

OUTDOOR Truths

BY GARY MILLER

tively. And then a few minutes later the caw of the crow will officially open the door for a new day. And I am there to watch....and listen.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle for obtaining answers is not in research, but in observation. It is not in being surrounded with much, but little. It is not in being overwhelmed with possibilities but in being overcome with simplicity. It is being reminded that we have been given two eyes, two ears, and only one mouth – and while our eyes and ears are open during our most productive times, our mouth is closed except for an occasional moment when it is dropped open in awe from something our eyes and ears have just witnessed. I don't understand everything about God. There are some deep and difficult questions that linger within the minds of every honest believer and even every honest skeptic. But I do know that deep within the heart of each of us, is a longing to find out if there is a God and what he is like. And every spring, I am reminded again as I stand with eyes and ears open, and mouth gaped in amazement, that He is a God of life and that while I have no promise of the quality or quantity of my days on earth, I can clearly see through creation, one day there will be a new morning that will give way to a new life.

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2020 State of Preschoolreport recognizes Mississippi as one of top six states for high-quality Pre-K

News Release

JACKSON, Miss. – The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) recognized Mississippi in its latest report on pre-K quality as one of only six states whose state-funded pre-K program meets all 10 quality standards for early childhood education.

The latest ranking is published in the NIEER report, The State of Preschool 2020. The annual survey provides an in-depth look at state-funded education for 3- and 4- year-olds nationally and in each state with a focus on enrollment, spending and 10 policies that support quality education.

NIEER evaluated Mississippi's Early Learning Collaborative (ELC) programs, which are partnerships among school districts, Head Start agencies, childcare centers and non-profit organizations. There are currently 18 collaboratives serving more than 3,000 children.

Because of the quality of the Early Learning Collaboratives, Mississippi has consistently been one of only several states meeting all original NIEER standards.

"Mississippi sets an example of policies to support high quality preschool, but funding is too low to allow programs to implement those policies well," said Steven Barnett, Ph.D., NIEER's founder and senior co-director, who is pushing for more federal funding for high quality pre-K. "Increased funding is needed to ensure quality and expand access to more children who can benefit from the program."

The Mississippi Legislature passed the Early Learning Collaborative Act in 2013, which provided \$3 million to establish a limited number of ELCs in underserved areas throughout the state. Funding increased in subsequent years based on the program's immediate success. During the 2021 legislative session, funding doubled to \$16 million, which will serve approximately 6,000 pre-K children.

walked at midnight. He can get in his car and drive wherever he wants to go. May God continue to bless him.

"Bubba Morris" of the Bowling Green community passed away recently. I'm sorry I don't know "Bubba's" real name. He was the Sunday school teacher at Wade Chapel C.M.E. Church. Before he passed away, he fell and broke his arm. Keep his family uplifted in prayer.

If you are over 16, sign up and get your COVID-19 vaccine, if you have not already done it.

"Research consistently shows how high-quality early childhood education has a profound impact on children throughout their lives," said Dr. Carey Wright, state superintendent of education. "High-quality pre-K leads to increased school readiness, reading proficiency by third grade, higher graduation rates and even less crime."

The Mississippi State Board of Education has made increasing access to high-quality early childhood education one of its top priorities.

The Mississippi Department of Education has partnered with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to build the state's early childhood edu-

cation infrastructure through coaching and professional development and by providing guidance and support to school districts.


Mississippi's Early Learning Collaborative program served 8% of 4-year-olds in 2019-20, up from 5% in 2018-19. When combined with Head Start (22%) and special education pre-K programs (5%), approximately 35% of Mississippi 4-year-olds attended public early childhood education programs in 2019-20.

Mississippi ranks 39th in the nation for pre-K access for 4-year-olds and 42nd in state spending per child.

Read the State of Preschool Report 2020 at NIEER.org.

