

JUNE 2012

A Message from the Executive Director

Today is the first day of summer. When deciding what to write for my monthly article, I felt that this would be a good time for some thought and reflection.

First of all, congratulations to all of our recent graduates. We have an outstanding workforce that continues to improve itself by earning degrees, including advanced degrees, obtaining professional designations and by participating in the MDHS leadership and character-building training.

As we are all busy meeting deadlines and completing projects, please do not get so caught up that you neglect your families. Take some time this summer to spend with your children and/or grandchildren to make some memories. Some of my fondest memories are of family trips when my children were small. Now that they are in their mid-thirties and have families and careers of their own, I sometimes wonder where the time went, but I will always have these special memories to cherish.

We have made a lot of progress so far this year. The Modified Settlement Agreement for Olivia Y is ready for signature by the Governor and Attorney General. The rollout of the Practice Model and the Council on Accreditation certification process in Family and Children's Services are continuing full speed ahead. Progress continues to be made by the Division of Youth Services towards becoming fully compliant with the Department of Justice Consent Decree. Child Support

collections continue to increase and TWP Participation Rates and SNAP payment accuracy rates remain at a very high level. The Divisions of Aging and Adult Services and Community Services are exploring new grant opportunities to better serve their vulnerable populations.

The Quality Stars Childcare Information campaign has gone well. The ads are first class and I have noticed an increase in the number of Two, Three and Four Star Centers. I would like to especially recognize: Aiken Village Preschool of Starkville; Calvert's ABC Pre-School and Nursery of Aberdeen; Laboratory Child Development Center/Hinds Community College of Jackson; Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College Early Childhood Education Facility of Gulfport and the Sanderson Farms, Inc. Child Care Center of Laurel for achieving 5 Star Status!

Finally, I would like to express my personal congratulations to my friend and colleague Earl Scales for his selection as the recipient of the Mitchell Wendell Jurist Award recognizing outstanding services to children. This is a national honor and we are extremely blessed to have him as a vital part of our organization!

I hope that everyone will get out and enjoy the warm weather and the upcoming Independence Day Holiday. Have a great month!

Richard A. Berry
Executive Director

Social Worker "Adopted" by Family



Social worker Rhoda McCovery of **Gulfport** spent so much time with one **Harrison County** woman and her adopted children that McCovery became, well, like part of the family. The boys, Charlie age 11 and Nathan age 13, asked their adoptive mother if they could adopt McCovery as part of their family.

Harrison County Court Judge Margaret Alfonso presided over the gathering to celebrate the family's unofficial adoption of McCovery. Judge Alfonso said their mutual affection "should be preserved, changeless and unaltered. A family relationship is one full of love and mutual respect. A family

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ADOPTION IS...

Give a child a forever home and make a difference that will last a lifetime. Call DHS at 1-800-821-9157 for more information.

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relationship results from time spent together in happiness as well as sadness, in work and in play, and the family ties that are created are sacred and should last forever."

It is not an actual adoption under the law but rather "recognition of the affection that the children have for her and she has for them," Judge Alfonso said of McCovery.

McCovery is a family protection specialist for the Department of Human Services. Almost two years ago, she began working with the two pre-teen brothers and their great-aunt who had adopted them as babies. As the aging great-aunt was struggling to raise the high-spirited boys, she was also dealing with her own health and housing issues.

"She was trying to keep up," McCovery said. Among the issues that had to be addressed were improving the housing environment and resolving existing health care issues.

Judge Alfonso commended McCovery for going above and beyond her duties to help the family. For instance, she made home visits as early as 6 a.m. to ensure the boys were able to get to school on time.

Margie Shelton, director of the MDHS Adoption Unit said, "We can all get cases and we can all make sure that a child is seen twice a month and that we are keeping them safe. It's when we are really invested in a family that we know that we have made a difference in the lives of children. McCovery has made a difference with these kids."

McCovery recently attended the children's elementary school awards program. She was overjoyed when both of them earned "most improved" student awards in two subjects. She said, "I love this. Anything I can do for them, I want to do in order to keep them together as a family." McCovery has worked for MDHS for the past two years. Her goal is to someday be able to open a group home for abused girls.

