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## Pittman Gift Boosts Grove Scholars

Alumnus helps build program to support underserved students

SEPTEMBER 6, 2022 BY BILL DABNEY

**FaTvLiErC&SMPrSt**



Grove Scholars director Gray Flora IV (center, with pizza) takes the 2022 freshman cohort bowling to help them bond and destress before beginning their collegiate experience at Ole Miss. Photo courtesy Renvy Pittman

OXFORD, Miss. – A \$1 million private gift to the **University of Mississippi** is the catalyst that has brought significant changes to **Ole Miss Grove Scholars**, enabling the program to provide a higher level of service to its students.

The Grove Scholars program facilitates academic success and job placement among Mississippi residents seeking degrees related to science, technology, engineering and math, as well as health care.

Formerly under the umbrella of another student success program, Grove Scholars has become a stand-alone, housed within the **College of Liberal Arts**, and has a full-time dedicated director and program manager. Its independence also makes the program eligible for dedicated resources from the College of Liberal Arts and the **Office of the Provost**.

Because of these changes, “we now have staff members focused exclusively on the academic success and general flourishing of every Grove Scholar,” said Gray Flora IV, the program’s director. “We’ll be better able to target resources to both the group and individual students to ensure their needs are met to be successful through their entire undergraduate experience.”

Meeting those needs takes money, and that’s why the recent gift from UM alumna Renvy Pittman is crucial to the program.

All Grove Scholars’ college expenses, such as tuition, room, food, books and supplies, are covered by the program for the second summer session before their freshman year. The students’ Ole Miss Opportunity scholarship covers most expenses during the fall and spring semesters; Grove Scholars then pays for one class every summer of their undergraduate career.

Through the program, students will be offered such services as increased tutoring, help finding jobs or internships, stipends for unpaid or lightly paid internships, assistance with fees related to graduate school and entrance exams, guidance on changing their majors and improved program activities.

“Staying true to Renvy’s transformational vision, we want our students to not only obtain a degree, but have an impactful, well-rounded undergraduate career that sets them up for success after college is completed,” Flora said, adding that this year the number of students eligible to participate in Grove Scholars was increased from 13 to 25.

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## Campus Briefs

### Donations Sought for 25th Annual Books and Bears Program

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children’s play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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## Thank You To Our Donors

### Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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## Ole Miss In the News

### Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith’s Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith’s enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith’s 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school’s first African-American student.

"As we grow, we will need more money to cover those fees and fulfill those guarantees. We need more people to invest in the work."



UM alumnus and donor Renvy Pittman and Gray Flora IV (fourth and fifth from left), director of the Grove Scholars program, join an early cohort of Grove Scholars on campus. Photo by Bill Dabney/UM Foundation

Since 2014, Pittman, a Jackson native living in Los Angeles, has contributed more than \$2.1 million to the program. She hopes her most recent gift will set an example, encouraging other Ole Miss alumni and friends to provide private support for the program.

"Gray had a big job with setting this up independently and bringing 25 kids on this summer without his No. 2 person in place yet, so we're kind of phasing the expansion," Pittman said. "I can see this getting really big."

"Within a few years, I fully expect we'll have 100 kids in the program."

Grove Scholars is the brainchild of Stephen Monroe, chair and assistant professor of writing and rhetoric and former assistant liberal arts dean.

Monroe and Pittman realized **Ole Miss Opportunity** recipients interested in STEM or health professions could benefit from a bridge program that would help orient them to the university and college-level work. With Pittman's support, 12 OMO scholars were selected for the program in the summer of 2014.

For the program's stability, Pittman credits university administrators, specifically Provost Noel Wilkin and Lee Cohen, dean of liberal arts.

"This is a program that offers advantages to students that extend beyond the classroom," Wilkin said. "It provides them with support, encouragement and opportunities that help them succeed and develop abilities that will serve them well throughout their careers."

"This program is a wonderful example of our commitment to student success and how support programs benefit students."

Cohen agreed.

"It is not uncommon for us to have students arrive on campus under-prepared for the many challenges they will face inside and outside of the classroom," he said. "This can lead to doubt about whether they will be able pursue their dreams."

"Grove Scholars provides much-needed assistance across multiple domains, which helps with retention and success towards graduation. It is our intent for Grove Scholars to become a nationally recognized program that will be the envy of other universities across the country."

Both administrators expressed gratitude for Pittman's generosity, tireless advocacy for underserved students and dedication to building Grove Scholars.

"We've been doing this program since 2014, and I wanted the program to grow," Pittman said. "Even though we were helping students, I knew we could do a lot more."

"I'm pleased with how far we've gotten, but I think we can do even more for the program now."

To make a gift to the Grove Scholars program, visit <https://give.olemiss.edu> or for more information, contact Nikki Neely Davis at [nneely@olemiss.edu](mailto:nneely@olemiss.edu) or 662-915-6678.

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"James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier," a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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