

*M Partner

(Continued from page 1.) promoted community well-ness, food security, and edu-cational enrichment and suc-cess.

“M Partner was the op-portunity of a lifetime for a small town with limited resources like Lexington to be provided with the exper-tise and collaboration with the best and brightest of the university’s campus,” Mayor Robin McCrory said. “We were able to attain commu-nity goals and complete proj-ects that will leave M Partner footprints forever ingrained throughout the city of Lex-ington.”

Health and Wellness Promotion

McCrory worked closely with Ovuokerie Addoh, as-sistant professor of health and kinesiology; Rachael Larkin, an exercise science major from Haymarket, Vir-ginia; and Taylor Sanders, a doctoral student in health and kinesiology from Madi-son, to compile the appli-cation and supporting data for the Healthy Hometown award. They met in Lex-ington and on campus and corresponded extensively to create the materials.

The award recognizes the strides that Lexington has taken to improve commu-nity health, including trails for walking and biking, and a weekly farmers market. The proposal for the Healthy Hometown award included a community garden and installation of a splash pad to enhance municipal recre-ation facilities. The \$50,000

award and recognition pro-vides financial resources and momentum to further develop parks and recreation infrastructure.

“We are grateful for the work of Mayor McCrory, Dr. Addoh and his team,” said Peter Granjean, dean of the School of Applied Sciences. “This partnership exempli-fies our commitment in ap-plied sciences to learn, lead and serve where human sci-ence and service intersect.

“We look forward to a longstanding relationship with the city of Lexington and a more healthy and vi-brant Lexington commu-nity.”

Also during the 2018-19 academic year, Addoh taught a graduate-level seminar that organized a health fair in Lexington as a culminat-ing project. The health fair was scheduled to coincide with the spring festival and included free screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol and BMI, along with help interpreting the figures and lifestyle changes to support healthy habits.

The health fair was post-poned because of inclement weather, which created an opportunity to collaborate with the Community Student Learning Center’s annual ga-rage sale and fundraiser.

Food Security

The Lexington Farmers Market provides healthy, lo-cal produce to residents and serves as a source of revenue for area farmers and grow-ers. During the summer of 2019, Kymberle Gordon, a doctoral student in nutrition from Canandaigua, New

York, served as an M Part-ner intern with the market to strengthen its presence and operations through market-ing, interviews with growers and customer surveys.

Gordon also worked with the Holmes County Herald to place information about the market in the paper and produced recipe cards to distribute at the market in partnership with the local extension agent and the UM Medical Center’s Holmes County Hospital. To raise the profile of the market among local youth, the Boys & Girls Club of Lexington organized a field trip to the market; this was an opportunity to use connections between the M Partner intern and VISTA members serving with the Boys & Girls Club.

In summer 2020, recent UM graduate Curtis Hills served as a public service in-tern for the McLean Institute for Public Service and Com-munity Engagement, work-ing to build the infrastructure of the Lexington Food Pantry in his hometown. Hills, who had served as an undergradu-ate innovation scholar with the institute’s Catalyzing En-terpreneurship and Econom-ic Development initiative, as well as an M Partner intern, helped with planning for the new nonprofit and assisted with mobile food distribu-tions, which reached 600-700 households each week.

“Lexington gave me so much growing up, and I felt lucky to have had the oppor-tunity to work alongside the Lexington Food Pantry this summer,” Hills said. “It is no secret that Lexington and the

entire Holmes County com-munity needed more hunger-related resources before the pandemic.

“LFP offered an invaluable resource in their weekly food distributions that impacted over 650 families weekly. The COVID-19 pandemic, with all its darkness, brought a lot of shining light to fami-lies in Lexington.”

Educational Enrichment and Success

A top priority for local stakeholders was improving the percentage of students reading on grade level by the end of third grade. In 2013, Mississippi passed the Lit-eracy-Based Promotion Act, which emphasizes reading skills, particularly from pre-K to third grade.

Angela Rutherford, UM professor of teacher educa-tion, director of the Center for Excellence in Literacy Instruction and state co-ordinator for the Region 7 Comprehensive Center, and Angelia Crawford, literacy teacher at CELI, worked with the Holmes County Consolidated School District to create a Comprehensive Literacy Framework to sup-port the district.

The framework provides elementary and second-ary school teachers with research-based tools to im-prove students’ reading lev-els.

“The work of the Center for Excellence in Literacy Instruction has helped trans-form elementary schools in Mississippi,” said David Rock, dean of the School of Education. “Dr. Ruther-ford has led a multitude of

efforts to provide quality training and support to edu-cators across the state. Her commitment and dedication to improving literacy in Mis-sissippi have truly made a difference.”

The McLean Institute used other strategies to sup-port educational initiatives in Lexington. During sum-mer 2019, Hills completed a summer internship in Lex-ington with the Nollie Jen-kins Family Center.

This was a particularly meaningful placement be-cause Hills is a graduate of Holmes County Consoli-dated High School and had participated extensively in the center’s programming as a high school student. Re-turning as a CEED Innova-tion Scholar and M Partner intern, he led workshops on resume writing, interview skills and identifying career pathways.

Consistent with the ethos of the McLean Institute, Hills embodied the example of education as a path to eco-nomic advancement while offering tools for others to follow in his footsteps.

Finally, in partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Lexington, the North Mississippi VISTA Project has placed summer associ-ates and a yearlong VISTA member in Lexington since June 2018. All these VISTA members are from Lexington and have a direct connection with the Boys & Girls Club, many as recent graduates.

In 2018 and ‘19, two sum-mer associates provided lit-eracy and math instruction and organized enrichment

activities, recording learn-ing gains in 77 students. The yearlong VISTA member is developing relationships with parents and local busi-nesses to support the club, and these partnerships will benefit the organization even after the VISTA term con-cludes.

“The city of Lexington welcomed the University of Mississippi with open arms,” said Laura Martin, M Partner director and associate direc-tor of the McLean Institute. “It has been exciting to see the ideas discussed in initial community meetings come to fruition through the com-mitment of our community and campus partners.

“We are deeply grateful to all who contributed to the successes of the M Partner pilot phase in Lexington.”



October 15 - J. J. and Christy Pritchard

October 16 - Eric and Andrea Adams

October 18 - Jeff and Angie Martin, Chandler and Dani Ramsey

October 20 - Aden and Kristen Wigley

October 21 - Justin and Laura Rennhack

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