MDHS Leading the Way in Leadership

Most will agree that great leadership is important and for an organization, its leadership, or lack thereof, is an expression of its health and success.

Leadership can be defined as, "A process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent; or as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal."

Clearly the development of leaders, both current and future, is important to MDHS Executive Director Rickey Berry who showed his commitment to leadership development early when he introduced the book, "**The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement**" by **Eliyahu Goldratt**, to his division directors.

Over the course of several months, directors were asked to read portions of the book and discuss the concepts during weekly meetings. They were then asked to take the concepts back to their prospective divisions for further staff development.

Expanding on the training, Deputy Executive Director Mark Smith suggested that a group work through the book, "**Monday Morning Leadership: 8 Mentoring Sessions You Can't Afford to Miss**" by **David Cottrell**. Charlie Smith and Mike Thornton, with assistance from Deputy Administrator for Programs John Davis, facilitated classes that consisted of staff from across the divisions that met each week. After the initial class, the training expanded into what became a nine-week, two hour per week course that, over the last two years, has trained numerous staff members from across the state. Further, the Division of

Economic Assistance, under the guidance of Davis, Charlie Smith and Kevin Dobbs, has pushed the program out to the county offices to train more leaders within the divisions. DEA staff have also been instrumental in helping to train leaders within county offices.

Another component of the classes is character training where curriculum from "**Character First**" along with "**Habitudes**" by **Tim Elmore** is utilized. Each month DEA county directors are trained and they, in-turn, train others in their offices. Charlie Smith coined the idea of the "4 A's of Training" to guide the program objective. They are: **Acquire** knowledge; **Apply** it; **Apprentice** someone; and **Accountability**.

Recently, a leadership team from DEA led a two-day conference on Habitudes and Character First for the Division of Aging and Adult Services with 24 people in the group. Other divisions have also expressed an interest in expanding the training for their staff.

Leadership growth has expanded throughout the agency. DEA Director Cathy Sykes has partnered with the State Personnel Board to help with an eight-week pilot program, "Online-Driven," called "The Eight Principles of Great Leadership."

Our various leadership teams are excited to share what they are doing with staff throughout MDHS to help multiply leaders.

As **John Maxwell** says, "Everything rises and falls on leadership."



SNAP FAST FACT

SNAP benefits help communities by generating revenue locally. For example, for every \$1 of federal SNAP benefits spent, it generates nearly double that amount in local economic activity.

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May a Busy Month for PI Investigators

May was a busy month for **Program Integrity** investigators from the Mississippi Department of Human Services who helped to bust individuals trying to defraud a program that provides assistance to those in need.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) trafficking arrests:

- **Winston County:** Store owner Vaishali Y. Rathod of Louisville was arrested and charged trafficking at her store, the Handy Andy Store, located on 801 South Church Avenue in Louisville. She fraudulently exchanged \$8,691.68 in SNAP benefits for ineligible food items or cash benefits.
- **Lee County:** Store owner Sananjit Nagra and clerk Harmanpreet Nagra, both of Tupelo, were arrested and charged with trafficking at their store, the Nagra First Stop, located on 3892 Highway 178 in Mooreville. They committed fraud in the amount of \$2,409.01.

SNAP fraud arrest:

- **Madison County:** Stacy Fleming was indicted by the Madison County Grand Jury. She entered a guilty plea and was ordered pay \$9,838 in restitution, fees and fines with five years of supervised probation subject to successful completion of the non-adjudication program. She is disqualified from receiving benefits for a 12 month period.

Local residents can help spot possible fraud in their grocery stores. The small "mom and pop" grocers are usually the type of stores targeted by those trying to defraud a system in place to help those who are at risk of food insecurity, such as the elderly and children.

If you suspect a store owner, clerk or client is misusing benefits, call the Fraud Hotline at 1-800-299-6905. SNAP fraud is a crime.

Hinds County Hosts a Resource Parent Appreciation Luncheon



On Saturday, May 19th the Hinds County **Division of Family and Children's Services** staff hosted a luncheon for area resource parents. These families play an integral part in helping to give children who have been displaced from their own homes a safe place to live. The event served as a way to honor these families for their ongoing cooperation and service to the agency for children in need. Southern Christian Services partnered with DFCS in the event along with Jackson Memorial Funeral Home. The day was marked with testimonials from resource families of how their lives have been touched when they opened their hearts and homes to a child. The event was attended by about 45 resource parents.

