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Pittman's Gifts Provide Equity above Access

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Pittman's Gifts Provide Equity above Access

Supplemented scholarships help Grove Scholars stay in school

JUNE 30, 2018 BY BILL DABNEY



Renvy Pittman (right) chats with Grove Scholars Jontae Warren (left), a May graduate from Booneville, and Devante Yates, a senior from West Point. UM photo by Bill Dabney

OXFORD, Miss. – An afternoon spent visiting schools in the Mississippi Delta inspired a University of Mississippi alumna to make a series of gifts totaling nearly \$1 million over the past six years, helping build a program that improves students' chances of graduating.

Renvy Pittman's most recent \$350,000 gift further bolsters the Grove Scholars program, which facilitates academic success and job placement among Mississippi residents seeking degrees related to science, technology, engineering and math and who have also

received Ole Miss Opportunity scholarships.

The Grove Scholars program is the brainchild of Stephen Monroe, chair and assistant professor of writing and rhetoric and former assistant dean of the College of Liberal Arts.

"Stephen is an amazing person; he is brimming with ideas about how to help more students from all types of backgrounds be successful at Ole Miss," said Pittman, who grew up in Jackson and lives in Los Angeles. "After talking extensively with him, it became clear to me that I wanted to help ensure that more Mississippi residents come to the University of Mississippi and graduate with a STEM degree."

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

The program has grown to serve more than 70 students and consists of classes in math and sciences for academic credit as well as tutoring, social events and exposure to labs and lectures on campus – all occurring the summer before the students' freshman year.

Because the Ole Miss Opportunity Scholarship does not cover summer tuition, the Grove Scholars program also provides opportunities for students to take summer classes throughout their undergraduate career. The newest initiative provides financial support for Grove Scholars seeking a career-relevant internship during the summer term.

Students find that being introduced to college life before their freshman year gives them a chance to bond with each other and with the program's director, Gray Flora.

"What's so great about what Renvy's done is she's enabled a lot of students to have what they need over and above their scholarships," Flora said. "It's one thing to say, 'Yes, you can come to the University of Mississippi,' but it's another thing to give them the tools and the equity to really be able to thrive at a major public university."

"It's more than just being able to come. You have to know how to navigate this place. There are all these extracurricular needs that you don't think about, and Renvy has enabled us to provide those for the students. That's the difference between access and true equity."

Jontae Warren, of Booneville, is a Grove Scholar who graduated in May with a bachelor's degree in pharmaceutical sciences and has already transitioned into the School of Pharmacy's Pharm.D. degree program. After completing that, he plans to pursue a residency and ultimately specialize in pediatric pharmacy related to oncology.

"The Grove Scholars program allowed me to meet other students who had the same aspirations as I, and we were able to become a support system for each other," Warren said. "I am still great friends with many in my cohort today."

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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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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.

"It's a community," Pittman said. "Students need community to be successful in college. So Grove Scholars identifies these young people, brings them in and empowers them to unlock their potential and encourage each other."

Warren said being a Grove Scholar helped him financially, academically and emotionally.

"Both (former program coordinator) Ben Pinion and Gray Flora have been great mentors, and anytime I needed advice on what to do next, their doors were always open," he said. "I am very thankful to have been a part of this program and hope that it continues to grow."

Pittman hopes so, too.

"I would like to look back after 10 years and see these kids, who are not children anymore at all, using their degrees in science, technology, engineering or math to make their communities in Mississippi a better place," she said.

Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter said he greatly appreciates the support of alumni such as Pittman who want to play an active role in the university's vision to have a transformative influence in communities throughout the state.

"Our hope is that as students from disadvantaged areas graduate from Ole Miss, their lives and those of generations to come will be significantly enhanced, which will help advance their communities and make great improvements for our state and ultimately our nation," he said.

"The Grove Scholars program is a key component of the big picture – to truly make a significant impact upon the world around us. Renvy has set an example of generosity that I hope others will want to follow."

To help support the Grove Scholars program financially, contact Denson Hollis, executive director of development, at 662-915-5092 or dhollis@olemiss.edu. For more information and student profiles, visit [Grove Scholars](#) online.

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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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