

# Holmes alumnus excels, shines light on the perks of community college



**LILY FRAN MCCRORY**  
News Release

As the valedictorian of Central Holmes Christian School, Lily Fran McCrory of Lexington could have gone anywhere upon graduating from high school. McCrory, however, will tell you today that going to Holmes Community College was the best decision she ever made.

"If I could have gone to Holmes all four years I would have," McCrory said. "There's something to be said about being able to get a top-notch education in your own backyard. Also, from a financial standpoint, it was a smart move as tuition was reasonable. Some people say, 'You get what you pay for,' but I did not find that to be true at Holmes. The college provided a quality education at an affordable price and I could not have been more pleased."

McCrory is just one of the many students who has benefited from attending community college. Though many benefit from career-technical and workforce training programs that allow them to go straight into a specific field/trade (such as nursing, welding, cosmetology, etc.), others like McCrory find that community college is a valuable foundation to build the rest of their education upon. She is now just months away from graduating medical school at the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC), and she will graduate debt-free unlike the majority of her classmates.

The 2015 Holmes alumnus took full advantage of every opportunity presented and was able to secure scholarships that paid for Holmes and the rest of her higher education career. For one, McCrory was part of the Holmes Plus Scholarship program, which is specifically for students who show an aptitude in science and mathematics (and covers all remaining charges for tuition, room and board once all other scholarships and aid have been applied). She was also selected as the 2014-2015 HEADWAE student recipient for Holmes.

Additionally, McCrory earned scholarships through

active involvement with the community college honor society Phi Theta Kappa. In addition to serving as reporter for the Holmes Goodman Chapter, she was also the regional reporter for the organization. Phi Theta Kappa provides opportunities for community college students to develop professional and leadership skills and earn scholarships; often enough to cover the remainder of their undergraduate education.

"I tell people all the time, the key is to really apply yourself and do well at community college so you get a full ride to the next step in your higher education," McCrory said. "Scholarships I received while at Holmes paid for my next step: earning my degree at Mississippi State University."

In addition to resources provided at Holmes, McCrory also discovered the upside to small class sizes: close relationships with and guidance from faculty and staff.

"At Holmes, you are not just a number in an auditorium," McCrory said. "I became accustomed to knowing my instructors and they really took time to invest in me. Between the mock interviews that helped me land the Mississippi Rural Physician Scholarship and my instructors writing recommendation letters in a very efficient manner, I would say Holmes is more like a family than anything. Some of my old instructors even came to watch me speak at Rotary Club in Lexington during their Spring Break one year. I still keep in touch with my Holmes instructors, and I can say, they truly provided me with the foundation to succeed at both MSU and in medical school."

McCrory speaks passionately when she shares her gratitude for her Holmes instructors. She credits Holmes for helping her secure the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship which was responsible for her being able to graduate medical school debt free.

"There's so much opportunity to shine at community college," McCrory said. "My instructors and the staff saw potential in me and fostered so much growth in me, helping me reach my full potential. They would push me to do things that might be outside of my comfort zone, as they did with other students, when they felt I was capable."

"I look back and I remember when I was applying to UMMC, Mrs. Heather Jones drove me down to the Ridge-land Campus in a Holmes

van to meet with the dean of the medical school. She and other instructors did practice interviews to help me prepare, as well. I graduated from Holmes six years ago and they still keep up with me! Mr. Will Alexander is one of my biggest fans to this day, cheering me on in all my endeavors, and Mrs. Sherrie Cheek has kept up with me, as well. They've told me if I'm going to do something, they're going to be there clapping the loudest."

McCrory brags on how her Holmes instructors not only helped her get into medical school but prepared her for success in the classroom as well.

"Any time I've done exceptionally well on an exam and a professor has contacted me afterward, I'm quick to tell them that Mrs. Heather Jones' chemistry class was one of the best courses I have taken to prepare me for medical school," McCrory said. "They are often surprised to hear I went to community college, as there are less than 10 of us in my entire class who did. I want to make sure they understand the quality of education I received at a community college. Because of classes with Mrs. Jones, Mr. Jim Shirley, Mrs. Mary Leigh Poole and others, my biology and chemistry background was so strong I felt confident in my ability to answer questions in class and complete the homework. Yes, there were 250 people in an auditorium instead of 35 like at Holmes, but I never felt less than confident because of how well prepared I was. When I've run into a problem with homework, my Holmes instructors have still been there for me, happy to assist over phone or email."

McCrory is also quick to point out that rather than community college being a hindrance to getting into professional school, it can actually be a benefit.

"There is somewhat of a stigma that if community college is on your resume, you're not as smart as others because you had to go there first," McCrory said. "That assumption couldn't be further from the truth. I'm in the top third of my medical school class and the other few students in my class that have associate degrees are in the top too. In fact, having my Associate of Arts degree on my resume came up as a talking point in my residency interviews because they rarely see that. I love to tell them that Holmes prepared me for medical school; I took all of my prerequisites there, and the instructors were nothing

# Garden attitudes

Do you remember the first time someone showed you something in the garden, and explained it to you, kick-starting a lifetime of wonder?

