

WEEK IN VICKSBURG

Vicksburg saw high temps drop from the 60s into the 50s throughout the week, and overnight lows bounced from the 30s into the 50s and back down again. Nearly 6 inches of rain fell during the week.

The Mississippi River climbed locally from 28.3 feet to 33.1. Forecasters were predicting a reading of 32.6 feet on the Vicksburg gauge today.

The City of Vicksburg is seeking to recover more than \$800,000 from Delta Investments & Development LLC and to prevent the former Grand Station Casino property from being abandoned. The potential motion is asking bankruptcy court to lift a stay that froze Delta's debts.

A Wisconsin man died from injuries he received after a van struck him while he rode a bicycle along U.S. 61 North near Blakely Subdivision. Found with a backpack and maps, the man was traveling to New Orleans to visit friends, family members said.

A series of documents filed by lawyers for Kenya Burks, former City of Vicksburg employee who is suing the city and Mayor Paul Winfield, are asking U.S. District Court to compel Winfield to respond to questions about her former job duties as well as personal data about Winfield. Burks' attorneys also made public 15 names of women with whom they say Winfield had affairs.

Long rumored to be a candidate for mayor of Vicksburg, Rep. George Flaggs officially joined the race to seek the Democratic nomination. He will retire from the Mississippi Legislature in June.

More than 4,000 people attended the Downtown Vicksburg Mardi Gras parade, which featured 32 floats. Following the parade, the second annual Vicksburg Carnival de Mardi Gras was held at the Southern Cultural Heritage Center and featured a gumbo cook-off and music by Slaphappy.

Military park officials began the park's annual survey of the frog population, an activity consisting of 10 stops throughout the park along ditches and natural water resources. The presence or absence of amphibians helps indicate changes in the environment.

In a hand-delivered letter, county supervisors demanded \$649,406 from Circuit Clerk Shelly Ashley-Palmtree in collections beyond her salary cap and payments to relatives dating to 2006. Ashley-Palmtree said she expects legal action concerning the settlement, adding that she has offered to pay the money back over time but gotten no response from the Office of the State Auditor.

Vicksburg Warren School District officials cut seven certified nursing assistants employed by a private company to save about \$37,000 a month and reduce duplication of services. The caregivers were assigned to students with special needs and accompanied them throughout the course of the school day.

In response to the Mississippi House approving legislation allowing teachers, cafeteria workers and janitors to carry concealed weapons on campus, VVSD trustees agreed that arming school employees is not the answer to stopping violence. They added that school resource officers are armed, and the high schools have security guards to monitor traffic and visitors.

Up to 10,000 visitors per day are expected at the Vicksburg National Military Park during sesquicentennial activities centered on Memorial Day Weekend. The park is planning to run a shuttle bus from the Outlets at Vicksburg to accommodate visitors to free nighttime events.

After visiting the Old Depot Museum, William Jones of Jackson donated 10 model tenant homes to the museum. The models represent shotgun houses that musicians such as B.B. King, Muddy Waters and other bluesmen grew up in.

Local deaths during the week were Duncan "Gene" Bryant, Michael C. Donovan, Edward Patrick Ryan, Elizabeth McKay Harper, Mary B. Taylor Wilson, Carrie Jackson Lewis, Dr. William Newell Brabston, Thomas Haskel Ross, Minnie Lindsey and Nancy Lucille Schwen Mackey.

Much-improved highways merit maintenance money

OXFORD — The good news is that cars get much better gas mileage. The bad news, well, is that cars get much better gas mileage.

Pain at the pumps is as severe in Mississippi as it is anywhere, but we may be growing numb. After all, not too long ago a 20-cent increase in a matter of weeks would have resulted in howls. But that's what we've seen since late January, and few even bother to comment.

One item of fuel news that did stir a reaction, though, was the confident assertion from Central District Highway Commissioner Dick Hall that the state's fuel tax needs to be doubled. Hall, a Republican and former state senator from Hinds County, is no stranger to controversy. So he likely wasn't surprised when other elected officials harumphed at his notion, shouted him down or ran for cover.

The numbers, however, are on Hall's side.

Taxation schemes vary; some would call them sneaky, even insidious. Sales and property taxes, for example, rise without any legislation, any debate or vote.

That's because sales taxes are keyed to prices. If a soda costs \$1, Mississippi gets seven cents. If the price of the same soda rises to \$2, Mississippi gets 14 cents. One purchase, one soda — two different outcomes for the public purse.

Likewise for property taxes. The assessed value of real estate can



CHARLIE MITCHELL

(and does) go up even when market values fall. Don't believe it? Look at the valuations county assessors established for property taxes starting in 2009. Even though the real estate market was in the dumps, assessed values — and the corresponding taxes — continued to rise.