Spring is made for the outdoors. It seems everything that inspires us has its beginnings outside. Whether you hunt, fish, hike, bike, run, play sports, garden, or simply mow your grass, it feels empowering to engage

in all of these under the clear skies and in the clean air of springtime. While fall will mesmerize us with its panoramas, spring will motivate us with its pursuits. It is the season of life and the preparation which comes with it. The birds will build their nests; the animals will give birth to their young; and the trees and plants will unfold their blankets of green that perfectly match a sparkling blue sky. It is a painting that has been supernaturally brushed. A few mornings of late, I have been able to observe the waking of the day. I have stood on a hill as the sun begins to rise, listening for the familiar sound of a gobbling turkey. His alarm might be the loudest, but it is not the only sound that comes from the surrounding woods. After a few days of listening, one can almost predict the order in which each creature will make itself known. The smaller birds will be the first to sing their songs. The tom turkey, along with a distant rooster from a nearby farm will gobble and crow respec-



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IN AND AROUND LEXINGTON

BY LEONA (LENA) FIELDS



Mr. Percy Applewhite is doing great by the grace of God. A while back he fell out of a tree, but God has blessed him mightily. Now he is able to get on his riding mower and cut grass. I would not be surprised if Mr. Applewhite planted a row of peas and a few hills of watermelons. Before his accident, he planted plenty of peas and watermelons. He used to pick blackberries. He is not a lazy man.

Rev. Fredrick Thomas has had two deaths in his family lately. His cousin passed away then one of his sisters passed. Keep the Thomas family uplifted in prayer.

Saturday night, April 24th, I heard from Christine Hodges in California. She said she was doing okay, as well as her sister Lanell and their brother. They are former Holmes countians and the children of Mattie and O.W. Hodges (both deceased).

One day last week, I was walking on the hospital walking track. I met an old walker. He wanted to know my age. I told him I was 72. Then he told me he was 95 years old. He told me he has

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Conservation Corner

by James Cummins
Executive Director
of Wildlife Mississippi

National Bike Month

National Bike Month is great inspiration and motivation for everyone to get out and cycle, especially as the weather gets warmer as we have been witnessing here in Mississippi. The League of American Bicyclists is promoting Bike to Work Week from May 17-23, 2021, and Bike to Work Day on Friday, May 21. Now is a great time to discuss bike safety.

First and foremost, the helmet is a very important piece of safety equipment. By law, all helmets sold in the U.S. must meet standards set by the Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC). Some helmets are also endorsed by the non-profit Snell Foundation, but the CPSC stamp of approval is what matters. Improperly wearing a helmet can be more dangerous than not wearing one at all. For a proper fitting helmet, make sure no more than three fingers fit between the chin and the helmet strap. When pushing the helmet from the back forward, the helmet should not touch the bridge of the nose. It should sit squarely and securely one or two fingers above the eyebrow. When pushing the helmet upward and back from the front, the helmet should not go above the forehead.

Some rules of the road are: Obey all traffic regulations, signs, signals, and markings. Bicycles are subject to the same rules of vehicular traffic, wherever they apply. Observe all local ordinances pertaining to bike safety. It is your responsibility to know them and obey them. Keep right: drive with the traffic, not against it. Drive single file. Keep as close to the curb as practical. Watch out

for drain grates, soft shoulders, and other road surface hazards. Watch out for cars doors opening and for cars pulling into traffic. Don't carry passengers or packages that interfere with your vision or control. Never hitch a ride on a truck or other vehicle. Use hand signals to indicate turning or stopping. Protect yourself at night with the required reflectors and lights. Be extremely careful at intersections, especially when making a left turn. Most accidents happen at intersections. Drive your bike defensively; watch out for the other person.

Biking will allow you to not only enjoy your surroundings; you will also save money—especially with the price of gas steadily climbing—and enjoy some healthy benefits. Cycling reduces air, water, and noise pollution. You don't have to pay for automobile insurance or gasoline. You will reduce stress and improve your cardio vascular health, which is something that many Mississippians need to be thinking about.

Riding your bike is a fun, life-long activity you can enjoy in a variety of climates. It is also a great means to see the world around you.

In honor of National Bike Month, National Bike to Work Week, and Bike to Work Day, watch your local paper, television, or listen to your local radio for specific events in your community.

James L. Cummins is executive director of Wildlife Mississippi, a non-profit, conservation organization founded to conserve, restore, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plant resources throughout Mississippi. Their web site is www.wildlifemiss.org.