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## Anonymous \$150,000 Gift Helping Build Stronger Communities

 FEBRUARY 19, 2010 BY [ADMIN](#)



OXFORD, Miss. – An anonymous \$150,000 gift to the McLean Institute for Community Development at the University of Mississippi is helping raise the quality of life for people throughout the country. The gift is part of a three-year, \$600,000 fundraising effort to further the work of the institute, which has projects in 30 states.

"We are extremely grateful for this initial gift, which is the seed money that will allow us to plan for the continuation of the work of the McLean Institute," said Vaughn Grisham, director of the institute and UM emeritus professor of sociology. "My mentor, George McLean, began his work 60 years ago, and this gift will help us to train more leaders to improve their communities."

Owner and publisher of the Tupelo newspaper from 1934 until his death in 1983, McLean worked to improve life for the underclass in Lee County. As a direct result of his efforts, the county was transformed from one of the nation's poorest to being recognized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a leading model of community development. During his lifetime, McLean's work was honored by many organizations, including The Nation magazine, which named him Man of the Year in 1937.

RKJ\_1108-Grisham

**Vaughn Grisham is director of the McLean Institute for Community Development at the University of Mississippi.** UM photo by Robert Jordan.

Toward the end of his life, McLean approached Grisham, hoping to establish a permanent tie between his community development work and the state's flagship university. McLean's goal was realized a year after his death, when his widow, Anna Keirseay McLain, donated \$150,000 to establish the institute.

More than 25 years later, the institute has positively affected hundreds of communities throughout the state, region and nation, as well as in Canada and Russia. Through on-site research examining strong communities and the subsequent sharing of best practices for community and economic development, the McLean Institute is ensuring that those living in troubled areas can address civic challenges.

The many people who receive training as a result of the institute – whether they're Ole Miss students enrolled in sociology courses or community-identified citizen-leaders participating in local training sessions – have taken on such issues as job loss, lack of affordable housing, low-performing schools and needs for afterschool programs.

The work of Grisham and the McLean Institute to develop and empower leaders to improve their hometowns has been recognized with supporting grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Kettering Foundation that have allowed the organization to reach many communities. The institute will use the recent \$150,000 gift, as well as gifts within the next three years, to further its teaching, research and service initiatives and therefore help more areas, with a focus on Mississippi, Grisham said.

"We've been fortunate to have the McLean Institute housed at the University of Mississippi within our Department of Sociology and Anthropology," said Glenn Hopkins, UM dean of liberal arts. "The work that Vaughn Grisham has done to carry on George McLean's dream of elevating the quality of life for all people is truly remarkable and deserving of support. We are most grateful for the recent gift to the McLean Institute to help ensure that dream is realized."

To learn more about supporting the McLean Institute for Community Development, contact Cody Giles, development officer for the College of Liberal Arts at 662-915-6967 or [wcgiles@olemiss.edu](mailto:wcgiles@olemiss.edu).

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