlands near Minter City, Mississippi, he came to visit. Within the year, my father owned the property,” Brasher said.

Though her father now owned the farm, it would be another two years before Brasher could finish high school and begin to forage her own path to Mississippi. In April of 1982, Brasher had the opportunity to spend the season with family friends in Bruce, who were also farmers, and by January of 1983, she was enrolled at Mississippi State to study soil science.

Brasher graduated in 1987 both with her master’s degree in composite agronomy

and a pioneer’s spirit, one that was met in stride by her husband, Brent, a fellow MSU alum who she met at a cotton short course.

“Farmers are entrepreneurs. Even before we met, Brent and I were both looking for alternative crops that could be used to better the environment and set us apart in the agricultural market. When we were introduced to kenaf, we were amazed,” Brasher said.

Kenaf is a tall-growing, value-added crop related to cotton and okra. Brasher shared that, with processing, the product is able to break down the hydrocarbons in oil spills and remain fully organic and compostable, making it a perfect choice for the environmentally-conscious.

Of course, the success they have with kenaf didn’t come without a great deal of trial and error.

“When we first started working with the crop, we partnered with MSU on research. The university did a lot of research on kenaf, but they were a great help to us with the agronomics research, specifically. They helped us figure out what to do to optimize the growth of the plants, how best to fertilize, how to control pests,” Brasher said.

Once they understood the intricacies of kenaf growing, the Brashers set

out to start their company, Kengro. They’ve since opened a two-location operation that includes their 450-acre farm in Tallahatchie County and a separation plant in Charleston, Mississippi, where they separate the core fiber from the bark. The core fiber is processed into oil absorption and bioremediation products, and the bark is made into mats that protect against soil erosion and can control

sediment. Brasher shared that, though the majority of their customers use the fiber product as an environmentally-friendly way to mitigate commercial oil spills it can also be used for oil cleanup in the garage. No matter the use, Kengro’s products are entirely organic.

“I think what sets us apart from other companies with similar products is the fact that kenaf is both environmentally neutralizing and is a renewable resource. Other businesses might sell products that have to be mined or products that aren’t biodegradable, but when we started Kengro, we were very conscientious about being as ecofriendly as possible,” Brasher said.

There are challenges, however, with being in the oil clean-up industry, even with an ecofriendly product produced by Kengro. With COVID driving the price of oil to record-lows, there is less business for Brasher and her family.

“We’re in a bit of a dilemma at the moment,” Brasher said. “We’ve got a lot of overstock because of the unpredictable market this season, and we’ve got all the kenaf we planted last year when the market was normal.”

Though the future is unpredictable for Brasher, she maintains the intrepid spirit that brought her across the ocean to live the American agriculturalist’s dream. Beyond maintaining that spirit herself, she has passed it onto her children as well.

“All three of our children have contributed their strengths to Kengro. Our oldest daughter helped with supply chain and operational management, our youngest daughter whipped our online representation and social media presence into shape, and our son is very much hands-on with the farming. He’s the only one I see continuing with the agricultural world, but our daughters are out striking their own paths in the business world,” Brasher said. “If either of them decides to come back to agriculture, there’s plenty of opportunities out there for determined women. It’s lonely sometimes, but I’ve always had all the help and support in Mississippi State that I needed to reach my goals.”



Mrs. Gabriela Brasher (photo submitted)

PETER KLINCK

WHETHER CULTIVATING seeds in war-torn nations or reaping the harvest on his own Vermont farm, **PETER KLINCK**, a '90 agronomy alumnus, has spent a lifetime committed to restoring and strengthening the integrity of local agriculture.

The Norwich, Vermont native began his humanitarian journey by volunteering for the United States Peace Corps in 1984.

His first assignment was an agricultural development project in Niger, where Klinck collaborated with the country's ministry of agriculture in one of their five seed multiplication centers, giving technical advice on a project designed by MSU. It was there that he crossed paths with Drs. James C. "Curt" Delouche and Warren Couvillion, former professors of seed technology and agricultural economics, respectively, working as consultants on the national cereal seed program. They encouraged Klinck to look into a master's program studying seed technology at Mississippi State.

After serving in the Peace Corps, Klinck took their advice and went on to earn a master's degree in agronomy focusing on seed technology from MSU.

By 1994, Klinck had returned to international humanitarian efforts in war-torn countries. He spent two years partnering with various non-governmental agencies working towards food sustainability in Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Tanzania, before being recruited by the International Committee of the Red Cross for his seed technology background. He was sent to Sierra Leone to aid in the local seed procurement and distribution program.

"Other delegate agronomists employed by the Red Cross may not have seed technology training and often end up with seed varieties whose microecology doesn't always correspond to the targeted climate zone, resulting in poor harvests. The seed technology degree I earned from MSU allowed me to create onsite quality control seed selection and processing programs, and reintroduce locally-obtained cereal



Peter walking with his field officers, Mamadou and Edgar Mena, also with the Red Cross, to meet village elders to discuss agriculture assistance in the Paoua region of the Central African Republic in 2009. (photo submitted)

crops that rebuild the biodiversity toward pre-war levels," Klinck said.

Klinck explained that the Red Cross—the first international humanitarian agency established in the world—is present in any given conflict zone to protect and assist victims of armed conflict while remaining impartial, politically neutral, and independent. Over the course of his 16 years as a dedicated ICRC seed technologist, Klinck made an impact on twelve countries and territories, where he honed the practice of seed distribution.

In Sierra Leone, his team distributed 1,200 metric tons of rice seed varieties to 40,000 households on two separate occasions. What made the endeavor so special was that the rice seed distributed were local varieties that Klinck had specifically procured from adjacent communities and quality-tested to ensure that they could be sustainably farmed in the future.

"The effort to reinstate the local biodiversity of crop species is important not only ecologically but also from a food sustainability standpoint. The varieties that grow native or were developed over generations on the land are those with which local farmers have the most knowledge and experience. Providing a high-quality variety means the communities are more able to continue cultivating in the future," Klinck said.

Klinck also invested his efforts in

the former Soviet Union Republics of Georgia, Abkhazia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, where the seed program he developed in Sierra Leone was again employed. Each country he visited saw Klinck investing in the economy and the community, which in turn, allowed their populations to gain back some purchasing power and reestablish the produce marketing structure.

Though Klinck has since retired from the International Committee of the Red Cross, his dedication both to local ecology and food sustainability has remained steadfast. He now owns and operates a 77-acre farmstead in Tunbridge, Vermont, where he maintains nearly 150 wild apple trees used for sweet cider and sparkling cider wine. He also participates in the current land use forest management program through the state of Vermont, where he manages the forests on his property following a local forester's consultant plan for species management and production, which includes wildlife habitat, wetland protection, and clean water.

"My plan, specifically, is for the management of hardwoods, which are important to the economy and ecology. It's a gradual plan over time, but hopefully one that can make a lasting impact for future harvests of mature timber," Klinck said. "It's not a big-business farm, but it's as sustainable or self-sufficient as one could hope." 🐾

IT'S A SIBLING THING

CALS alumni siblings share passion for landscape architecture

BY TAYLOR VOLLIN

A SIBLING IS LIKE a built-in best friend. They are a shoulder to cry on, a confidant, a partner in mischief, and a teacher. Aside from the occasional fights and bickering, having a sibling offers a friendship difficult to find in anyone else. The luckiest of pairs have a connecting factor aside from the genes they share, such as a passion that shapes their lives. Two groups of siblings discovered their shared passion in landscape architecture.

TARIQ, YAZAN, and AMER MAHADIN, three brothers from Amman, Jordan, have a deeply rooted passion for outdoor design. In 1987, their father, Professor Kamel O. Mahadin, a fellow in the American Society of Landscape Architects, founded Jordan's leading landscape architectural firm, MK Associates. While the two younger brothers have found their way back to the family business, Tariq is blazing another trail in the Lone Star State.

The 2011 MSU graduate received his master's in landscape architecture and is currently a project manager with CEI Engineering Associates, Inc., a Dallas-based firm providing services around the country. Whether it's

figuring out the specifics of an airport design, land development, flood protection, hydrology or hydraulics, Tariq said he is always up for a challenge.

"My passion is site grading and addressing the physical challenges of the sites, which is exciting for me because I enjoy figuring out ways to solve problems," Tariq said.

As a current doctoral student of urban planning and public policy at the University of Texas at Arlington, staying stateside offers Tariq the ability to accomplish goals he has for himself professionally so he can continue to best serve his clients.

"My goal is to keep obtaining knowledge about our profession and stay



Yazan, Tariq, and Amer Mahadin (photo submitted)

up to date with new technologies and solutions that help reduce the cost of construction for my clients,” Tariq said.

Back home in Jordan, Yazan serves as CEO of the firm their father founded. After receiving his bachelor’s degree from Cairo University in Egypt, Yazan pursued his master’s degree in landscape architecture at MSU, where he graduated in 2015. He said his passion is using landscape architecture as a means to mitigate climate change.

“My motto is to use landscape architecture for survival,” Yazan said. “For years, I’ve been an advocate in promoting landscape architecture to protect and enhance the environment, so my goal is to continue using my field to advocate and create new ways to save the environment from our current climate crisis.”

Yazan’s drive to address climate change through landscape design began when he was working on his degree at Mississippi State. He was a member of the team that created a design for a green infrastructure and training demonstration site on the MSU campus, resulting in a second place finish in the 2013 EPA Rainworks Challenge. He was also a team member in the 2015 Come Alive outside challenge, a national challenge to inspire children to spend more time outdoors. This team designed a school garden for Memphis Catholic School in Memphis, Tennessee, which was built in 2016.