In other PI news, the semi-annual Firearms training was held and the top winners, scoring 100 percent were: Scott Dejong, Ken Mitchell and Frank Saddler.



FNS IS WORKING TO FIGHT SNAP FRAUD

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) works aggressively with state and federal partners to crack down on fraud and hold crooks accountable for misusing taxpayer dollars.

Americans support helping struggling families put food on the table, but they also want to know taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. FNS' proactive strategies

protect the federal investment in SNAP and ensure that the program is targeted towards individuals and families who need it the most.

While the vast majority of SNAP retailers and recipients play by the rules, any fraud weakens public confidence in government and the program. This

hurts the ability of SNAP to serve over 46 million people who rely on the program to obtain healthy food.

As part of the Administration's new Campaign to Cut Waste, FNS is aggressively working to Fight SNAP Fraud and prevent any abuse of the program.

For more information on the battle against SNAP fraud, go to the USDA FNS site at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/fraud.htm>.

Spring Graduations at MDHS

Seeking higher education is something many are doing these days. Whether it is to the open doors to a promotion, receive training for a new career or simply attain a degree in an area of a life-long passion, MDHS folks are in the classroom. Listed below are some of the names submitted of staff who have achieved recent educational milestones.

Division of Budgets and Accounting - Janice Simmons (Payroll Unit) graduated from **Jackson State University** with a Master of Science in Education with a major in Technology Education. Tamara Jones (Vendor Payables Unit) graduated from JSU with a Bachelor of Business Administration and a major in Accounting. Stephanie Cox (General Accounting Unit) also graduated from JSU with a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice. Chris Cavett (Vendor Payables Unit), graduated from **Mississippi College** with a Master of Business Administration with a major in Business Administration.

Division of Early Childhood Care and Development, Leah Buffington earned her Master of Public Policy and Administration from **Mississippi State University**. Tiffany Dillard completed her Master of Early Childhood Education from JSU.

Division of Economic Assistance, State Office, Vera Butler graduated from **Belhaven University** with a Master of Science in Leadership. Carla Mayberry in the Neshoba County office received her Master of Social Work from the **University of Alabama**. Latoya S. Jackson, EW I, graduated from **University of Southern Mississippi** with a Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies with an emphasis in English, Biology and Psychology. Catrina Denise Mitchell received an Associate of Science in Healthcare Administration and Associate of Arts in Business Administration from the **University of Phoenix**. Vanessa Rogers Long, will receive



her Doctor in Christian Education from **Jacksonville Theological Seminary**. Mildred W. Smith graduated from JSU and received her Bachelor of Science in Professional Interdisciplinary Studies. In Holmes County, Lethia Townsend, Case Manager, graduated from **Capella University** with a Master of Public Health. Mattie Porter, eligibility worker II, graduated from **Abundant Blessings Theological Seminary** with a Master of Theology. In Leake County, Chelsea LeAnne King graduated from MC with a Masters of Science in Public Relations/Corporate Communications.

Marilyn Guice, Program Integrity, Office of Monitoring received a second Master of Public Administration, (her first was a MBA in 2009), both from Belhaven University

