

# Colts set for Morton match-up



Lexington Colts started off their season strong against the Kemper County Wildcats on Saturday, September 8. Peter Reeves is the head coach for the local youth football team. Colts will host Morton on Saturday, September 15 at the Holmes County Central High School field. Pictured above (from left), players KeShawn Wright (#12), JaCorey Rand (#25) and Montreal Skinner (#51) line up for a play against the Wildcats. (Photo submitted)

# Family First Initiative aims to prevent child neglect

Mississippi officials have launched an effort to prevent child neglect by helping struggling families.

“For too long in Mississippi we have been reactionary to crisis,” Supreme Court Justice Dawn Beam said July 30 at the start of a half-day conference aimed at creating collaborative efforts by government, the private sector and the faith-based community.

Of the 5,214 children in foster care, 82 percent came into the custody of Child Protection Services as a result of neglect. Neglect is preventable if needy families get help.

The Family First Initiative of the Commission on Children’s Justice aims to prevent child abuse and neglect and prevent children from entering the foster care system. The initiative aims to address multiple needs of struggling families by directing those families to services and resources that will improve family stability and create safer home environments for children. The idea is to identify and coordinate resources, and to connect struggling families with services.

Justice Beam envisions “a small army” of help. She outlined numerous possibilities that draw on collaborative efforts by government, businesses, non-profits and the faith-based community. Help parents with parenting and life skills. If children are sleeping on the floor, someone out there has beds to donate. If the house is dirty, would a group of church volunteers be willing to help clean it?

“Foster care is not a treatment or a solution for the pervasive problem,” Justice Beam, co-chair of the Commission on Children’s Justice, told more than 200 people gathered at the Westin Hotel in Jackson. “Children don’t want a new family. They want us to help fix their family and we owe them our best efforts.”

“A home doesn’t have to be perfect in order for it to be the right place for these children,” Justice Beam said.

The Mississippi Supreme Court on July 27 unanimously

approved an order commending the Commission on Children’s Justice for the creation of the Family First Initiative. Justice Beam and First Lady Deborah Bryant are co-chairs of the Family First Initiative.

Gov. Phil Bryant and the First Lady embrace prevention services to preserve families. Deborah Bryant recalled how a 4-year-old girl who had been placed in a transitional home drove home to her the point about wanting to go home. She will never forget the sight of the child standing on the back of a couch, repeatedly calling for her mother. “They want to be with their families,” she said.

Gov. Bryant said, “If we can find jobs for these parents and keep them clean and sober, they can take care of their children.”

Mississippi Department of Human Services Director John Davis said, “It is an opportunity for us to come together as a group of concerned people.”

The state Department of Human Services during the past several years has undergone a significant shift in its approach to providing assistance to the needy. Called Generation Plus, the approach to address family poverty goes beyond funding public assistance and seeks to help families become self-sufficient. Part of the idea is to help people become better educated and gain access to career and technical training so that they may work and find better paying jobs. DHS has sought partnerships with federal, state, community and faith-based resources in the area of social services.

DHS contracts with the non-profit Families First for Mississippi as a gateway, coordinator and provider of community based non-government services. Families First has been in operation in Mississippi for 25 years and has expanded into all 82 counties during the past two years. Families First works to provide services or connect needy people with service providers in areas such as literacy, attainment of a GED, technical training, job searches, parenting skills, conflict resolution and

anger management. If Families First doesn’t provide the needed service, they find an entity which does.

The Human Services landscape shifted further with passage of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act, FFPSA, which went into effect in February. The federal law redirects some federal spending to child abuse and neglect prevention in an effort to reduce the need for children to enter foster care.

“The goal of the Family First Act is prevention,” said Carlis V. Williams of Atlanta, Southeast Regional Administrator for the Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families.

Mississippi’s collaborative efforts could become a model for other states. “This work you all have done here in Mississippi has traveled far and wide,” Williams told the crowd.

“It’s just a good thing to see all of Mississippi’s top leaders in the room today,” she said. “Support from the top makes the results real to people.” That support makes a difference for families.