At one time, Mississippi's tax on fuel worked the same way: when the price at the pump went up, so did the state's revenue. There was a per-gallon tax as well as a tax based on the total sale. But for many years now, Mississippi has followed the national model as well as the one used by other states. The tax is per-gallon only and the current rate is 18.4 cents.

Translated, that means if a gallon of gas sells for 50 cents (fewer of us remember those days), the state's take is 18.4 cents. And if the same gallon sells for \$4, the state's share remains 18.4 cents.

Higher-mileage vehicles are on the road these days and the expense of

fuel combined with the slack economy means the state's income from the fuel tax is pretty flat.

And that flatness, coupled with the rising costs of new construction and maintenance, is leaving the Mississippi Department of Transportation feeling rather penurious.

To be more specific, in the fiscal year that ended in June 2011, the state collected its levy on 1.62 billion gallons of gasoline and in the fiscal year that ended in June 2012, the levy was collected on 1.63 billion. That translated to \$292.7 million in 2011 and \$294 million in 2012.

That's not much growth, and this is as good a place as any to throw in the federal funding aspect. The federal fuel tax is 18 cents per gallon, too. But Mississippi has been getting about \$1.46 worth of work for every federal dollar collected in the state. With the mood in Washington, that cash could be slashed. And in Mississippi, that could be a 33 percent cut if the decision is just

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Highlighting blues culture will keep people coming to city

The big dish in Vicksburg is the National Military Park, delivering several hundred thousand visitors annually. Mostly, they're off Interstate 20, through the Park, and back on the highway to their next stop. Our city and our businesses do not benefit from these thousands of visitors unless we entice them to enjoy other things cookin' in Vicksburg.

The Mississippi Blues Trail is the sizzle we need. The Blues Trail offers us a profound opportunity to develop and promote Vicksburg as a great blues destination. Led by the Vicksburg Blues Society, and anchored by the dynamic weekly Heritage Music Series presented by VBS, and sponsored by Ameristar, we are carrying out a fresh, exciting campaign, "Vicksburg's GOT the BLUES," showcasing our city's blues experiences, including art, real food and real blues.

And we're inviting all the cooks to the kitchen. We've gathered "Vicksburg's GOT the BLUES" partners, a group organized to step-up give our visitors more reasons to stay longer in Vicksburg. In a creative economy, and complementing our city's five Blues Trail markers, we've successfully identified and partnered with, so far,

Voice your opinion

Letters to the editor are published under the following guidelines: Expressions from readers on topics of current or general interest are welcomed. • Letters must be original, not copies or letters sent to others, and must include the name, address and signature of the writer. • Letters must avoid defamatory or abusive statements. • Preference will be given to typed letters of 300 or fewer words. • The Vicksburg Post does not print anonymous letters and reserves the right to edit all letters submitted. • Letters in the column do not represent the views of The Vicksburg Post.

30 local businesses to offer interesting blues fare, all embracing the "Vicksburg's GOT the BLUES" campaign. Each one adding rich ingredients and helping us develop Vicksburg's prominence along the Mississippi Blues Trail.

With this packaging and branding effort, we are able to offer a critical mass of blues activities and experi-

ences that our visitors will eat with a spoon.

Tell your friends. Tell everybody. "Vicksburg's GOT the BLUES".

Shirley B. Waring
Vicksburg Blues Society
Vicksburg Heritage League

Call out the media

I read on the editorial page subject above from The Natchez Democrat on Feb. 9. It appears they cry about certain governmental bodies that want to protect the people and they like to play the First Amendment card.

I have a question: if you are all so concerned about the people, how come you haven't said anything about the news media that's in bed with the federal government? You know the cover-ups, untruths, flat-out lies, etc., that have been told to the American people.

I guess that doesn't bother you because you need to protect the liberal agenda.

Well, one of these days, when it's proved that the media did not inform the American people what is happening to this country you all will never be trusted again. I always thought that the First Amendment

to give back every penny that state residents now pay in.

According to the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal in Tupelo, Hall has agreement from North Mississippi Highway Commissioner Mike Tagert that a "conversation," at least, needs to begin on how to fund any new roads and perform all-important maintenance on the good roads built since the state's ambitious highway expansion began in 1987. The newspaper also reported that back then asphalt was \$27 per ton, compared to \$60 today and concrete was \$16 per square compared to \$90 today.

By comparison, Mississippi's fuel tax rate is pretty reasonable. Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas are at 20 cents. Alabama is at 16 cents. Nationally, the scale ranges from about 58 cents in New York and California to 7.5 cents in Alaska.