The Division of Family and Children's Services graduations: Alice Adair, **University of Mississippi**, Masters of Social Work; Lasonya Alford, JSU, MSW; Artie Allen, **Mississippi Valley State University**, MSW; Pat Anosike, MVSU, MSW; Judith Brown, MVSU, MSW; Stephanie Brown, UM, MSW; Wendy Bryant, UM, MSW; Sarah Butler Hall, **Union University**, MSW; Sheena Caston, USM, MSW; Latosha Ceasar, JSU, MSW; Lora Leigh Cockrell, UM, MSW; Brenda Coe Weiss, USM, MSW; Joyce Cooke, MVSU, MSW; Dorothy Courtney, USM, MSW; Angela Dixon, MVSU, MSW; Sherita Dobbins, University of Tennessee, MSW; Lisa Drummond, JSU, MSW; Karen Freeman, USM, MSW; Debra Gann, UM, MSW; Rosemary Grice, UU, MSW; Diana Hall Thornton, JSU, MSW; Katherine Hickman, UU, MSW; Jackie Hill, UM, MSW; Minnie Hoey, MVSU, MSW; Jeffery Hollie, UM, MSW; Lakeisha Ivy, UM, MSW; Jimmy Johnson, UM, MSW; Stephania Jones, JSU, MSW; Wonda Jones, MVSU, MSW; Brandy Kelly, JSU, MSW; Mary Lewis, MSW; Tracy Malone, USM, MSW; Dorothy Manuel, MVSU, MSW; Andrea Mayberry, JSU, MSW; Carla Mayberry, UA, MSW; Tonya McAnally, UU, MSW; Judy McClain, MVSU, MSW; Stephanie McGowan Stanton, USM, MSW; Shelly Medlin, USM, MSW; Jessica Michael, UM, MSW; Sandra Panzo, UM, MSW; Terry Phillips, USM, MSW; Tammy Prude, MVSU, MSW; Stacey Rasco, JSU, MSW; Victoria Reed, USM, MSW; Juanita Roberson, UU, MSW; Tonya Rogillo, USM, MSW; Tosha Satcher, USM, MSW; Christina Schumpert, UM, MSW; Margie Shelton, UM, MSW; Tomario Stamps, MSW; Latasha Thomas, MSW; Patricia Turnage, JSU, MSW; Tina Turner, UM, MSW; Shirley Vallery, MVSU, MSW; Mary Vernon, MVSU, MSW; Amy Ward, UM, MSW; Anna Warren Brooke, USM, MSW; Viedale Washington, UM, MSW; Billie Williams, UM, MSW; Kenyatta Williams, UM, MSW; Wade Williams, UM, MSW; Valerie Yowk Foster, Masters/Health Services Administration.

We have the Grandmother of the Year at MDHS!

Phyllis Teague, administrative assistant in Budgets and Accounting was recently named Grandmother of the Year at Oak Forest Elementary in Jackson, her grandchildren, JaQuavious and Javia Teague's school. Everyone who knows Phyllis can attest to her kind, caring spirit. She is a friend to all she meets. Congratulations!



Region VI Director Celebrates her One Year Anniversary



Jolie Kerenick, Region VI Regional Director for the Division of Family and Children's Services celebrated her one year anniversary as an RD. She was presented a JUMBO cupcake and candle during the weekly staff meeting.



Earl Scales Receives the Mitchell Wendell Jurist Award

Our very own Assistant Attorney General Earl Scales received an award in Orlando, Florida in May on behalf of the work he does for children. Scales was awarded the Mitchell Wendell Jurist Award on May 7 at the **Annual Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children** and the **American Public Human Services Association** Conference. This national award is in recognition of his significant contributions to the field of children's law and legal administration of children's programs.

The Mitchell Wendell Award Jurist Award recognizes outstanding leadership, guidance and counsel for dedication to the Association of Administrators of the ICPC and the children they serve. The award was created in honor of Mitchell Wendell who was the original author of the ICPC and served as legal counsel to the AAICPC for many years. Scales has worked tirelessly with the agency's divisions on legal matters. His hard work, dedication and committed focus is always followed with his mantra, "It's what is best for the children." Congratulations on your achievement and recognition.



DID YOU KNOW....

Top three Hurricanes to Hit the U.S. are (1) **The Great Labor Day Storm**, September 2, 1935, Florida. One of just three Category 5 Hurricanes to make landfall in the U.S. Caused 423 deaths and provided the setting for the Humphrey Bogart - Lauren Bacall movie, Key Largo. (2) **Hurricane Katrina**, August, 2005, Louisiana and Mississippi. Katrina was the costliest and the third deadliest ever to hit the U.S. (3) **Hurricane Camille**, August 17-22, 1969, Mississippi, Louisiana, Virginia. The final windspeed will never be known because all measuring devices were destroyed, but it is thought to have exceeded 200 mph. June is the start of Hurricane season for us. For more information on preparing an emergency kit for your family, go to: www.msema.org. Be alert. Be prepared.