Yazan also competed with his brother Amer in two designs for Archicontest—a place where designers from all over the world are invited to develop their ideas in the context of an international competition. The brothers, along with other designers at MK Associates, submitted two designs for a sport center in New York, garnering first and third place finishes. Their winning idea was inspired by the relationship between sports and the community.

“Our first-place design was inspired by the important relationship between

a sports center and its community, where the center contributes to social infrastructure, as well as health. This was reflected in the project by considering how the urban settings resemble the human body. The sports center design is intended to maintain and improve the human body, while also improving human health,” Yazan said.

For Yazan and Amer, being able to compete and win together in an international competition fostered a deeper connection within a family passion that is unique to the pair. In the third-place idea, Amer was excited for his team, comprised of students and engineers from their firm, to place in the top three, utilizing a concept that connected the multiple architectural styles in Manhattan.

“The site is situated on Madison Avenue, which encompasses traditional, mixed, gothic, utilitarian, and contemporary architectural styles. We sought to connect the styles surrounding the site by utilizing an iconic yet context friendly design. Our approach was to create a contemporary design using elements from the early 20th century, when Manhattan experienced its largest growth, to remind us of the bygone era,” Amer said.

Amer’s landscape architecture journey began with a computer science degree from the University of Jordan in Amman. After taking a year to work at MK Associates, and with inspiration from his father and brothers, he made the decision to follow in the family footsteps and pursue a master’s in landscape architecture. Amer graduated from MSU in 2016 with the degree before returning to MK Associates.

Now, the landscape architect works with his brother, Yazan, and father specializing in architectural, planning, and engineering designing on a variety of projects including urban plazas, roof terraces, residential communities, parks, and resorts. Amer is driven to put the family practice to use by changing landscapes in their

capital city, where the field is less known.

“Landscape architecture is still a field that we need to explore and consider more in our region in the Middle East. My goal is to expand our firm and educate people about landscape architecture,” he said.

BUILDING BRIDGES

SOME 700 MILES APART, siblings **KATIE (BULLMAN) BELLENO** and **MARK BULLMAN** maintain their connection through phone calls and the common ground of landscape architecture. The Starkville natives and MSU alumni both have had an interest in the field from an early age.

In their backyard, Katie and Mark’s parents—LaDonna and Mark Sr.—built a greenhouse to nurture their children’s interest in plants. Aside from the pair’s daily competitions to name the most plants correctly, days growing up in the Bullman household were spent propagating vegetation as a family, growing not only an array of plants but also a love of horticulture.

“Our parents played a large part once they saw that we were both interested in the subject. Building us a greenhouse and nurturing those interests was something special they wanted to do for us. They were a big part in helping us develop those interests, and they still are,” Katie said.

The pair went on to enroll in a vocational program at Starkville High School, in which they studied horticulture. For Katie, the 2011 MSU landscape architecture major, studying horticulture opened the door for a future in landscape architecture.

“I have always been a plant nerd and love learning the different types of species,” Katie said. “My interest developed as we went through those classes, and I wanted to know what I could do in the field. I wanted to make something beautiful through it, and horticulture was the steppingstone for landscape architecture and landscape contracting.”

Katie now lives in Libertyville, Illinois an hour north of Chicago working as

Mark Bullman and Katie Bullman Belleno (photo submitted)



an associate landscape architect at Rosborough Partners, Inc. Though she primarily focuses on commercial design, Katie said she is ecstatic to get to dive into more residential design as well. Since her start with Rosborough Partners, Inc. in 2016, Katie has transitioned from Mississippi techniques and practices, to those unique to Illinois.

“The climates and zones for plant material in Illinois are very different than in Mississippi. For example, we plan for cold weather here compared to Mississippi, so we build walls, structures, and elements preparing for a freeze. I also had to learn a new palette of plants that grow here, as opposed to those that do well in the South,” Katie said.

Katie and Mark enjoy being able to explore and compare the differences

between their work, since Mark has remained in Starkville. Mark, older by three and a half years, started at East Mississippi Community College and then moved on to MSU where he graduated with his bachelor’s degree in landscape contracting in 2008. With the same start in the field, pursuing this degree was something he said he knew he would do, considering he felt it came easy to him.

“It was something I always thought I had an eye for, and thought I was good at it. When you enjoy doing something, it also makes it easier to learn more about it, and I’ve always enjoyed landscaping,” Mark said.

The owner of Bullman Yardworks, Mark said his company handles any project including lawn maintenance, landscaping, and irrigation. From brick

paving, deck building, water features, to building complete residential outdoor kitchen areas, Mark has enjoyed every minute of his hands-on, outdoor career.

“I’ve come to really enjoy the hard-scaping, which would be jobs like brick paving, but I also enjoy when we work on big, residential, outdoor kitchens. We have gotten to transform backyards just by adding retaining walls, water features, or other elements,” Mark said. “It’s hard to have one favorite project or one I’m most proud of because I have enjoyed them all.”

Along with his work, the siblings stay connected, calling as often as possible, bonding over their love of the field.

“I have always thought it was neat that we shared this field because we could relate about work and projects,” Mark said. 🐾

Development

Georgia couple's gifts create scholarships at MSU

Georgia couple make lasting impact on students

By Amy Cagle

GENEROUS SUPPORT from Mississippi State alumni couple **Fred and MariAnna Brown** of Roswell, Georgia honors their commitment to higher education at the largest university in their home state. A recently established deferred gift from the couple will further their support of the land-grant institution, primarily through student scholarships.

The Browns earned degrees from Mississippi State with the assistance of student loans and through their philanthropy hope to help make an education possible for future students. The couple's gift will create three academic-based endowed scholarships and provide support for the university's music department.

In the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the MariAnna and Fred Brown Endowed Scholarship will benefit students following in Fred Brown's academic footprint by studying in the Department of Biochemistry, Molecular



MariAnna and Fred Brown. (photo submitted)

Biology, Entomology, and Plant Pathology. Recipients must have a 3.0 GPA, demonstrate financial need, and meet established criteria.

"Scholarships truly make a positive impact and give people a better life. A student either can be hindered by his or her personal hardships or use hardships as the motivation to reach for success. We want to encourage future recipients to meet challenges in their lives and succeed

along their paths toward future careers with our scholarships as incentives," said MariAnna Brown.

Fred Brown shares the goal of their deferred gift.

"Education is important to the quality of life for everyone, and we want students who hold our scholarships to work hard and be rewarded with a clean slate after graduation, free from the financial burdens of education," he said.



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MSU's Staggers honored for achievements

*National Agricultural
Alumni Development
Association honors
Staggers*

By Georgia Sisson

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY Foundation fundraiser **William "Will" Staggers** of Starkville is being recognized by the National Agricultural Alumni Development Association for his early career success and leadership.

Staggers is receiving the organization's Up and Coming Award, which honors individuals with two to five years of experience in agricultural advancement professions. Staggers joined the MSU Foundation in 2015 and serves as director of development for MSU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, MSU Extension, and the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Experiment Station. Both Extension and MAFES serve all of Mississippi's 82 counties.

"For a long time, NAADA has been the lead organization for professionals who work in development and alumni tracks at land-grant institutions and agricultural circles here in the U.S., so to be recognized in that arena is flattering, and



William "Will" Staggers. (photo by Beth Wynn)

I'm really honored to have been selected," Staggers said.

The Starkville native graduated from MSU in 2010 with a bachelor's degree in kinesiology from the College of Education. Staggers then worked as a physical science teacher and football coach at Quitman High School, later returning to Starkville and working in commercial insurance. He began his career at MSU as an accounts payable specialist in the Department of Procurement and Contracts prior to joining the MSU Foundation.

Prior to his director role, Staggers served as assistant director for CALS, Extension and MAFES. He succeeds Jud Skelton, who has the new role of senior director of development for real estate services for the MSU Foundation.

Regarding his recent award, Staggers said he owes his success to those who have helped him along the way.

"I think largely this award has as much to do with Jack McCarty, Jud Skelton, and Charlie Weatherly as it does me," Staggers said. "These guys paved the way to create the level of philanthropy in the College of Agriculture and Life

Sciences, as well as MSU Extension, and I'm fortunate to be behind the wheel now."

McCarty and Weatherly each had a tenure as the primary fundraiser for CALS. Today, McCarty is executive director of development for the MSU Foundation and Weatherly is the college's senior director of development emeritus.

Staggers continued, "I also can't say enough about what our alumni and friends of the college do to help us on an annual and perpetual basis to further opportunities. Their loyalty is unwavering and that's what makes this college and our university so special."

NAADA has provided education, support, and recognition to professionals and volunteers dedicated to advancing agriculture and related disciplines through land-grant and other colleges of agricultural sciences and partner programs for more than 40 years. For more information, visit www.naada.org.

To learn more about how to support MSU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, MSU Extension, or MAFES, contact Staggers at 662-325-2837 or wstaggers@foundation.msstate.edu.

Horticulture alum offers inaugural internship

Watson and Jackson County Master Gardeners fund once in a lifetime opportunity to work world's largest indoor flower show

By Reagan Poston

AN MSU ALUMNUS provided an opportunity for a horticulture major to participate in the largest indoor flower show in the world.

Phillip Watson, graduate of MSU's horticulture program, established an internship for a Mississippi State horticulture major to spend a week in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to work alongside him at the world-renowned Philadelphia Flower Show.

Watson, a 2019 CALS distinguished alumnus, is a long-time ally of the university, from serving on the faculty advisory board for the plant and soil sciences department, to serving as a guest lecturer on numerous occasions, to his most recent contribution: creating an internship in the hopes of giving up-and-coming horticulturists the opportunities they need to succeed.

"We didn't have internships that I was aware of when I went to MSU, so I learned through mentors and by trial and error, but there was so much more knowledge I sought. I want to contribute to this next generation by providing chances to learn that knowledge," Watson said.

Watson established the internship to create an opportunity for a

student who might not have the financial means to attend a flower show of that scope and size. This new internship—funded by Watson and the Jackson County Master Gardeners—

included airfare, meals, housing and miscellaneous expenses for the full week. "It's the breadth and location of the internship that really make it special. There are so many opportunities in the Northeast that are available to newly-minted and adventurous horticulturists. This internship covers as many of them as we could possibly fit into a week," Watson said.

Watson's inaugural intern, Lauren Waters of Dothan, Alabama, had a week full of professional enrichment opportunities. In her time with Watson, she was able to shadow him as he judged the largest horticultural event in the world and throughout his live broadcast of QVC's Garden Event Day, giving her a valuable glimpse into the life of a horticulturist in the entertainment industry. Waters's primary duty while taking part in the internship, however, was helping florist Barbara King design and assemble the show's main entryway. Waters was in charge of cleaning and storing flowers to be incorporated into the entrance design and shared that, although the actual mechanical

assembly was relatively simple, the process became exponentially more extravagant as layers of exotic florals were added.

Watson said that Waters fit his target student entirely.

"I chose Lauren for several reasons. I could see from her resume and from speaking to her that she'd already taken it upon herself to seek continuing education opportunities from previous internships she'd had. Her mind seemed to be open to a variety of specific careers within her field of study, and she had a clear vision about what she would like to get out of her internship and how it might help her career," Watson said.

Waters is a senior horticulture major who worked on a handful of other meaningful internships before being offered the chance to work with Watson. Waters said she applied for the same reason Watson created the internship: she wanted to seize the opportunity for greatness.

"I was lucky enough to have had a previous internship at Longwood Gardens where I worked in the conservatory, and I wanted the opportunity to visit again and rekindle connections I made the first time. Not to mention that experiencing the Philadelphia Flower Show in person is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," Waters said.



Phillip Watson and inaugural intern Lauren Waters. (photo submitted)

Gita and Sonny Ramaswamy. (photo submitted)

Ramaswamys honor family through student scholarship

Former faculty/alum make infinite impact

By Amy Cagle

DRS. SONNY AND GITA RAMASWAMY will always hold Mississippi State University in high regard. Although they make their home in Redmond, Washington, for a time their life centered around Mississippi's largest research university. A new endowed student scholarship now connects them in perpetuity with MSU, where they spent the early years of their distinguished careers.

Originally from India, the couple has been married almost 40 years. The Ramaswamys came to the United States to study for their doctorates; Sonny in 1976 and Gita in 1978. They moved to Starkville in 1982 for faculty positions at MSU. In the years that followed, they held numerous roles over some 15 years in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Sonny was a professor of entomology, and Gita was a professor of human environment and design.

The Ramaswamys are strong proponents of education and longtime financial supporters of educational institutions in the United States and India. Their most recent gift at MSU establishes the Padmavathi and P.R. Narasimhan Endowed Scholarship in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences in tribute to Gita's late parents.

In India, P.R. Narasimhan, Gita's father, had a long career with his country's



government as chief engineer for All India Radio. Her mother, Padmavathi Narasimhan, was instrumental in Gita's education in the United States. She motivated Gita to achieve her Ph.D. in toxicology from Mississippi State, after she earned her Bachelor of Science with honors in zoology from Bangalore University and Master of Science in entomology from the University of Agricultural Sciences, both from India, and a Master of Science in textiles from Michigan State University.

At MSU, recipients of the Padmavathi and P.R. Narasimhan Endowed Scholarship will be students studying in a wide array of fields. Preference will be given to students from underrepresented backgrounds with financial need.

"Mississippi State University is a phenomenal institution that places focus on helping change the human condition through education, through discovery, and through the application of knowledge that positively changes lives," said Gita. "We are very pleased to offer this scholarship at the university."

Sonny echoed her sentiment in citing why the couple wanted to establish the scholarship.

"A Mississippi State University education is important. We hope the recipients of our scholarship will use their education from the university to change the human condition for the better and impact the world around them," he said.

Over their careers, the Ramaswamys have mentored numerous students, along with many colleagues. They enjoy helping others seek knowledge that can create global impact.

In 1997, the Ramaswamys left MSU when they were recruited by Kansas State University. Sonny became head and distinguished professor of the Department of Entomology, and Gita served as professor and interim head of the university's Apparel, Textiles, and Interior Design Department. From there, they held administrative leadership positions at Purdue University and Oregon State University.

Gita is the recipient of several awards and honors for her research and teaching efforts, and she's the author of numerous research articles. Sonny has published a book, book chapters, and over 150 journal articles, and he also holds a patent.

For his accomplishments, Sonny is the recipient of a number of awards and honors. Like Gita, Sonny earned two of his degrees in India—Bachelor of Science in agriculture and Master of Science in entomology, both from the University of Agricultural Sciences in Bangalore. His doctorate is in entomology from Rutgers University.

Following roles in academia, the couple moved to the Washington, D.C., area in 2012, where Sonny served for six years as then President Barack Obama's appointee as the director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Since 2018, he has been the president of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

Following her distinguished career in academia, Gita served as a senior advisor to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Chief Scientist in then President Barack Obama's administration. In 2015, she retired professionally.

Kipp Brown honored by longtime mentor

Talented students benefit from Livestock Judging Endowed Scholarship

By Amy Cagle

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY has a rich history in 4-H Youth Development, and an endowed scholarship will continue the impact of students who are part of livestock judging teams. The **Kipp Brown Livestock Judging Endowed Scholarship** honors its namesake, an MSU agriculture and life sciences alumnus and Extension Livestock Coordinator who recently retired from MSU.

The scholarship was born from a passionate desire to ensure the legacy of livestock judging at the land-grant institution that dates back to the 1920s. The benefactor is **Bill Able**, who was head of the Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences at MSU from 1991 to 1996. Over time, Able hopes members of the Extension community and fellow alumni will help grow the scholarship endowment for Brown which is the first at MSU specifically for talented livestock judging students.

“By establishing the scholarship, I wanted to salute Kipp for his interest and encouragement of young people in Mississippi and give him credit for his longtime efforts of infusing energy and passion into the judging program,” said Able. “The scholarship will help MSU recruit high-caliber students in Mississippi who often initially enroll at junior colleges and

then find ample scholarship opportunities at senior colleges outside the state.”

Able lives in Miami, Oklahoma, and returns to MSU often to visit with former colleagues. He was a professor at Kansas State University and later director of that institution’s International Meat and Livestock Program where he coached KSU to six national championships. Along with his MSU master’s degree, Able earned a bachelor’s from Oklahoma State and a Ph.D. from the University of Kentucky. His career roles also include executive secretary for the American International Charolais Association and Vice President of Academic Affairs at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College. Today, he oversees Able Publishing Company.

For Brown, the scholarship has special meaning because it was created by Able, his longtime mentor who has judged every livestock competition in the nation. Brown recalls trying to mold and pattern himself after Able as he developed his own style in the ring at livestock shows. In his career, Brown has amassed over 30 years of experience judging all species of livestock at all show levels.

“Judging is the foundation of any 4-H livestock project, and MSU wants young people to judge livestock to learn accountability and life skills,” said Brown. “Our university has a heritage of this success, and

people want to engage with our judging teams because of their solid skill sets.”

The MSU judging team is open to students in any major. It is an important milestone in the lives of student members who invest nearly three-quarters of their weekends traveling across the country each year to hone their skills during competitions where they evaluate, select, place, and learn the various livestock species – beef cattle, goats, sheep, and swine.

Future recipients of the Kipp Brown Livestock Judging Endowed Scholarship in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences must be Mississippi residents and active members of the Animal Sciences Senior Livestock Judging Team who have finished in the top 10 at a National 4-H or Future Farmers of America live animal evaluation contest. Priority will be given to students who meet established criteria and who are enrolled in the Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences.

“It is an honor to work at something I love and be recognized with this scholarship that can help continue to grow the university’s livestock judging program,” Brown said. “The MSU program would not be possible without the support of past and present faculty, staff, coaches, alumni, livestock producers, and students. I believe strongly in this program and appreciate the benefits it can provide

Bill Able (left) and Kipp Brown. (photo by Beth Wynn)




to our participants and the livestock industry as a whole.”

A native of Winona, Mississippi, Brown worked with the USDA, the Mississippi Department of Agriculture, and the Mississippi Cattlemen’s Association prior to joining MSU’s Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences in 1993 as an assistant livestock judging coach. He then spent 15 years as an area agent before becoming extension livestock judging coordinator

in 2013. He has worked with the Dixie National Collegiate Beef Judging Contest, the most prominent all beef contest in the nation, since 1989. He has been an integral team member of the Mississippi Junior Livestock Program and the Livestock Judging Program throughout the years.

“The Kipp Brown Livestock Judging Endowed Scholarship opens new opportunities for students,” said John Blanton, animal and dairy sciences

department head. “Judging programs are critical for the development of future leaders in agriculture, and scholarships increase the accessibility of these programs to more students.” 

Gifts to grow the scholarship endowment may be made online at www.msufoundation.com. For gift planning, contact Will Staggers, director of development for the College Agriculture and Life Sciences, at wstaggers@foundation.msstate.edu or 662.325.2837.