Sherniqua Thedford is one of those family success stories. “My goal was to be able to provide for my children,” she said in a Mississippi Department of Human Services video titled “Better Me. Better Mississippi.”

Thedford took the stage with Justice Beam at the summit. The Meridian mother of four said she fell into difficulties when she became ill during her last pregnancy. She was unable to work. She applied for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits at the Lauderdale County Department of Human Services. With temporary assistance, she got a job and was able to pay her bills.

“I want young ladies my age to know someone is listening,” she said.

Thedford now works in hospice care. She is pursuing dual degrees in social work and accounting. She wants to make sure that the next generation – her children – never face the difficulties that she did.

# WEST REPORT

by West Civic Club

This past Saturday was the Big Black River Festival. The weather cooperated so that we had a pretty decent day. We would like to thank each and everyone of you for all that you have done, on social medias, radio spots, newspaper ads, word of mouth and phone calls. It takes the work and cooperation of each and everyone of us working together to make it work. Vendors came from as far as Louisiana to West. There were all kinds of good items being offered for sale. Some of our vendors were new as well as some returning. The winner of the \$200 gas give-away was Mr. Charles Grove of Kosciusko. We also need to

Canopy Children’s Solutions CEO John Damon said the creative resources that can be leveraged can help families overcome difficulties. “Families, if they get just a little bit of help, can make it,” he said during an afternoon panel discussion.

Court of Appeals Judge Latrice Westbrook, also a panelist, said, “Families need hope. Desperate people do desperate things. If they are given the resources they need, they can see a better tomorrow.”

The next step is six pilot Family First Initiative programs. Sites include the Metro Jackson area of Hinds, Madison and Rankin counties, and programs in Lee, Bolivar, Lauderdale, Pearl River and Jackson counties.

Several local judges from each of those areas are expected to convene community leaders and stakeholders. These Community Steering Committees will identify service gaps and develop action plans to address those service gaps in their communities. These community groups are expected to include government officials, private business, faith-based organizations and non-profit organizations.

Justice Beam announced the pilot leaders. They are:

- Lee County, Chancellor Jacqueline Mask and Circuit Judge James L. Roberts Jr.
- Bolivar County, Chancellor Catherine Farris-Carter, Circuit Judge Linda Coleman and County Court Judge Hunter Nowell.
- Lauderdale County, Chancellor Lawrence Primeaux, Circuit Judge Charles Wright, and County Court Judges Veldore Young and Lisa Howell.
- Hinds, Madison and Rankin counties, Chancellor Cynthia Brewer, Chancellor Denise Owens, Rankin County Court Judge Thomas Broome and businessman George Malvaney, who coordinated the response to the 2010 BP oil spill.
- Pearl River County, Chancellor Deborah Gambrell and Circuit Judge Prentiss Harrell. p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Pearl River Community College.
- Jackson County, County Court Judge Sharon Sigalas and Circuit Judge Robert Krebs.

During the past week as everyone is aware there was a tropical storm that during the day of heavy rainfall the post office in West was flooded. As I understand the situation, there was damage to the building, requiring the shutting down of mail inside the post office. Anyone who has a rural delivery will still be getting their mail normally, but for those that have post office boxes, they will have to choose putting up a rural box or getting a post office box in Durant. Currently we have to go to another post office for stamps, etc. There is to be a meeting sometime soon for a discussion on this situation.

Again thank each and everyone of you for all that has been contributed in so many ways.

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### 2018 HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	PLACE	TIME
August 31	M.S. Palmer	Away	7 p.m.
Sept. 7	Northside High	Home	7 p.m.
Sept. 14	Niceville High	Niceville, FL	7 p.m.
Sept. 21	Neshoba H.S.	Away	7 p.m.
Sept. 28	Canton	Away	7 p.m.
Oct. 5	Germantown	Home	7 p.m.
Oct. 12	Cleveland Central (HOMECOMING)	Home	7 p.m.
Oct. 18 (Thurs)	Callaway	Away	7 p.m.
Oct. 26	Ridgeland	Away	7 p.m.
Nov. 2	Vicksburg (Senior Night)	Home	7 p.m.

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