ICPC is an agreement, that has been enacted into law by all 50 states in the U.S. and the District of Columbia, which controls the lawful movement of children from one state to another for the purposes of adoption. For more information, go to: [http://glossary.adoption.com/interstate-compact-on-the-placement-of-children-\(icpc\).html](http://glossary.adoption.com/interstate-compact-on-the-placement-of-children-(icpc).html)

Ribbon-cutting celebrates new facility for Jackson County CASA in Pascagoula

Standing underneath large, shady oak trees on the grounds of the **Jackson County** Youth Court, Frances Allsup was fighting to hold back tears as she spoke without reserve about Court Appointed Special Advocates, or CASA volunteers, and the children they represent.

"It's bittersweet, because it's sad to know that a program like this is needed, that there are abused children," Allsup said, "But if it has to be, then I'm excited that there's a building that we can call our own."

Allsup, Jackson County's CASA executive director, spoke to guests during a ribbon-cutting ceremony and balloon release to welcome CASA moving into a new office facility.

The trailer will serve as part of the training facility where CASA must host 30 hours worth of instruction along with 12 hours of in-service a year, according to national CASA guidelines, Allsup said. There are presently 64 CASA volunteers in Jackson County.

The move into the new office facility is expected to take place toward the end of summer.

"The Jackson County Board of Supervisors was gracious enough to give us one," she said of the trailer. "I'm thrilled. It's going to be amazing."

Among special guests at the ceremony were Mark Smith, deputy executive director of the Mississippi Department of Human Services; Earl Scales, assistant to the Attorney General; Sally Wilson Erny, chief program office for National CASA; Laurie Johnson, CASA Mississippi director; and Sharon Sigalas, the county's youth court judge.

"One of the things CASA provides MDHS is teamwork," Smith said. "That's one thing we have to have because there is no way that we, at the Department of Human Services can do it by ourselves. It's just impossible to do with all the economic problems we have in the country today. We have to have this support."

Smith called CASA team members great.

"I learned a long time ago that players play but teams win. And with CASA as part of our team, we are winning the battle, one child at a time."

Youth Court Judge Sharon Sigalas said Jackson County CASA is the oldest CASA program in the state of Mississippi.

"I'm proud, as a community, we do what we need to do to provide those children a safe permanent place to call home," Sigalas said.

After the ribbon-cutting, everyone moved to the front of the youth court and watched as more than 350 blue balloons, each one representing a child in foster care, were released into the air.

Reprint from [The Mississippi Press/Gulflive.com](http://TheMississippiPress.com).



Jackson County CASA officials hosted a ribbon-cutting and balloon release on Tuesday to celebrate CASA moving into a new office soon. Guests and CASA supporters gather on the grounds of the Jackson County Youth Court to release balloons that represent each child in CASA's care. (The Mississippi Press/Beverly Tuskan)

To report abuse or neglect of a child or vulnerable adult, call:
Mississippi Centralized Intake

1-800-222-8000

www.msabusehotline.mdhs.ms.gov

You can remain
anonymous.
Just don't remain quiet.

A report of child abuse is made every ten seconds. • More than five children die every day as a result of child abuse. • Approximately 80% of children that die from abuse are under the age of 4.
(Information from www.childhelp.org)

County Corner - Spotlight on Hinds and Holmes Counties



This month we travel to **Hinds County**, home to **Jackson**, the capital of the state. Hinds is located in the west central portion of the state. The **2010 U.S. Census** noted a population of 245,285 residents. That is down from the 2000 Census which counted, 250,800 people. Hinds County is one of ten counties in the state with two county seats, the city of Jackson and **Raymond**. Hinds County is considered to be a large county with a total area of 877.35 square miles.

Hinds County is named for **General Thomas Hinds**, a hero of **Battle of New Orleans**.

In 2010, Jackson had a population of 173,514, down 5.8 percent since 2000. Jackson has a fairly young population with a median age of 31.2 years compared to the state median age of 37.7. The population consisted of 46.5 percent males and 53.5 percent females.

The current slogan for the city is Jackson, Mississippi: City with Soul. Jackson is ranked 3rd out of America's 100 largest metro areas for the best "Bang For Your Buck" city according to Forbes magazine. The study measured overall affordability, housing rates and other key indicators. The city is named after Andrew Jackson, who was still a general at the time of the naming but later became president. The city is the anchor of the Metro area.

