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UM Unveils 'Transformative Partnership' with Three Communities

Ceremonies in Charleston, New Albany and Lexington kick off M Partner program

MARCH 22, 2018 BY MICHAEL NEWSOM

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Lexington Mayor Robin McCrory (right) signs the M Partner agreement alongside UM Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Communications

OXFORD, Miss. – M Partner, the transformative initiative outlined in the **University of Mississippi's** comprehensive strategic plan, **Flagship Forward**, was launched this week through signing ceremonies with pilot partners in three Mississippi cities: Charleston, New Albany and Lexington.

Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter and the mayors of those towns announced the partnerships Monday and Tuesday at public launch events in those communities.

M Partner is the fruit of a meeting of leaders from all UM campuses that was designed to create an ambitious new approach to the university's longstanding commitment to addressing needs in the state.

"We challenged ourselves to come up with a 'big, bold idea,' a new approach to making a difference here in Mississippi," Vitter said. "And we realized that the opportunity is to tap into the talents of our entire university, partner with a community and make a difference across a broad range of areas in that community – from health, entrepreneurship, education and economic development to transportation, media, marketing and more."

The chancellor laid out the vision for the program in his November 2016 inaugural address, noting the considerable potential in channeling the talents of the university to support towns and cities as they work together to improve community life. This innovative program seeks to match diverse and comprehensive university talent and ideas with community goals to create leveraged results.

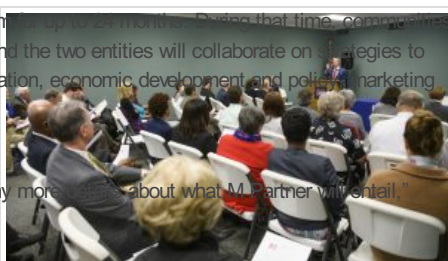
The goal is to create a mutually beneficial relationship through which the university and the community work together to co-create knowledge and ideas that improve quality of life in the long term. M Partner employs a three-pronged approach to community partnership:

- A robust student service-learning component in which students and professors work alongside community members to achieve meaningful results in the community and enhance learning and teaching at the university
- Research and scholarship fueled by real-world challenges and informed by lessons learned from partners at the community level
- Engagement of university and community leaders to apply best practices and creative problem-solving that will enhance community life and inform university outreach and service activities

The chancellor signed agreements with New Albany Mayor Tim Kent and Charleston Mayor Sedrick Smith on Monday, and one with Lexington Mayor Robin McCrory on Tuesday to launch M Partner.

In those cities, M Partner will act as a pilot program. Over the next six months, pilot partners will work with the university to define their needs and the two entities will collaborate on strategies to address issues ranging from health care and education, economic development and policy, marketing and tourism, and resiliency to core government systems.

"Over the coming months, you'll begin to hear many more stories about what M Partner will entail," Vitter said. "But at its core, it is about working together for a stronger Mississippi, collaborating with local leaders to address community priorities while enhancing student learning and



Members of the New Albany community listen as Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter discusses the new Flagship Forward.

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Campus Briefs

Students Learn 'Real Politics' in Washington, D.C., Winter Session

OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates' decisions.

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting profession."

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve's

research and addressing our university's fundamental responsibility to help build a healthy and vibrant Mississippi."

Forward partnership. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Communications

New Albany has a thriving downtown and a strong tax base, but community leaders said they will look to the expertise of Ole Miss students, faculty and staff to identify ways for the city to grow and improve. Officials said they're also eager to hear from their citizenry.

"The city of New Albany is excited to see where this collaboration with the University of Mississippi takes us," Kent said. "This relationship will lend itself to our community in a way that gives us the ability to imagine and generate new ideas and achieve great collective goals for the common good and general interest of our citizens."



New Albany Mayor Tim Kent (right), signs the M Partner agreement with Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Communications

M Partner promises to be a great program for the people of New Albany, said U.S. Rep. Trent Kelly, congressman for Mississippi's first district.

"I commend the University of Mississippi and Chancellor Vitter for their forward-thinking initiative that created M Partner," Kelly said.

"Through this public-private partnership, Mississippi is leading the efforts to capitalize on the community's strengths, to recognize and address its challenges, and to create meaningful opportunities for the future."

Smith said Charleston is eager to get started with the program's community assessment to determine which projects to undertake and how to execute them. Following Monday's announcement, city leaders held a meeting with citizens to hear their ideas.

"I'm both honored and proud to share in the opportunities for how we can work together to invest in Charleston and provide every citizen with the resources necessary for a brighter future," Smith said.

McCrory said M Partner's goals for the work in Lexington, which will be determined through meetings with the university and community members, will leave an impression on her city for generations to come.

"M Partner is the collaborative hope we have in striving to do this in a community with such limited resources and budgetary restraints," McCrory said. "The University of Mississippi will leave footprints of progress throughout the city of Lexington for years to come through the successful projects our community will have the privilege of working on together as a result of being an inaugural M Partner city."



Charleston Mayor Sedrick Smith (left) and Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter sign the M Partner agreement. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Communications

U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson, who represents the state's second district, said he is pleased that Charleston and Lexington were selected for the program.

"A collaborative approach to community development and engagement is a great way to strengthen these communities and build resources that will be very useful today and in the future," he said. "I appreciate the University of Mississippi's strong commitment to our state and these cities."

Katrina Caldwell, UM **vice chancellor for diversity and community engagement**, will guide the program.

Research has clearly shown that it takes teams made up of those from different backgrounds to solve complicated problems, Caldwell said. When she spoke at Lexington, she characterized M Partner as an "all hands-on deck" situation where everyone brings his or her best ideas to the table.

"We have spent a lot of time thinking about what success looks like in a partnership like this, and the reality is that we cannot answer that without you," Caldwell said. "We need to rely on you, the true experts in what matters most in this community to help us set the terms of engagement so that by working together we can co-create a vision that is far greater than anything we could accomplish separately."

More information about the M Partner program is available at <http://mpartner.olemiss.edu/>.

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