Department News

AGRICULTURAL AND BIOLOGICAL ENGINEERING

Thomasson returns to MSU as agricultural and biological engineering head

A PRECISION AGRICULTURE and cotton ginning expert is the new head of Mississippi State's Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering. **DR. J. ALEX THOMASSON** took the reins of the MSU department effective July 1. A 15-year veteran and former endowed chairholder in Cotton Engineering, Ginning and Mechanization in Texas A&M's Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering, Thomasson returned to Mississippi State, where he worked early in his career. Thomasson served as an agricultural engineer and research scientist in the U.S. Cotton Ginning Laboratory for the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Stoneville, working closely with faculty



in the university's Delta Research and Extension Center. Upon completion of his Ph.D. from the University of Kentucky, he then moved to Starkville where he served on the faculty in MSU's Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering from 1997-2004.



LaShan Simpson honored for diversity

DR. LASHAN SIMPSON was honored for her impact in advancing diversity and encouraging understanding and respect. The honor was presented during the Mississippi Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning's annual Diversity Awards program on February 20, 2020. She was also the 2019 recipient of the Outstanding Faculty Award from the MSU President's Commission on the Status of Women. Simpson is a researcher in the university's Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station with interests in tissue engineering, cardiovascular disease, osteogenesis, biomineralization, animal models, cell culture, histology, and cell and gene therapy. She also is focused on diversity and K-12 STEM education. As an ag and bioengineering faculty member, she is involved in both MSU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Bagley College of Engineering. She also serves as diversity coordinator for the university's Shackoul's Honor College.

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

KIMBERLY YOUNG, business coordinator, earned the 2019 CALS/MAFES Outstanding Support Staff Award.

Graduate students **CAITLYN A. COWICK**, **SAMAN FATEMI**, and **QUIGYU SHENG** were

2019 MSU Graduate Student Research Symposium winners. Cowick earned first in the Life and Biomedical Sciences and Engineering Master's Students Poster Competition. Fatemi earned first in the Life and Biomedical

Sciences and Engineering Doctoral Students Oral Presentation and Sheng earned third in the Life and Biomedical Sciences and Engineering Doctoral Students Poster Competition.

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

MSU's ag econ department head honored for lifetime achievement

A MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY department head and leading agricultural economics expert is being honored for his longstanding contributions to agriculture. **DR. KEITH COBLE**, professor and head of MSU's Department of Agricultural Economics, is a selection for the Southern Agricultural Economics Association Lifetime Achievement award. According to its website, the mission of the Southern Agricultural Economics Association, or SAEA, is to foster the study and understanding of agricultural economics and its applications to address problems in the southern U.S. Coble received the association's highest



recognition at its annual meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, on Feb. 4, 2020. The honor recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions to scholarship and public service in southern agricultural economics over the course of a career spanning 25 years or more.

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS



DR. RANDY LITTLE, professor, received the 2020 CALS Excellence in Teaching Award, Upper Undergraduate Level.



DR. DAN PETROLIA, professor and MAFES scientist received the 2020 CALS Excellence in Teaching Award, Graduate Level.



DR. XIAOFEI LI, assistant professor and MAFES scientist, received the 2019 CALS Excellence in Teaching Award at the Graduate Level.

DEBRA PRICE, administrative assistant, received the 2019 Zacharias Distinguished Staff Award.

ANIMAL AND DAIRY SCIENCES

MSU faculty, administrators celebrate completion of Animal and Dairy Sciences Building

THE 34,500-SQUARE-FOOT NEW ANIMAL and Dairy Sciences Building was unveiled and dedicated in fall 2019. The building is part of a complex at the corner of Blackjack Road and Hail State Boulevard, which also includes the newly constructed, 15,000-square-foot Meat Science and Muscle Biology Laboratory that opened last fall. A 27,300-square-foot Poultry Science Building is anticipated for completion in fall 2020. The Animal and Dairy Sciences Building serves the department's growing student body, which includes approximately 430 undergraduates and 30 graduate students. The facility also houses the department's some 40 faculty



Administrators and partners involved in making the Animal and Dairy Sciences Building a reality were on hand to commemorate the opening of the building with a ribbon-cutting ceremony Sept. 30, 2019. Pictured left to right: David Howell, Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station engineer; David Shaw, MSU provost and executive vice president; Gary Jackson, director of the MSU Extension Service; Amy Tuck, former vice president of MSU Campus Services; George Hopper, former dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and former MAFES director; MSU President Mark E. Keenum; Reuben Moore, interim vice president of the Division of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine; Colin Maloney, president and CEO of Century Construction; Justin Harrington, architect at McCarty Architects; and John Blanton, animal and dairy sciences department head and interim associate director of MAFES. (photo by David Ammon)

members and staff. The space includes classrooms, laboratories, faculty offices, conference rooms, and a graduate assistant suite. A food retail space on the first floor, adjacent to the main lobby, has

been named by the Mississippi State Equine Association. A 5,000-square-foot connector building between the Animal and Dairy Sciences Building and the Poultry Building also is under construction.

ANIMAL AND DAIRY SCIENCES

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS



DR. THU DINH earned the 2019 MAFES Outstanding Publication Award

for his article "Effects of USDA quality grade and cooking on water soluble precursors of beef flavor."



DR. CALEB LEMLEY was honored with the 2019 Mississippi Land Bank sponsored

MAFES Excellence in Research Faculty Award.

DR. RACHEL HENDRIX, who earned her doctorate in May 2020, received the 2019 North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture Graduate Student Teaching Award.

THE MISSISSIPPI STATE EQUESTRIAN TEAM ended the 2019 Western regular season by winning two High Point Team awards. Individual awards went to **HART DANIELS** in Open Horsemanship and Reining, **SAVANNAH YONGE** in Intermediate II Horsemanship, **ASHLEY ACKERMAN** in Intermediate II Horsemanship, **TAYLOR PERRY** in Intermediate II Horsemanship, and **SAVANNA BLACKBURN** in Beginner Horsemanship.

COURTNEY HEATON, MAURÍCIO XAVIER, and **KATE PARSONS** received the 2019 ADS outstanding doctoral student, master's student, and senior award, respectively.

BIOCHEMISTRY, MOLECULAR BIOLOGY, ENTOMOLOGY AND PLANT PATHOLOGY

One-of-a-kind toad born through MSU pioneering technology that's saving threatened species

A MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY partnership with the Fort Worth Zoo has hatched the first of more than 30 metamorphosed toadlets produced through in vitro fertilization. It is a one-of-a-kind toad, born through MSU pioneering technology that's saving threatened species. MSU is also home to the country's only National Amphibian Genome Bank, a repository of cryopreserved sperm from approximately 10 of the world's most threatened and endangered amphibian species.

A Puerto Rican crested toad named Olaf, hatched at the Fort Worth Zoo in 2019, is what one might call a work of art. ART, or assisted reproductive technologies, developed by scientists in the university's Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station and the Forest and Wildlife Research Center, helps amphibians like the Puerto Rican crested toad, considered a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

DR. CARRIE VANCE, assistant research professor in the Department of

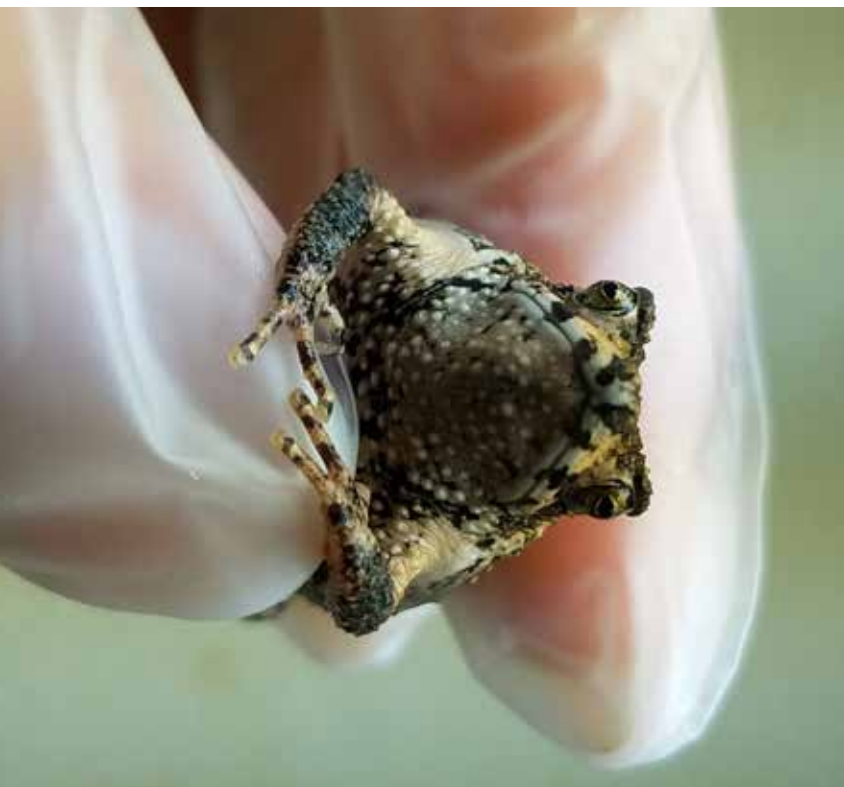


Biochemistry, Molecular Biology, Entomology and Plant Pathology, co-leads the project with **DR. ANDY KOUBA**, professor and head of the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Aquaculture in MSU's College of Forest Resources and scientist in the Forest and Wildlife Research Center. They've been working together for more than 20 years developing innovative reproductive technologies for threatened and endangered species.