Definitely not this session and probably not next session, but eventually the Mississippi Legislature will revisit the state's taxes on fuels, including diesel.

People often say what America needs is elected officials who will level with people, tell them the truth.

That's pretty much what Dick Hall is doing.

But we sure don't like hearing it.

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Wilbur Ruhl
Vicksburg

Dems love gun control

It seems that the Democrats are big on gun control, but the GOP is a lot bigger on hate control.

After the Columbine school murders in Colorado, almost all of the GOP members of Congress voted to post the Ten Commandments in schools, but most of the Democrats voted against the measures.

Every Supreme Court justice said if students saw them it might help them to obey them. Whom we elect makes a difference in the culture for good or bad.

Stan Severson
Claremore, Okla.

African-Americans should look to farming for a solid living

Can you name five prominent African-Americans?

I don't mean name five African-American doctors, athletes, or entertainers, but can you name five African-Americans who still derive their living full time from farming or five academic fields that complement farming?

As we celebrate Black History Month, we should ponder the question above. Between 1920 and 1930 there were more than 900,000 African-American farmers in the United States, and they owned more than 15 million acres of farm land. Today, based on the U.S. Agricultural Census, there are fewer than 20,000 African-Americans deriving their living full time from farming, and they own fewer than four million acres of farm land.

We all have heard the adage, "Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime." Well, I am here to tell you that if you don't own the lake, it doesn't matter how good your fishing skills are, you will still go to bed hungry. African-Americans are becoming people without lakes because we are becoming people without land.

Our heritage, albeit much of it negative, is rooted in agriculture — slavery, the plantation system, and sharecropping. In the 1930s and '40s, most of the African-American population still lived in the rural south and participated in subsis-



DR. CHARLES MAGEE

tence agriculture, either farming their own land or sharecropping. Even though this lifestyle was hard and unprofitable, it did provide the basic necessities of life: food, fiber and shelter. I am not advocating that we return to this lifestyle. However, I am advocating that African-Americans should pursue and obtain degrees in the agricultural and engineering sciences to complement farming.

There are basically three reasons why we should obtain degrees in the agricultural and engineering sciences.

1. This is where the jobs are. If you don't think there are jobs associated with agriculture, next time you visit your local supermarket; ask yourself, how did the 10,000-plus food products get there?

Perhaps the greatest reason of all for some of us to pursue degrees and careers in the agricultural sciences is our social and moral obligation to help our brothers and sisters who still work the land for a living.

Hypothetically, if we, African-Americans, were to become a separate country, it would be the third largest black country in the world, with a population of about 40 mil-

lion. However, we would still be at the mercy of other races because we wouldn't have enough African-American farmers and agricultural scientists to feed ourselves. I believe, we will never prosper as a people until we learn that there is as much dignity in driving a tractor as there is in driving a luxury car.

Many African-Americans are still living under the false myth that farming is 40 acres and a mule. I've got news for my African-American brothers and sisters down South and up North. Modern-day farming is a business and one would probably need 2,000 acres, two tractors, a combine and an irrigation system to make a living. The probability of an African-American being able to afford 2,000 acres, two tractors, a combine, and an irrigation system is not very high. Therefore, African-Americans should pursue specialized disciplines such as agribusiness, animal science, biological engineering, food science, plant science, etc. to support and complement production agriculture.

In order for African-Americans to have lucrative careers in the food and agricultural sciences we must first obtain degrees at all levels in these specialized disciplines. Lack of money need not be a problem in deciding to pursue these degrees because at my university, the College of Agriculture and Food Sciences has more scholarship funds than any other college at the uni-

versity. Yet, we have a very difficult time in finding qualified students for these scholarships.

During Black History Month, elementary, junior high, and high school students will identify George Washington Carver as a great African-American scientist who is renowned for developing more than 100 products from peanuts. Yet, his face does not appear on the jar of any peanut butter. As a scientist, he also developed alternative uses for sweet potatoes, soybeans, pecans, and other crops. This should prompt you to wonder why so few African-Americans follow in the footsteps of Mr. Carver?

Our society will put African-American athletes and entertainers' faces on food products and other items, but they will not put Mr. Carver's face on a jar of peanut butter. We still have many high schools named after Mr. Carver, but very few high school counselors or teachers encourage African-American students to follow in the footsteps of Mr. Carver, or to pursue degrees in science, technology, engineering, agriculture and mathematics fields. And, until more African-Americans pursue careers in agriculture and related sciences they will remain an endangered species.

Dr. Charles Magee is a professor of Biological and Agriculture Systems Engineering at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee.