

Hats On for Reading!



On Thursday, March 21, Families First For Mississippi Greenwood Field Educator, De'Kendrick Clark (pictured above, dressed as the Cat in the Hat) to share his passion for reading with the Durant Head Start and Genesis Daycare in Durant. Families First celebrates March as literacy month; it is also National Read Across America Month. Building a strong foundation in literacy is one of the main emphasis for Families First.

(Photo submitted)

Health organization to address HIV and aging disparities with \$750K in grants

My Brother's Keeper, Inc. is among 30 US organizations that recently received a total of \$17.6 million in grants through the Gilead HIV Age Positively initiative.

My Brother's Keeper, Inc. aims to enhance the lives of individuals aging with HIV by working with Open Arms Healthcare Center of Jackson to focus on three priority areas: improving health care coordination, increasing resources for better client well-being, and educating and informing policies that impact people living and aging with HIV. Estimates suggest that by 2030, more than 80 percent of people living with HIV will face at least one age-related medical condition, compared to just 29 percent in 2010.

Due to increasing access to effective HIV therapy, the average lifespan of an HIV-infected person has improved significantly. However, HIV infection is associated with greater incidences of many conditions that occur with aging like cardiovascular disease, liver disease, depression, and neurocognitive impairment. Thus, HIV/AIDS continues to pose a major public health threat for people 50 and older. Aging, nutrition, and physical activity can influence outcomes in other chronic conditions, and previous studies have shown that each of these factors can impact viral replication and the immune system in HIV. In Mississippi, HIV is a heavily stigmatized disease and older adults living with HIV tend to experience the dual threat of HIV stigma and ageism.

"Older people already face isolation due to illness or loss of family and friends," said Dr. Talya Straughter, Open Arms LifeStyle Project Director. "Stigma associated with being HIV positive or being older

Time for Strawberries

Spring is just around the corner. I can't wait for that fresh spring and summer produce to hit the stores and farmer's markets. Strawberries are the first fruit to ripen each spring. I love to see those beautiful baskets of luscious red strawberries – I can never resist.

Strawberries are great chopped and macerated in sugar to serve over ice cream.

Dip those berries in chocolate for a special addition to any dessert. Frozen strawberries are also delicious to have when fresh aren't available. They are great for dessert preparations. You can easily freeze your own, if you have an abundance. Just hull, rinse the berries, and completely dry on paper towel. Place on cookie sheets to quick freeze and then place in plastic bags for storage.

Here are a few facts about strawberries:

*There are 200 seeds in an average strawberry.

*They are the only fruit to have seeds on the outside of the fruit.

*The seeds can grow into a new strawberry plant, but most reproduce by the runners.

*Americans eat an average of 3 1/2 pounds of fresh strawberries each year.

*California produces 75 % of all the strawberry crops in the United States, but strawberries are grown in every state.

*Strawberries are a member of the rose family and give off a sweet fragrance as they grow on bushes.

*They are considered perennials and grow back year after year.

*Ancient Romans believed they had medicinal powers and were used to treat everything from depression to sore throats.

*Native Americans were among the earliest people to eat strawberries.

*Don't rinse berries under water until you are ready to eat them – it speeds the spoiling.

I hope you will give these great strawberry recipes a try. Thanks for reading.

STRAWBERRY POUND CAKE

3 cups flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. salt
1 cup butter, softened
2 cups sugar
1 (3 oz.) box strawberry Jell-o
4 eggs
1 cup milk



FRESH STRAWBERRY COBBLER

3 cups fresh strawberries, diced
3/4 cup sugar
1 cup flour
2 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 cup sugar
1 cup milk
1/2 tsp. vanilla extract
1 stick butter, melted

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a medium bowl, add strawberries and stir in 3/4 cup sugar; set aside. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, salt, and 1/2 cup sugar. Add milk, vanilla extract, and melted butter; stir until combined – may be a little lumpy. Grease a 9 inch baking dish and pour evenly into dish; spoon strawberries evenly on top of batter – Do No Stir. Bake for about 40 minutes or until golden brown. May serve warm or cold.

STRAWBERRY and CREAM ÉCLAIR CAKE

1 box graham crackers
2 (3 1/4 oz.) boxes instant pudding mix
3 1/2 cup milk
1 (8 oz.) container

Cool Whip
1 pint strawberries, sliced
1 (16 oz.) can vanilla frosting
Additional strawberries for garnish
Spray the bottom of a 9 x 13 inch baking dish with cooking spray. Line the bottom of the pan with whole graham crackers; layer with half the sliced strawberries. Mix pudding mixes with milk and beat for 2 minutes; fold in Cool Whip. Pour half on top of strawberries. Place another layer of graham crackers on top and then a layer of the remaining strawberries. Pour on top the remaining pudding mixture. Cover with another layer of graham crackers. Heat the container of vanilla frosting in the microwave for 45 seconds. Pour on top of the cake and spread to cover. Refrigerate at least 8 hours before serving. Top with additional berries if desired.

*Lee Ann Fleming is a Holmes County native, food columnist and has garnered fame for her recipes featured in the film, *The Help*. Fleming can be reached at lafkitchen@hughes.net.

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