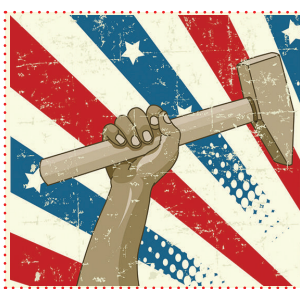


**EARLY DEADLINE**  
**FOR LABOR DAY HOLIDAY**  
**ALL LEGALS, ADS AND EVENTS**  
**SUBMITTED BY**  
**FRIDAY, SEPT. 4 @ NOON**



**OFFICE CLOSED**  
*The Holmes County Herald*  
*will be closed on Monday,*  
*September 7, in observance*  
*of LABOR DAY.*

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**HOLMES COUNTY**

# HERALD

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2020

ONE SECTION

LEXINGTON, MISSISSIPPI 39095

VOLUME 62 - NUMBER 36

## Holmes County was 'already off the cliff with no safety net. Then COVID came.'

By Jerry Mitchell  
 Mississippi Center For  
 Investigative Reporting

This small town sits an hour from the suburbs of Mississippi's capital city of Jackson, but it rests a world away.

It is the poorest town in the nation's poorest county, the most forgotten place in America.

"We were already off the cliff with no safety net," said Holmes County Supervisor Leroy Johnson. "Then COVID came."

People in Holmes County have contracted the coronavirus twice as often as residents of Hinds County — and died from the disease seven times as often. The rate of infection in Holmes County is more than three times the national average.

At the 80-bed Holmes County Long-Term Care Center in Durant, most of the staff members and residents came down with COVID.

One of those residents, 80-year-old Lula Pearl "Duley" Benford, was already suffering from diabetes, resulting in the amputation of one of her legs.

At 4 a.m. May 25, her daughter, Annie Lee Benford, received a call from a nurse at the center who said the ambulance was coming for her mother.

The same nurse called back with the news that employees had tried to resuscitate her mother, but she had died.

Benford said her sister, who was also at the home, became ill as well and had to go on a ventilator.

In further conversations with staff, Benford said she learned that a nurse employed by the center became ill at work.

Each time MCIR contacted



Calvin Head works with Mileston Co-op in Tchula that provides jobs to young people to plant and harvest fresh vegetables to address Tchula's food shortages. He and others provided food boxes to children forced home from school by the pandemic. (Sarah Warnock/MCIR)

nursing home officials for comment, asking how they were keeping residents safe, they hung up the telephone. Johnson said what has

made Holmes so vulnerable has been the number of people suffering from underlying health conditions, including

(Continued on page 2.)

## Mississippi extends mask mandate, other limits, by 2 weeks

Associated Press

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves said Monday, August 31, that he is extending a statewide mask mandate and most other restrictions another two weeks to try to slow the spread of the new coronavirus.

He made a single change — eliminating a cap of two spectators per participant at high school sports events. Reeves said a limit of 25% capacity remains in place for stadiums, gyms, and other venues, and people should maintain social distance from those who are not in their immediate families.

As the University of Southern Mississippi prepares to host its first home football game on Thursday, Reeves said his prohibition on tail-



GOV. TATE REEVES

gating at college games also remains in place for at least two more weeks.

"I'd rather be in the South where we can't have tailgating, where we have rules in place but we are going to have football, than to be in the Pac-12 where they're not even going to have football," Reeves said.

(Continued on page 4.)

## County seeks new purpose in building after roof collapse

By Matthew Breazeale

Rehabilitation work is progressing at one of the Lexington Court Square's landmark buildings. The former Masonic Hall/Lexington Lodge #24, on the corner of Wall and West China Streets, is set to have a new roof built on it to further its lifespan.

The building was damaged with a roof collapse in May 2019. Holmes County Chamber Secretary Lydia McLellan recalled coming into work on Monday, May 6, and found the back portion of the building's roof, a three-story building, had fallen through to the first floor, into the chamber's office.

"That was one of the worst days in my life," said McLellan. "The roof had apparently fallen through over that weekend, it was hot and there was water

(Continued on page 5.)



Pictured above, the three-story former Masonic Hall on the Lexington Court Square is currently having its roof rehabilitated after it collapsed in 2019.

(Photo by Matthew Breazeale)



Crewmen and architects with Belinda Stewart Architects stand on scaffolding while inspecting brickwork and repairs ongoing at the former Masonic Hall on the Lexington Court Square on Friday, August 28. The building's roof collapsed last year and the county is working to rehabilitate it. (Photo by Matthew Breazeale)

50¢ Single Copy



**Thursday**  
 Sunny  
 93/71  
 Precip. Chance  
 10%



**Friday**  
 Partly Cloudy  
 94/72  
 Precip. Chance  
 20%



**Saturday**  
 Partly Cloudy  
 93/68  
 Precip. Chance  
 10%



**Sunday**  
 Mostly Sunny  
 94/69  
 Precip. Chance  
 10%



**Monday**  
 Mostly Sunny  
 92/69  
 Precip. Chance  
 20%



**Tuesday**  
 Partly Cloudy  
 89/66  
 Precip. Chance  
 20%



**Wednesday**  
 A.M. Showers  
 79/59  
 Precip. Chance  
 40%

How to reach us

PHONE • 834-1151

FAX • 834-1074

EMAIL

hcherald@gmail.com



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