MSU biochemistry program earns prestigious accreditation

MSU BECAME THE THIRD SEC university and one of only 85 universities nationwide to gain accreditation from the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. Accreditation provides independent assurance that the curriculum and education offered in the department meet the high standards set by ASBMB, the leading professional society for biochemistry and molecular biology. Additionally, this designation allows the program's

graduating seniors and former graduates to sit for the ASBMB comprehensive accreditation exam. Those who pass it will have an advantage for admission into competitive research programs and other advanced training opportunities. Even students who do not sit for the certification exam will benefit by merely attending an ASBMB-accredited university, as potential employers recognize the quality of education from accredited universities.



MSU's newest Goldwater Scholar recipient passionate about finding cure for cancer

A **MISSISSIPPI STATE** student with a growing interest in cancer research has been selected to receive the prestigious Barry Goldwater Scholarship. Junior biochemistry major **HANNAH L. SCHEAFFER** of Ruston, Louisiana, is among nearly 400 students from across the country receiving the highly coveted undergraduate award that encourages pursuit of research careers in the natural sciences, engineering, and mathematics. Scheaffer is pursuing a concentration in science and



a minor in French. Scheaffer is also one of 56 scholarships being presented to the ASF's 2020 Astronaut Scholars Class, which includes students from 41 universities across the nation.

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS



DR. ASHLI BROWN JOHNSON, state chemist and professor

with the Mississippi State Chemical Lab, is among the newest fellows of the Association of Public Land-Grant Universities' Food Systems Leadership Institute.



DR. JEFFREY GORE, an entomologist with the Mississippi Agri-

cultural and Forestry Experiment Station and MSU Extension Service, is a newly appointed member to the Environmental Protection Agency's Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Committee. U.S. EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler and U.S. Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith (R Miss.) announced in June 2020 the appointment of Jeffrey Gore, one of 33 new committee members.



DR. JOHN RIGGINS, received the Regions Division of

Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine Superior Faculty International Award.



DR. DARRELL SPARKS, received the 2019 CALS/MAFES Out-

standing Faculty Service Award.

Entomology master's student **BEVERLY CATCHOT** was awarded the Outstanding Graduate Student Award at the 2019 MSU Row Crop Short Course.

Senior biochemistry and microbiology double major **AUSTIN DRURY** was awarded the 2019 MAFES Excellence in Research Award in the Undergraduate Category.

Research Associate **RYAN WHITEHOUSE** was honored with the 2019 MAFES Outstanding Research Staff Award.

AURIANNA TUCKER, biochemistry major in the pre-veterinary concentration, was the 2019 recipient of the Tri-State Soybean Forum Scholarship.

REAGAN MOAK and **STANLEY BLACKMON, JR.** 2020 biochemistry graduates, received the 2019 Spirit of State Awards.

FOOD SCIENCE, NUTRITION AND HEALTH PROMOTION

Professor designated as Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs

DR. BRENT FOUNTAIN is the new associate vice president for Academic Affairs, focusing on faculty and student affairs. A longtime faculty member in the Department of Food Science, Nutrition and Health Promotion, Fountain previously has worked in the Office of the Provost and Vice President, and he most recently served as interim director of Career Services and associate vice president intern.



NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS



DR. WES SCHILLING was honored with the 2019 MAFES Most Impactful Publication Award.



The Community Health Internship Inaugural Leadership Team and participants were awarded the 2019 CALS/MAFES Diversity Award. The team includes (from left) **JE'KLYNN STEEN, JASMINE HARRIS-SPEIGHT, DR. DAVID BUYS, REAGAN MOAK** and **ANN SANSING**.

NICOLE K. REEDER, a food science, nutrition and health promotion doctoral student from Columbus, MS, was one of two MSU students selected for the Robert Smith, M.D. Graduate Scholars Program, part of the Jackson Heart Study Graduate Training and Education Center at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson.

MSU faculty designated fellow of national aging organization

A **MISSISSIPPI STATE** associate professor is being honored as a fellow of the Gerontological Society of America. **DR. DAVID BUYS**, associate professor in MSU's Department of Food Science, Nutrition and Health Promotion and state health specialist with the MSU Extension Service, is one of 33 individuals approved by the GSA's board of directors for fellow status within the society.



MSU professor presents at international listeria symposium



IN 2019, one of the largest outbreaks of listeria occurred in Andalusia, Spain. Regional health authorities acted swiftly reducing the impact to humans. Their efforts culminated in an international symposium focused on evaluating efforts and determining best ways to move forward to prevent another such event from happening in the future. The International Symposium

on Andalusian Listeria Outbreak was held January 23-24, 2020.

DR. JUAN SILVA, food science, nutrition and health promotion professor; MAFES scientist; MSU Extension specialist; and leading listeria expert, presented at the symposium and discussed current U.S. regulatory efforts as a possible model for Spain to consider when assessing better ways to protect against future listeria outbreaks.

"Information exchange is critical for our research to have a global impact as part of an international conversation about food safety," Silva said.

HUMAN SCIENCES

MSU School of Human Sciences now offers retail certification

MISSISSIPPI STATE FASHION DESIGN and merchandising students in the university's School of Human Sciences now can earn a retail certificate, also available to all majors.

The state's retail industry is one of the largest in terms of employment, with 254,562 working directly for retail and another 94,000 with jobs supported by retail. **DR. CAROLINE KOBIA**, MSU assistant professor of fashion design and merchandising, pointed out that many careers, including buyers, analysts, allocators, planners, managers, product developers, designers and more, all utilize skills that may be learned through this retail certificate program.

Kobia and **DR. JUHYOUNG LEE** are spearheading this effort within the university's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. To ensure the best preparation possible for students looking to better position themselves in the field, these faculty members have developed MSU's program from a model program created by the world's largest retail trade association, the National Retail Federation.

"The certificate was created to fill a void in the state," Kobia said. "It will help our students break into difficult areas of the retail industry, and we're proud to be the only university in Mississippi to offer it."

Kobia also said the certification is an important part of remaining successful in the field once a job has been secured.

"Retail is an industry of change. Things are always shifting—market trends, platforming techniques, needs of the consumer—all of it. Through the process of earning this certificate, our students will learn how to adapt with the shifting tides," she said.

One of the most rapidly evolving areas within the industry is online shopping. Retailers are losing face-to-face interactions and opportunities to promote their merchandise. However, Lee said as online shoppers scour the internet, retailers

are able to do the same and market their merchandise more broadly.

"It's because we are living in a world of online shopping that it is important to know about the 'ins and outs' of retail, where operations hidden behind a screen are, ultimately, more complicated and complex," Lee said.

While the internet promises more changes to come, Lee said it also provides a distinctive opportunity. Currently,

many classes comprising the certificate are offered online, and program advocates are working toward creating an entirely online option, hopefully making it available for non-traditional students already working in the retail industry.



MSU fashion design and merchandising senior Ty'Yonna McCalphia of Newton adjusts a display at Barnes and Noble Bookstore. (photo by Beth Wynn)

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

RILEY BAKER, fashion design and merchandising junior, was awarded the 2019 Regent's University London Will Conrad Scholarship for fashion design.



DR. CHARLES FREEMAN, associate professor in the School of

Human Sciences, was a recent graduate of the national LEAD21 leadership development program. Administered by the Committees on Policy of the Associations of the Public and Land-grant Universities and its strategic partners, the LEAD21 curriculum is designed specifically for faculty and staff of member institutions who strive to improve their leadership capabilities both in their present roles and future

endeavors.



DR. CARLEY MORRISON, assistant professor in agricul

tural education, leadership and communications, received the 2020 CALS Teacher of the Year and New Faculty Award. Dr. Morrison was also faculty recipient of the 2020 Wesley A. Ammon Outstanding New Academic Advisor Award.



DR. JULIE PARKER, associate professor in human develop

ment and family science, was awarded the 2019 CALS Excellence in Teaching Award at the Upper Undergraduate Level.

Agricultural and Extension Education doctoral student,

CHRISTIEN RUSSELL,

was appointed a fellow of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Civil Rights. She is the recipient of several awards including a Distinguished Research Poster award from the American Association for Agricultural Education, and a Distinguished Poster award from the American Association for Agricultural Education. The latter poster included co authors **ABBIGAIL PETERSEN**, under graduate research scholar, and **DR. CARLA JAGGER**, former assistant professor. Russell was also elected for a third term as Region 3 Vice President of MANRRS.

TRACY WILCOX received the 2019 Louis and Doris Wise Support Staff Award in the secretarial/clerical category.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Student collaboration in MSU Community Garden bears first fruits

A STUDENT AND FACULTY COLLABORATION is blossoming into national and state awards for Mississippi State's Community Garden design team.

The MSU Community Garden has received the 2019 Award of Excellence for Student Collaboration from the American Society of Landscape Architects, the highest honor in its category.

In addition to ASLA's national award, the garden also was recently recognized as part of the annual Mississippi Celebrates Architecture. Hosted by the Mississippi Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the garden received an AIA Design Merit Award in the sustainability category, and the U.S. Green Building Council Mississippi Chapter

Award for Sustainability.

The 8,000-square-foot garden, designed and built from 2015 to 2018, is located in the landscape architecture complex off Stone Blvd. and is a research lab, classroom and community center. Landscape architecture students led the garden project, while students in architecture, graphic design, and building construction science also played significant roles. Their collective work resulted in 17 standard, raised beds, eight accessible beds and the installation of two farming robots, called "Farmbots" across four terraced levels. Two garden sheds, a 2,000-gallon rainwater cistern, a system capturing rainwater from another building, a gateway arbor, demonstration area, and



Students from Professor Robert Brzuszek's landscape architecture design 2 course till soil in a raised garden bed at the MSU Community Garden. (photo by David Ammon)

stair entrance were all designed and built by students in their respective courses.

More than 50 MSU students, faculty and staff rent garden beds in groups on an annual basis. Additionally, the space serves as an outdoor laboratory for sustainable/healthy food courses on campus and as a research site for the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station.

In addition to the MSU landscape architecture and art departments and the School of Architecture, university collaborators include the departments of plant and soil sciences and food science, nutrition and health promotion. The MSU Student Association in conjunction with Students for a Sustainable campus played a significant role in helping secure funding and promotion. Administrative units include the Office of Planning Design and Construction Administration and the Department of Health Promotion and Wellness. MSU Facilities Management and the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station volunteered time and expertise while the MSU Extension Service contributed funds.

To learn more about the national award from the ASLA, visit www.asla.org/2019studentawards and scroll to the student collaboration category.

For more information, visit communitygarden.msstate.edu or [instagram.com/msucommunitygarden](https://www.instagram.com/msucommunitygarden).

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS



SADIK ARTUNÇ, faculty member and head of MSU's

Department of Landscape Architecture, is the newly elected president of the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture, a global group striving to further education in landscape architecture specifically related to teaching, research/scholarly works, and service.



MELISSA ANNE CURRIE, an assistant professor in the

Department of Landscape Architecture and co author, **JANNI SORENSEN**, an assistant professor in the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences at UNC Charlotte, have been selected as the recipient of the 2020 Best Article in the Journal of Urban Affairs Award for their article, "Repackaged 'Urban Renewal': Issues of Spatial Equity and Environmental Justice in New Construction, Suburban Neighborhoods, and Urban Islands of Infill!"

TAZE FULFORD, associate professor, was named 2019 CALS Teacher of the Year. He was also honored with the 2019 Excellence in Teaching Award at the Lower Undergraduate Level.



The Alumni Association's Early Career

Undergraduate Teaching Excellence Award was given to **PETER SUMMERLIN**, associate professor.

JASON WALKER, associate professor, won the 2020 CALS/MAFES Diversity Award.

Revitalizing Africatown: MSU faculty, students honored for creativity, preserving the past

MISSISSIPPI STATE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE students and faculty are being recognized for their role in the design of recreational areas within historic Africatown, Alabama.

Development of the Mobile County site, where the last African individuals in the Atlantic slave trade landed in 1866 on the schooner Clotilda, has seen a resurgence since the ship's discovery in 2019 in Mobile Bay. Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of the town's infrastructure.

Students enrolled in both MSU urban design and planting design courses have, for the past two years, conceptualized plans for the Africatown Connections Blueway and for landscaping at the site's community center. The Blueway, a water and walking trail network, includes 14 points of interest, five of which the National Park Service asked the landscape architecture students to design. The service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program has funded the project.

"It has been an exciting project for the students to be part of as they were honored with their plans being sent to the City of Mobile planning office, the Alabama State Legislature, and several agencies in Washington, D.C., including the Smithsonian Institution, a sponsor of several dives into Mobile Bay that

unearthed the Clotilda. The students' work really has painted the picture for what Africatown is trying to do," said **BOB BRZUSZEK**, MSU landscape architecture professor, who has overseen the university's involvement with **CHUO LI**, associate professor and co-instructor of the Urban Design Studio class.

Brzuszek recently accepted the Isaiah J. Whitley Founder Mobile County Training School Legacy Award on behalf of the university for its involvement with building the Blueway. The award, given by the Africatown school's alumni association, is named for the principal who served from 1910 to 1923.

An opportunity to introduce students to the rigors of real-life design and problem solving in a service-learning environment was the motivation behind Brzuszek's and Li's initial involvement in the project, with the two also wanting students to honor the history and culture of Africatown.

Adding to the significance of creating design plans for the Blueway's points of interest and the community center's landscaping was that freed slaves who had been passengers aboard the Clotilda purchased Africatown and traveled the local waterways, using them for sustenance and recreation.

"This assignment has been good for students because it is an actual site with unique conditions and provides the human element of working with clients. It's not an academic, hypothetical project. It involves real problems in an area of historical

and cultural significance," Brzuszek said.

Students met with Africatown representatives in community meetings and focus groups, visited the community and toured the site before forming three teams to work on different areas of the town's river access. The student plans had to meld into one seamless design.

The opportunity also provided students with hands-on experience in creating a sense of place, Brzuszek said.

"Sense of place communicates the historical and cultural significance of a location through landscape design. It also accounts for the issues and values within the culture," Brzuszek said. "The students had to dig deep in this project—they couldn't just apply a surface design. It had to come from the heart."

The students' conceptual plan did just that and has provided the community with a vision for what the area could look like. As a result, Africatown is now hosting a national design competition, with one of the MSU urban design students participating.

Landscape Architecture magazine, Design Alabama, and National Park Service magazine have featured the students' work, while Brzuszek has continued to work with the community to see that some of the students' solutions are refined and implemented.

"It is an honor for our department and the university to be recognized by the community for this service-learning project," Brzuszek said. "For me, receiving the Legacy Award is one of the best awards because you're helping people. The Africatown community is a great group to be involved with because the people are proactively working to pay tribute to their heritage and culture."

Mississippi State's landscape architecture major is the only accredited Bachelor of Landscape Architecture program in the three-state region of Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. For more information on the landscape architecture major, visit www.lalc.msstate.edu



Students enrolled in both MSU urban design and planting design courses have conceptualized plans for the Africatown Connections Blueway and for landscaping at the site's community center. The Blueway, a water and walking trail network, includes 14 points of interest, five of which the National Park Service asked the landscape architecture students to design. (photo submitted)

PLANT AND SOIL SCIENCES

Cotton professor appointed to lead MSU department

DR. DARRIN DODDS, a Mississippi State cotton agronomist is the new head of the university's Department of Plant and Soil Sciences.

A native of Rushville, Illinois, Dodds is well respected throughout the Midsouth for his teaching, research, and outreach programs in cotton physiology. In 2016, he was awarded the Dr. J. Tom Cothren Outstanding Young Physiologist Award by the National Cotton Council and its partners.

An MSU alumnus, Dodds has garnered nearly \$6 million in research funding and mentored a



dozen graduate students. The professor performs more than 100 cotton extension and research trials each year.

Dodds earned his bachelor's degree from Western Illinois University in agriculture, a master's degree at

Purdue University in botany and plant pathology, and his doctoral degree in agricultural science from MSU.

He is also a recent graduate of the national LEAD21 Leadership Development program.

MSU faculty, students honored by Weed Science Society of America

FACULTY AND STUDENTS in Mississippi State's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences are receiving various accolades from the Weed Science Society of America.

DR. DAN REYNOLDS, a longtime MSU weed science professor, is a new WSSA fellow, the society's highest honor. Reynolds also is serving the university as interim associate vice president for international programs and executive director of the university's International Institute. Fellows are honored for their significant contributions to the society itself and the advancements they

have made in the weed science discipline across the U.S.

DR. JOHN BYRD, extension and research professor also in the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, is the society's Outstanding Extension Award recipient.

This is given to an individual who develops creative, innovative, and effective weed science extension programs that influence growers or ranchers to adopt new practices.

Byrd provides weed management outreach related to forages, rights of way, home and commercial gardens, lawns, and landscapes. His expertise includes exotic and invasive weeds, as well as weeds that impact natural areas and cropping systems.

WSSA also is recognizing nearly three dozen university students in the U.S. and

Canada for outstanding research-related presentations and proposals.

ANDREW NUSS, an MSU agronomy senior from Hartselle, Alabama, is one of nine students receiving a \$2,000 John Jachetta Undergraduate Research Award to fund his project investigating the use of weed-suppressive sweet potato and cover crops for weed management and for increased profitability of organic sweet potato production.

Additionally, **JUSTIN CALHOUN**, a weed science doctoral student from Star City, Arkansas, won first place for his Ph.D. oral presentation, and **HAYDEN QUICK**, a weed science master's student from Brighton, Tennessee, tied for third place for his M.S. oral presentation.



Dan Reynolds (top) and John Byrd.

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS



DR. JASON KRUTZ, director of the Mississippi

Water Resources Research Institute and plant and soil sciences professor, received the 2019 Regions Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine superior faculty research award.



DR. COLEMAN ETHEREDGE, assistant professor,

received the 2020 CALS Excellence in Teaching Award, Lower Undergraduate Level.



DR. TONGYIN LI, assistant professor, received the

2020 MAFES Most Impactful Publication Award.



DR. JESSE MORRISON, assistant professor, received the

American Forage and Grassland Council's Early Career Award.



DANIEL PETERSON was named a William L. Giles

Distinguished Professor. Peterson teaches in the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences and serves as director of MSU's Institute for Genomics, Biocomputing and Biotechnology.



DR. K. RAJA REDDY, began his term as MAS

president on July 1, 2020. Reddy recently received the organization's 2019 Outstanding Contribution to Science Award. Reddy also won the MAFES Outstanding Publication Award in 2020 and was named the 2019 SEC Faculty Achievement Award winner.



DR. MARK SHANKLE, research professor, received the

2020 Mississippi Land Bank sponsored MAFES Excellence in Research Faculty Award.



DR. TE-MING PAUL TSENG, assistant

professor, received the 2020 CALS/MAFES Outstanding Faculty Service Award and the Outstanding Reviewer Award from the Weed Science Society of America.

BRAD BURGESS, director of variety testing, received the 2020 MAFES Outstanding Research Staff Award.

WAYNE PHILLEY, senior research technician, was honored with the 2019 Zacharias Distinguished Staff Award.

CALYN ADAMS, won the undergraduate poster competition in 2019 from the Southern Branch of the American Society of Agronomy.

LUCAS FRANCA, doctoral student, placed first and **SAVANA DAVIS**, master's student, placed third in the poster presentation awards at the 2019 Southern Weed Science Society annual meeting.

EDUARDO S. GARAY, plant and soil sciences graduate student, has been named a 2019 Kirchner Food Fellow.

DYLAN HOLLOWELL, agronomy major, was selected as a 2019 outstanding senior by the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and the Soil Science Society of America.

Agronomy doctoral student **JACOB MCNEAL** was awarded the Outstanding Graduate Student Award at the 2019 MSU Row Crop Short Course.

MICHAEL NATTRESS received the 2020 MAFES Excellence in Research Award, Graduate Category.

JENNY RYALS, a doctoral student, received first place for her presentation at the 2019 IPPS Southern Region meeting. Ryals also received the MS Association of Conservation Districts Jack H. Winstead Scholarship, as well as being the first place winner in the 2019 Southern Nursery Association Bryson L. James Student Research Competition.

JAY SEALE, agronomy student, placed second for his master's oral presentation at the 2019 Southern Weed Science Society meeting.

BHUPINDER SINGH, doctoral candidate, was awarded the 2019 MAFES Excellence in Research Award in the graduate category. Singh was also inducted into MSU's Graduate Student Hall of Fame Scholars.

BROOKLYN SCHUMAKER won second place in the master's oral presentation contest at the 2019 Southern Region American Society of Horticultural Science meeting. Schumaker along with doctoral student **SHANDREA STALLWORTH**, and undergraduate **AURIANA TUCKER**, won first place in their oral divisions at the 2019 Mississippi Academy of Sciences.

SWATI SHRESTHA, master's student, received the 2019 Outstanding Master's Research Assistant Award from the MSU Graduate School.

SHANDREA D. STALLWORTH, doctoral student, was chosen as the 2019 Grand Champion in the Three Minute Thesis Competition. Stallworth was also elected graduate president of national MANRRS.

AURIANA TUCKER received the Undergraduate Research Award at the 2019 Weed Science Society of America meeting.

CHARLES "HUNT" WALNE, doctoral student, was one of 18 graduate students chosen as a recipient of the Future Leader in Science award, an honor bestowed by the agronomy tri-societies—the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America and Soil Science Society of America.

ISABEL WERLE placed first at the 2019 North American Weed Science Contest for the undergraduate herbicide symptomology and third overall in the undergraduate division.

AMY WILBER, Plant and Soil Sciences graduate student, placed first for her poster at the 2019 Crop Science Society of America C-5 Division competition.

POULTRY SCIENCE

MSU professor named Poultry Science Association fellow



A MISSISSIPPI STATE poultry science faculty member was named a fellow of the Poultry Science Association.

DR. DAVID PEEBLES, professor, received the association's highest recognition during its annual meeting July 15-18, 2019 in Montreal, Québec, Canada.

The elected honor is reserved for individuals who have achieved professional

distinction and made significant contributions to the field.

MARY BECK, professor and head of the Department of Poultry Science, said the designation is a testament to Peebles's dedication to a lifelong career in poultry science.

"Dr. Peebles collaborates with organizations like the USDA to solve pressing issues for the poultry industry, such as his work studying a bacterial pathogen, *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, which costs the industry more than \$780 million a year. Additionally, he teaches genetics to approximately 500 students each year," Beck said. "This honor further underscores his commitment to both research

and teaching in an industry that's valued at \$3.2 billion dollars for our state alone."

A scientist with the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, Peebles' research focuses on nutrients and vaccine in ovo, or in egg, injection, and hatching egg incubation, eggshell quality and embryogenesis. He has trained 26 master's and nine doctoral students and has served on 53 graduate committees. Currently, he is the major professor for one master's and two doctoral students. Peebles has had 513 career publications and was the most published author in Poultry Science and the Journal of Applied Poultry Research combined from 2014-2016.

MSU and Alcorn partner to offer poultry science dual-degree program

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY and Alcorn State University are partnering to launch a dual-degree program that will prepare more leaders for the state's top agricultural industry.

On Feb. 21, 2019, MSU President **DR. MARK E. KEENUM** and ASU Interim President Dr. Donzell Lee signed a memorandum of understanding to establish the program that will allow students to earn bachelor's degrees from both universities.

Students can complete 91 hours toward an ASU Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Science with a focus in animal science and then transfer to Mississippi State to complete the remaining 31 hours in coursework for an MSU Bachelor of Science in Poultry Science.

Upon completion of the MSU coursework, students will graduate from both institutions with dual degrees.

Keenum said the new program will provide a range of benefits for both students and the poultry industry, the state's largest agricultural enterprise topping \$3 billion in value last year alone.

"This is an opportunity for two leading land-grant institutions to work together

to prepare even more professionals and leaders for one of our state's most important industries," Keenum said. "Mississippi State offers one of only six poultry science programs in the nation, and our graduates have a 100 percent job placement rate, with many of them considering multiple offers."

Lee said this partnership is a great opportunity for both institutions.

"I am delighted about the partnership," Lee said. "Working together, ASU and MSU will have a great impact on one of the largest industries in the state by creating a pipeline of competent individuals who can jump right into leadership positions."



Alcorn State University Interim President Dr. Donzell Lee, seated from left, and MSU President Dr. Mark E. Keenum signed a memorandum of understanding on Feb. 21, 2019, to establish a program that will allow students to earn bachelor's degrees from both universities. Looking on are ASU Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. John Igwebuike and former MSU Provost and Executive Vice President Dr. Judy Bonner. (photo submitted)

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS



DR. JESSICA WELLS is the newest recipient of the Poultry

Science Association recruitment award.

Students from the Department of Poultry Science competed in the 54th annual national collegiate poultry judging

competition and placed third as a team.

Poultry science students **JOSIE GAMBLE** and **LAUREN LINDSEY** were honored at the International Poultry Scientific Forum, with the Don R. Sloan Undergraduate Research Poster Presentation Award and the Don R. Sloan

Oral Presentation Award, respectively.

NEIL SMITH, poultry science major, placed first overall in the 2019 annual national collegiate poultry judging competition.

Alumni News

BENNY GRAVES (B.S., M.S., plant pathology, '77, '79) is the author of a new book, "Dancing with Trees: A Family Journal." The book is a collection of photographs and stories that explore a Mississippi family's journey through life under the watchful eyes of individual trees.

CRAIG SHIDELER (B.S., agricultural economics, '77) president and chief executive officer of the Mississippi Land Bank received the Alumni Achievement Award.

STEVE MCLAURIN (B.S., poultry science, '79) was elected Chairman of the Mississippi Poultry Association Board of Directors for 2020.

PAUL HARDIN (B.S., agricultural engineering technology and business, '83) is the 2019 president of the Mississippi Coalition of Appraisers. He previously served as vice president and director. He is the owner of pH Real Estate Services Inc. in Madison, which provides real estate services, as well as commercial, industrial, and agricultural appraisals.

JEROME GODDARD (Ph.D., entomology, '84) has a new book available from Livingston Press. "Soul Traveler" is a scientific thriller about traumatic memories and how they can infect other people and even are purposely moved from one person to another by an unethical scientist. It is the sequel to his previous work "Living Memories."

DANNY WALKER (B.S., agricultural engineering technology and business, '84) received an

Alumni Achievement Award. Walker is CEO for Heartland Catfish. Walker was also named one of the Mississippi Business Journal's CEOs of the Year for 2019, an honor that recognizes high performing chief executives from companies of all sizes throughout Mississippi.

JOHNNY RAY (B.S., agricultural economics, '86) was elected chairman of the Mississippi Council on Economic Education board of directors. He has more than 33 years of banking experience and is executive vice president and Jackson regional president for BankFirst.

TOM KENDALL (B.S., agricultural economics, '89) was named president of the Meridian market by Trustmark. He previously served as president of the Vicksburg market and has more than 17 years of banking experience.

GAYLE FORTENBERRY, (B.S., agricultural communications, '93; B.S., agricultural education, '94) was named the Agriculture Workforce Development Coordinator for the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce.

KENT BLOODWORTH, (B.S., agronomy, '95; M.S., weed science, '99) received an Alumni Achievement Award. Kent is General Counsel for the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation

RILEY JAMES (B.S., agricultural economics, '95) was sworn in as the newest member of the Mississippi River Commission. The seventh generation of his family involved in farming, James is

CEO of the family business, A.C. Riley Cotton Company.

BRANDON GIBSON (B.S., agribusiness, '96; MABM, agribusiness, '97) has been appointed the Chief Operating Officer for the State of Tennessee. Gibson had previously been serving as Senior Advisor to the Governor.

BOB SCOTT (Ph.D., weed science, '97) has been named director of Arkansas' Cooperative Extension Service, the organization that delivers the education outreach portion of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture's land-grant mission.

JOHN G. CAMPBELL (B.S., ag pest management, '01) is the new State Director for USDA Rural Development in Mississippi. Campbell will administer USDA Rural Development programs and set priorities particular to the rural needs of Mississippi.

HANNAH BECKER (B.S., animal and dairy science, '10) joined the Military Family Advisory Network Advisory board in Washington, D.C. She is the digital creative director for Becker Digital, a veteran-owned marketing and public relations agency in Florida. MFAN is a national nonprofit organization that partners with government agencies and private industry to support military families and increase community awareness.

TYSON RAPER (M.S., agriculture, '11) was named the 2019 Cotton Specialist of the Year at the Beltwide Cotton Conference.

He is a small grains specialist for the University of Tennessee Agriculture Extension Service.

PHILLIP L. VINES (B.S., agronomy, '12; M.S., agricultural life sciences, '16) has received from the Musser International Turfgrass Foundation the Musser Award of Excellence, which is given to outstanding doctoral candidates who, in the final phase of their studies, demonstrate overall excellence through their turfgrass research program.

