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1-22-2021

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Recommended Citation

Smith, Edwin B., "UM Announces New Towns for M Partner Community Improvement Program" (2021).
University of Mississippi News. 5425.
<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/umnews/5425>

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UM Announces New Towns for M Partner Community Improvement Program

McLean Institute adds Ecu, Pontotoc for Phase 2 of community building

JANUARY 22, 2021 BY EDWIN B. SMITH

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Chancellor Glenn Boyce (left) and Ecu Mayor Jeff Smith shake hands after signing M Partner agreements on Friday (Jan. 22). Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – Following the successful launch of a pilot program that assisted three Mississippi towns with community improvement projects, the **McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement** at the **University of Mississippi** has launched Phase 2 of its M Partner program with the addition of two more municipalities.

The town of Ecu and city of Pontotoc are partner communities for the next phase of **M Partner**, announced Friday (Jan. 22). Both communities have identified priority projects to promote economic development, elevate local history, expand educational enrichment, create public art and encourage visitors to the **Tanglefoot Trail**.

This next phase of the initiative will run through August 2022.

“The University of Mississippi is defined by a powerful feeling of shared community, compassion and care for others,” Chancellor Glenn Boyce said. “This is true within our university, and it is true more broadly throughout the state we serve. Our towns and cities are full of potential that our university can help to cultivate and unleash.

“M Partner is a fantastic program and a powerful vehicle for the university to deliver on its commitment to Mississippi.”

McLean Institute administrators expressed high expectations for the program’s growth.

“We are excited to kick off the spring 2021 semester with the involvement of students and faculty from the College of Liberal Arts, Honors College, School of Journalism and the School of Law, and we look forward to new collaborations across campus,” said Laura Martin, M Partner director and associate director of the McLean Institute.

“We know that there is a lot of positive momentum for community and economic development along the Tanglefoot Trail. We are grateful to our new community partners for their excitement and willingness to pursue this collaboration with the university.”

The pilot phase of M Partner worked with **Charleston, Lexington** and **New Albany**. Across the pilot communities, priority projects addressed economic development, educational attainment, community

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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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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.

health and wellness, and beautification.

"The next phase of M Partner will focus in one county, Pontotoc County, and build on our work in New Albany by extending the involvement of UM down the Tanglefoot Trail," Martin said. "The projects still revolve around quality of life, with an additional emphasis on the Tanglefoot Trail as more people are seeking outdoor recreational activities while practicing physical distancing during COVID."

Officials from both communities said they hope the university's involvement will provide "fresh eyes" and that the expertise of faculty and students within some departments might help unlock problems that can sometimes be overwhelming.

"Part of my job is to find ways to improve the quality of life for my constituents and, in doing so, thereby retain them and attract additional constituents," Ecu Mayor Jeff Smith said. "Finding the needs and wants of the people living in the community and then delivering on those needs is a goal. We want to positively affect the people in our community."



Chancellor Glenn Boyce (left) and Pontotoc Mayor Bob Peeples sign M Partner agreements on Friday (Jan. 22). Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

Pontotoc Mayor Bob Peeples said his community can benefit from the university's resources, while allowing UM students to get hands-on experiences to put their education into practice.

"The close proximity of Pontotoc to Ole Miss makes it a perfect fit for this program," Peeples said. "With the budget constraints that cities have, looking for new and cost-effective ways to serve fellow Mississippians is a top priority."

M Partner is among several community engagement initiatives housed at the McLean

Institute. The institute provides strategic direction for M Partner and acts as a conduit to connect faculty, staff and students with community partners.

"When these connections are made, students can apply what they are learning in the classroom to real-world situations, faculty can pursue community-engaged research partnerships, and community organizations can make tangible progress on their priority projects," said Albert Nylander, McLean Institute director. "We strive to practice mutually beneficial and empowering partnerships where everyone can learn and grow."

The institute also has created linkages among its signature programs – M Partner, Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, and the North Mississippi VISTA Project – to create additional points of connection and foster the sustainability of these community-campus partnerships.

For more information about the McLean Institute and its programs, visit <https://mclean.olemiss.edu/>.

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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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