USS Jackson will be the first ship of the **United States Navy** to be named in honor of the city.

The region which is now the city of Jackson was historically part of the large territory occupied by the **Choctaw Nation**, the last of the indigenous peoples who had inhabited the area for thousands of years. The area was obtained by the United States under the terms of the **Treaty of Doak's Stand** in 1820, by which the Choctaw ceded some of their land. After the treaty was ratified, European-American settlers began to move into the area, so many that they encroached on remaining Choctaw land.

Under pressure from the U.S. government, the Choctaw Native Americans agreed to removal after 1830 from all their lands east of the Mississippi River. Although most of the Choctaw moved to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma, along with the other of the **Five Civilized Tribes**, a significant number chose to stay in their homeland, citing Article XIV of the **Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek** and gave up their tribal membership and became state and U.S. citizens. Today, most Choctaw in Mississippi who are part of the federally recognized **Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians** live in several Indian communities located throughout the state, the largest of which, Choctaw, is about 100 miles northeast of Jackson.

The current location of Raymond was selected for the original county seat of Hinds County because the true center was low and subject to flooding. The town of Raymond received its charter from the Mississippi legislature on December 15, 1830. Because of its status as a seat of justice and its proximity to the **Natchez Trace**, Raymond developed quickly into a prosperous small town.

In the late 1840s, **Cooper's Well**, a property near Raymond with a well that provided sulphured water, was developed into a resort for those seeking the perceived health benefits from its ingestion.

Construction of a new courthouse was begun at the center of the town square in 1857 and completed in 1859, and was facilitated largely by slave labor. The courthouse is still in use as a secondary location of county legal matters and is considered by many to be a prime example of southern Greek revival architecture.

The **Battle of Raymond** was fought by Confederate and Union soldiers near Raymond on May 12, 1863 as part of **General Ulysses S. Grant's Vicksburg Campaign** during the Civil War. Four days later, the pivotal **Battle of Champion Hill** was won by Grant's troops and sealed the fate of Vicksburg. **Grant stayed at Waverly, the plantation of John B. Peyton**, and Union soldiers used **St. Mark's Episcopal Church** as a hospital. Blood stains can still be seen on the church's floor today.

Hinds County has a number of colleges and universities including: **Belhaven University** (Jackson), **Hinds Community College** (Raymond), **Jackson State University** (Jackson), **Millsaps College** (Jackson), **Mississippi College** (Clinton), **Mississippi College School of Law** (Jackson), **Reformed Theological Seminary** (Jackson), **Tougaloo College** (Tougaloo), **University of Mississippi Medical Center** (Jackson) and **Wesley Biblical Seminary** (Jackson).

Holmes County is located to the north of Hinds County in what is considered to be the **Mississippi Delta**. As of 2010, the population was 19,198, down from the 2000 Census number of 21,609. Of the 19,198, there were 3,001 whites and 16,018 blacks, 6,926 households and 2,084 with children under 18. The county has a total area of 764.18 square miles. Holmes County has reportedly the lowest life expectancy of any county in the United States, either for men or women.

The county is named in honor of **David Holmes, the first governor of Mississippi**. Its county seat is **Lexington**. Notable natives include: Malachi Favors, jazz bassist, **B.B. King**, internationally acclaimed blues musician lived in Lexington, **Charles Harrison Mason**, founder of the Church of God in Christ, **Edmond Favor Noel**, 37th Governor of Mississippi, **Lonnie Pitchford**, blues musician born in Lexington, **Hazel Brannon Smith**, first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing (1914–1994), **Hattie Winston**, American television, film and Broadway actress, **Monroe Saffold Jr.**, American bodybuilder, **John A. Lomax** (1867–1948), pioneering folklorist and **David Herbert Donald** (1920–2009), Pulitzer-prize-winning historian.

Holmes County is largely rural but has some beautiful, nationally protected wildlife areas that include parts of the **Hillside National Wildlife Refuge**, **Mathews Brake National Wildlife Refuge**, **Morgan Brake National Wildlife Refuge** and the **Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge**.

