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Recruiting Future Economists

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Recruiting Future Economists

Alumni couple's gift benefits UM Department of Economics

SEPTEMBER 10, 2022 BY BILL DABNEY

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UM alumni Al (left) and LeaAnne Williams have committed to growing an endowment that benefits Ole Miss economics majors. They're joined by their children, Mary Frances and Harrison. Photo courtesy LeaAnne Williams

OXFORD, Miss. – LeaAnne and Al Williams, of Knoxville, Tennessee, who met at the **University of Mississippi**, committed to growing an endowment that will help their alma mater recruit students interested in economics.

“Our family started at Ole Miss, and we love it,” LeaAnne Williams said. “We want to see it continue to be the best university it can be and to recruit the best students and faculty.”

With a recent gift of \$50,000, they established the Al L. Williams Scholarship Endowment in Economics to provide financial assistance to incoming freshmen majoring in economics. Recipients may retain the scholarship for up to eight semesters while in good academic standing.

Al Williams, president and CEO of the nation’s leading baked bean producer, **Bush Brothers & Co.**, earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Tennessee in 1987 and a master’s degree in economics from Ole Miss in 1989.

Afterward, Williams accepted his first job offer with Bryan Foods, a division of Sara Lee, as a financial analyst in 1990. In 1997, he joined Bush Brothers, where he has worked in several capacities, including director of procurement, logistics and supply chain, vice president of human resources, senior vice president, and chief financial officer.

In August 2017, he accepted the role of chief operating officer and in 2018 was named president of the company. In July 2019, he was unanimously elected CEO, becoming only the second non-family CEO in Bush Brothers history. Williams also serves on the board of directors for another family-owned business, Milo’s Tea Co.

“We’ve seen how Al’s economics education has been so beneficial to his career, so we hope our gift will help future generations of students have a similar experience,” said LeaAnne Williams, who earned her bachelor’s degree in accountancy from Ole Miss in 1991. “We plan to add to the endowment each year, and our goal is for the scholarship to provide students with financial means for a four-year degree.”

LeaAnne Williams passed the CPA exam in 1993 and started working for Weyerhaeuser Paper Co. in Columbus, before the couple moved to Knoxville. There, she started her own CPA firm, focusing on tax, and has enjoyed a successful two-decade career.

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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.

Josh Hendrickson, UM chair of economics, expressed gratitude for the Williamses' gift.

"Their gift will greatly improve our ability to recruit the best and brightest students to study economics at Ole Miss," Hendrickson said.

The couple, both of whom serve on the Dean's Advisory Board for the **College of Liberal Arts**, met when Al Williams was a graduate assistant to economics professor Lewis Smith, under whom LeaAnne and her roommate took Economics 201.

Their children are following similar paths. Mary Frances Williams graduated from the Patterson School of Accountancy in May 2022 and is pursuing a master's degree in accountancy this fall. Harrison Williams is a sophomore at Samford University, where he plays tennis for the Bulldogs and studies economics like his dad.

Nikki Neely Davis, executive director of development, said the Williamses, both of whom serve on the Now & Ever Campaign committee for the College of Liberal Arts, are shining examples of engaged alumni.

"I'm so glad to know Al and LeaAnne," she said. "I consider them wonderful friends and I greatly appreciate their vision for the **Department of Economics** and for its students. Private gifts like theirs truly make a transformative difference in the quality of education we can offer."

The Al L. Williams Scholarship Endowment in Economics is open to support from businesses and individuals. Gifts can be made by sending a check, with the fund's name noted on the memo line, to the University of Mississippi Foundation, 406 University Ave., Oxford, MS 38655, or by giving online at <https://give.olemiss.edu>.

For more information about supporting the College of Liberal Arts, contact Nikki Neely Davis, executive director of development, at 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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