Just as most popular songs can be played with only three chords, gardening is composed of countless combinations of plants, chores, and diverse people who pull it together. And though I usually opine about the first two, my informal talk last week at the B.B. King museum in Indianola, my youth's home grounds, focused on the people who helped shape my garden attitudes.

Sure, my dad taught me to get chores done before going out to play, and responsibility and a sense of accomplishment, however grudging. He explained the physics of extra-long chains making his porch swing so much more languorous than those with frenetic short chains.

The county's Extension Agriculture Agent, my first real expert, took time out from a busy day to help me identify a weird butterfly, inspiring me to take a similar career path. And when my fifth-grade teacher sent me bicycling out to Sunflower County's only garden center for a school project, I was amazed when Betty Pearson gifted a small potted succulent to me. It was portentous.

More direct influencers included my great-grandmother Pearl, a horticulturist, naturalist, flower show judge, herb grower, and plant collector with row upon row of carefully labeled daffodils and chrysanthemums; she delighted in unusual edible plants including pawpaw,

but supportive." The daughter of Frankie and Robin McCrory, she is engaged to Rosario Guastella of Madison (originally from Chicago), who is also a medical student at UMMC. The couple will wed on May 22 before graduating on May 28 and then will move to Arkansas to begin residency at Conway Regional Health Systems. McCrory's long-term plan is to return to her hometown of Lexington to practice family medicine with her soon-to-be husband.

"As I look back on my time at Holmes and everything the faculty/staff there did to help get me where I am today, I am so thankful," McCrory said. "I'm a proud graduate of Holmes Community College and forever grateful for my time there!"

To learn more about Holmes, visit [www.holmescc.edu](http://www.holmescc.edu).

Article courtesy of *The Northside Sun*.

hardy citrus, and cassava. And she called me "Little Professor" when I was just ten.

She kept meticulous journals of what flowered when, and what her garden's wildlife was up to each month. In spite of being somewhat crustily plainspoken, Pearl was very active in the garden club she helped form in the 1930s; however, as I gleaned later from furious notes in her old garden

journals, she sometimes felt despondent when her circle of garden club friends didn't understand her passion for native wildflowers.

My mother was a self-trained, keenly observant nature lover who entertained every kid around with fishing, identifying bird calls, and using a straw to snag doodlebugs from their deep burrows. Wilma Gene's treasured potted plants had to be dragged in and out with every change of the season, and the chore always seem to come to me.

Her mother, Granny Boyer, was a simple, stoic country woman who exemplified gleaning simple pleasures from humble materials. She didn't know nothin' about gardening, and was okay with her single bed of tall, butterfly-laden zinnias and cockscombs. One of her most cherished possessions was a concrete chicken she'd

received as an anniversary gift which stood sentinel over winter daffodils until zinnia season rolled back around.

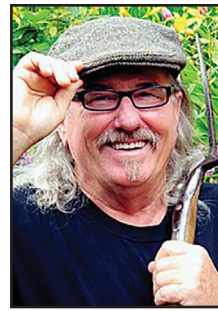
My other grandmother, Louise Rushing, was prim and proper, an unfailingly cheerful garden club stalwart with blue ribbons for her hybridized daylilies, prized African violets, and beautiful flower arrangements; she taught me the value of planning, tending little details, and observing the esoteric rules for garden-circle social acceptance.

There are others, of course, and some horticulture professors as well, but I am paying homage to the four strong women who tore me from doing kid stuff to help with their versions of gardening; early on, each in her way exposed me to diverse philosophies and styles that guide my garden attitude all these decades later.

I still grow some of their flowers, use some of their tools, and even enjoy Granny's chicken, which is more at home in my cottage garden than any high-end statues I've photographed around the world.

And every time I see the old concrete bird, I'm reminded of those who came before, who took time to share.

*Felder Rushing is a Mississippi author, columnist, and host of the "Gestalt Gardener" on MPB Think Radio. Email gardening questions to [rushingfelder@yahoo.com](mailto:rushingfelder@yahoo.com).*



**FELDER RUSHING**



**GRANNY'S CHICKEN**

## Happy Anniversary

**May 9** - Lavelle and Cindy Cheatham

**May 10** - Mark and Susan Chamblee, Jared and Jordan Ingram, Adam and Rebecca Kelly

**May 12** - Miles and Linda Dickerson

To add your birthdays and anniversaries to our list, please send your information by mail to P.O. Box 60, Lexington, MS 39095; fax 662-834-1074; email to [hherald@gmail.com](mailto:hherald@gmail.com); or stop by our office at 308 Court Square in Lexington. No phone calls, please.