BRIAN HOWELL, RLA (B.L.A., landscape architecture, '15) completed the requirements to become a Registered Landscape Architect, including a two-year apprenticeship and passing the Landscape Architectural Registration Examination. He apprenticed with HRC, a civil engineering, landscape architecture, land surveying and construction administration firm in Douglasville, Georgia, under fellow MSU alumnus Darryl D. Ray.

WHIT KENDALL (B.S., agricultural engineering technology and business, '16) was named the Senior Counsel and Legislative Policy Coordinator for the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce.

SARAH BYRD (B.S., agronomy, '19) placed in the final four in America's Young Farmers & Ranchers competition sponsored by Farm Bureau. Byrd is a research agronomist with Indigo Ag.

CIARRA SMITH (B.S., biochemistry, '19) received a prestigious National Science Graduate Research Fellowship.

OBITUARIES

LEE A. BENOIST (B.S., M.S., agricultural economics, '81, '84) 61, Jackson—He was employed with Stone Wealth Management in Ridgeland and was vice president of the Private Client Group, Sterne Agee Inc. He was a member of the MSU Alumni Association, serving on the national board from 2004-09. He also served on the Central Mississippi Chapter's scholarship board, received the 2010 Distinguished Service Award and contributed to the annual "Evening in Maroon" banquet. A lover of the outdoors, he co-hosted the call-in radio program "Outdoors with Uncle Lee and Bobby C" on WFMN Supertalk from 1999-2003.—June 21, 2019

HEMBREE BRANDON (friend) 82, Starkville—A native of New Albany, Miss., he was public relations manager for the state Highway Department's Northern District (1956-61) and editor of the Winona (Miss.) Times (1963-1973). For more than 45 years, he held various editorial positions with Farm Press Publications, Clarksdale, Miss., ending his career there as editorial director for the

company's print, electronic, and online publications and communications. He received numerous awards for news, photojournalism, editorial, and column writing during the course of his career.

MARTIN L. BRIDGES (B.S., agronomy, '53) 89, Swainsboro, Georgia—A native of Wesson, he was an Air Force veteran of the Korean War. He received the UDC Cross of Military Service and later joined the Army Reserves. He was a member and past master of the Masonic Lodge and received his 50-year award from The Grand Lodge of Georgia. He retired from the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a soil and water conservationist. An active member of his community he was a part of the Swainsboro Exchange Club, the choir of Swainsboro First Baptist Church, and was an Eagle Scout.—May 27, 2019

LAURANCE WATSON CARTER (B.S., general agriculture, '52) 88, Rolling Fork—He served as a pilot with the U.S. Army from 1952 until 1956, including 16 months in Korea. A lifelong farmer, he

mentored people through the Boy Scouts and First Baptist Church of Rolling Fork, where he taught Sunday School and was a lifetime deacon. He was a member of the Yazoo Mississippi Delta Water Management District and a former board member with Farmers Grain Terminal and Farmers Inc and served as a commissioner on the Mississippi Levee Board. He was named the Mississippi Farmer of the Year in 2005.—March 13, 2019

DAVIS RAY CLARK (M.S., horticulture, '72) 76, Leland—He earned a bachelor's from Mississippi College and, following his graduation from MSU, did post graduate work at North Carolina State University. He worked at Morson Sterling Oil Company and the Delta Branch Experiment Station as a member of the MSU Extension Service. Active in the First Baptist Church in Leland, he was a deacon and served on numerous committees. He also worked for Habitat for Humanity helping to build, wire, and finish many homes. He was a member of the Leland Rotary Club, serving

as secretary for many years. He also served many terms as assistant governor and deputy assistant governor.—December 26, 2019

JAMES BUD DILLARD (B.S., M.S., Ph.D., agricultural economics, '62, '63, '72) 82, Muscle Shoals, Alabama—A native of Winfield, Alabama, he became an agricultural economist with the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1963. He later returned to Mississippi State as part of the Extension Service and the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station with economic research that supported Mississippi's beef cattle industry. He would return to TVA once more before ultimately joining MSU's Department of Agricultural Economics and expanding his research to include the catfish industry.—May 5, 2019

ROBERT "BOB" FYE (retired faculty) 95, Starkville—He served in the U.S. Army during WWII, earning the rank of master sergeant. He earned a bachelor's degree at Iowa State, a master's at Washington State and a doctoral degree in entomology at

the University of Wisconsin. He began his career at New Mexico State University as an assistant entomologist, but soon joined the U.S. Department of Agriculture where he spent 28 years as a research entomologist. During that time, he enjoyed sabbatical work in Canada and Australia before coming to Mississippi State as a member of the faculty. He was a member of Phi Kappa Phi, Sigma Xi, Phi Sigma, Gamma Sigma Delta, American Men of Science and was awarded a USDA Certificate of Merit.—July 12, 2019

DUDLEY RUSSELL JONES (B.S., horticulture, '79) 66, Cleveland, Georgia—A native of Birmingham, Alabama, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps and served in Vietnam. After earning his degree, he began working in the field of viticulture. He helped establish the vineyards of Habersham Winery in Georgia and worked as a winemaker there.—December 23, 2018

CHARLES EVERETT KEENUM (B.S., agricultural science, '62) 83, Belzoni—Keenum had a distinguished career with the U.S.

Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, where he was a dedicated and enthusiastic federal employee until his retirement, serving farmers and landowners in the Mississippi communities of Greenwood, Yazoo City, Forest, Corinth, and Marks before his final USDA assignments in Humphreys and Sunflower counties.—June 20, 2019

JIMMY C. MCLAIN (B.S., general agriculture, '64) 78, Senatobia—He had a passion for and commitment to the youth, farmers, and cattlemen he served as a 4-H youth agent and county agent. He was inducted into the Mississippi Cattlemen's Association Hall of Fame in 1997.—January 14, 2019

JOE V. PETTIET (Ph.D., agronomy, '64) 87, Leland—He served in the U.S. Army before moving to Arkansas to pursue bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Arkansas. After earning a doctoral degree from MSU, he joined the Delta Branch Experiment Station in Stoneville. He and wife, Iris, opened Pettiet

Agricultural Services Inc., a soil-testing and plant analysis laboratory in 1973, and he worked there until his retirement.—May 21, 2019

ANDREW M. RATCLIFF (B.S., animal science, '50) 94, Natchez—He served in the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet in the Pacific where he was wounded in action during the invasion of the Philippines. After graduating from MSU, he began a 45-year career with International Paper Company. During that time, he was treasurer of the Old South Federal Credit Union. He continued to serve on its board of directors after his retirement and was inducted to the Mississippi Credit Union System Hall of Fame.—July 4, 2019

JAMES SIMPSON JR. (B.S., agricultural economics, '53; retired faculty) 87, Longview—He was a retired professor of agricultural economics and a longtime member of Longview Baptist Church.—January 9, 2019

REBECCA HOWELL TREVINO (BLA, landscape contracting, landscape architecture, '89, '90)

52, Salt Lake City, Utah—A native of Starkville, she moved to Utah with her husband in 2018 to follow professional aspirations. There she began exploring, hiking, and camping at the many national and state parks in the area. A four-time cancer survivor, she began running full and half marathons at the age of 50 and was a finisher of the Chicago Marathon in 2018.—January 9, 2019

LEON WEIR WILLIAMS (B.S., general agriculture, '50; M.S., animal science, '54) 91, Newton—He was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army in 1952 and enrolled at Mississippi State. He worked as an assistant county agent for the Mississippi State Extension Service in Bolivar County before joining the MSU faculty where he taught and conducted research until 1962. He then earned a pharmacy degree from the University of Mississippi and bought a half-interest in McMullan's Drug Store, which was renamed Williams Drugs after he acquired full ownership. He operated the pharmacy with his wife until 1991.—July 22, 2019

Super Bulldog Weekend

April 13, 2019

1. CALS Ambassadors.



2. Governor Tate Reeves, (then lieutenant governor) addresses the breakfast crowd.

3. Richard Taylor (B.S., general business, '73), of MS Seedmen's Association, receives an alumni achievement award from DAFVM interim vice-president Reuben Moore and former CALS Dean George Hopper.



4. Brandon Gibson (B.S., agribusiness, '96; MABM '97), chief executive officer for the State of Tennessee, receives an alumni achievement award from DAFVM interim vice-president Reuben Moore and former CALS Dean George Hopper.



5. John Gordon Campbell (B.S., ag pest management, '01), State Director for USDA Rural Development in Mississippi, receives an alumni achievement award from former CALS Dean George Hopper and DAFVM interim vice-president Reuben Moore.

Homecoming

November 23, 2019



1. Kent Bloodworth (B.S., agronomy, '95, M.S., weed science, '99), general counsel for the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation, receives the Dean's Award from former CALS Dean George Hopper and MSU President Mark E. Keenum.

2. MSU President Mark E. Keenum congratulates Mississippi Farm Bureau President Mike McCormick as an honorary bulldog.



3. Craig B. Shideler (B.S., ag economics, '77), chief executive officer of Mississippi Land Bank, receives an alumni achievement award from former CALS Dean George Hopper and MSU President Mark E. Keenum.

4. Danny G. Walker (B.S., ag engineering technology and business, '84), chief executive officer of Heartland Catfish receives an alumni achievement award from former CALS Dean George Hopper and MSU President Mark E. Keenum.



5. MSU President Mark E. Keenum poses with the Homecoming Court.



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PHOTO: Foaling season at the MAFES H. H. Leveck Animal Research Center. (photo by David Ammon)