Next month we'll take a closer look at Humphreys, Itawamba and Issaquena Counties.



Texting while driving kills.

For many of us, text messaging and smart phones are a way of life. It's not smart, however, to text and drive or use your smart phone, as tempting as it is. Make a deal with yourself: Put the phone down while you are driving. Don't pick it up until you are stopped. There is no text message, email or phone call that is more important than your life and the lives and safety of those with whom you share the road. **Distracted drivers kill.**

CDC Releases Stats on Risky Teen Behavior - Let's Help Mississippi Teens Become Healthy Teens

(Reuters) - A new federal study shows dramatic improvement in the driving habits of U.S. high school students, but texting by teenagers behind the wheel is a concern, the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** said on Thursday.

One in three high school students reported they had texted or emailed while driving during the previous 30 days, according to the centers' 2011 youth risk behavior survey of 15,000 high school students.

The percentage of those who had texted or emailed while driving was higher for upper classmen, with nearly 43 percent of 11th graders and 58 percent of 12th graders saying they had done so in the past month. This is the first time texting questions were included in this survey.

"Texting or emailing while driving a car can have deadly consequences," said Howell Wechsler, director of the CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health.

The CDC did not have statistics on how many teens are killed annually from accidents caused by texting or emailing.

In 2010, auto accidents killed 3,115 teens aged 13-19, the CDC said. That was down 44 percent over the past decade, but auto accidents remain the leading cause of teen deaths.

The centers said the survey revealed more teenagers are wearing seatbelts and fewer are driving after drinking.

Over two decades, the percentage of high school students who never or rarely wore a seatbelt declined from 26 percent to eight percent, the CDC said.

In 2011, only eight percent of students said they had driven a car within the past 30 days when they had been drinking alcohol, compared to 17 percent in 1997. The percentage of students who rode with a driver who had been drinking during the previous 30 days dropped from 40 percent to 24 percent.

"These trends show that we are making great progress," Wechsler said.

The risk behavior survey found that while cigarette smoking

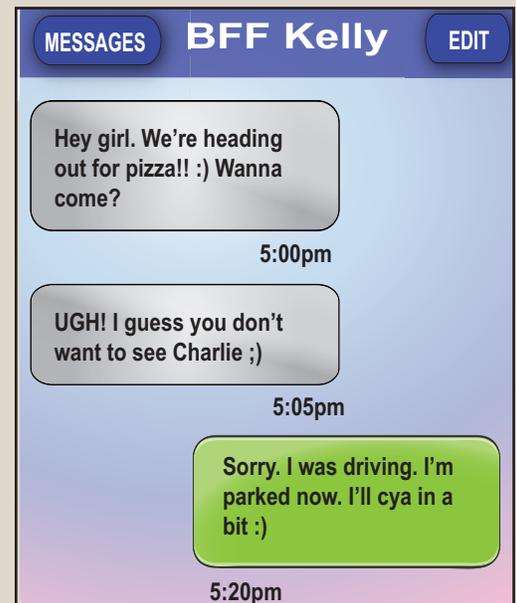
dropped slightly from 2009-2011, more teens smoked marijuana, with 23.1 percent of students saying they had used it one or more times during the previous 30 days. For the first time since the CDC began taking the survey in 1991, more teens said they smoked marijuana than cigarettes.

Nearly 40 percent of students said they had at least one alcoholic drink in the previous 30 days.

The risk survey also found that one in five students said they had been bullied on school property during the previous 12 months. About 16 percent said they had been bullied electronically through email, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites or texting.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/07/us-usa-health-teens-risk-idUSBRE8561GO20120607>.

For information on positive steps we're making in Mississippi, "like" Healthy Teens for a Better Mississippi's page on Facebook or watch for the new website: www.htbm.ms.



Do You Have a Facebook or Twitter Account?

Social networking is one of the many ways we stay connected with our friends and family. We also use it to find out what's going on in the world. "Like" the Mississippi Department of Human Services Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/msdhs> or follow us on Twitter at http://twitter.com/MS_DHS to stay up on the latest happenings at MDHS.

To apply for a job with the Mississippi Department of Human Services, go to the State Personnel Board website at: <http://www.mspb.ms.gov/>