

FOR MEMBERS OF ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES OF MISSISSIPPI

TODAY IN MISSISSIPPI

THE HEART OF MUSIC HISTORY *Turns 10*



WINTER STORM
FERN

SAVING SANDHILL
CRANES

NOTHING LIKE A
GOOD SANDWICH

MARCH 2026

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A corridor of ice

As I write this column — on Feb. 8 — we are beginning day 14 of storm restoration from Winter Storm Fern. As of this morning, 92% of outages have been restored. For the 8% of our members who were still without power, I know that's not much comfort, but we are working as hard and as quickly as we can.

Fern left a corridor of ice — 25 miles wide and 1 ½ inches thick — starting just north of Vicksburg and running to the northeast corner of the state. The damage within this corridor was unlike anything we have seen before. I've heard linemen refer to it as a "frozen hurricane" because the trees were bent in a swirling motion but covered in a coating of ice.

The storm lasted an entire weekend with two rounds, the worst beginning on a Saturday night and lasting until Sunday afternoon. In the aftermath, Mother Nature did not let up. The temperature didn't get above freezing in most places until Wednesday, and the next weekend another severe cold front moved into the state dropping the lows to single digits. This made for brutal working conditions for our line crews. I've been at the Electric Cooperatives of Mississippi (ECM) for 20 years, and this is the most injuries affecting our personnel I can recall us ever having during power restoration.

The storm damage to our electrical systems was catastrophic.

I'd like to thank our cooperative employees across the state for their hard work. Many have worked for 20 plus days straight (they worked the week before the storm hit) and these have been long, 16-hour days, and they, like the members they serve, came home to dark, cold homes.

I'd also like to thank our members for your patience and understanding. Someone must be first to get their lights on, and unfortunately, someone must be last. Trust me, your co-op's employees are working as hard and as fast as they can to restore your power. And thank you to the members who stepped up to aid in restoration efforts. Many churches and local restaurants helped feed the linemen, and many volunteers, including cooperative employees' families, helped with laundry and other tasks. In some places, restoration truly became a community effort, and that is what makes the cooperative family special.

By the time you read this, every one of our members should (barring some other emergency) have power.

Fern was different folks. Unfortunately, that made power restoration tricky and difficult. (Check out our story about the storm on page 26.)

Thanks again for your support and patience. ❁



by Michael
Callahan

Executive Vice President/CEO
Electric Cooperatives of Mississippi



Mississippi is...

Mississippi, You Were There

*Mississippi, you were there on the day of my birth,
the first arms to hold me my first day on earth.
You were there to witness the first breath that I took,
the first one to meet me and have the first look.
You taught me to laugh, cry, and to walk.
You were there to witness my first day of school,
to teach me God's love and the Golden Rule.
Everything I learned, I learned from you.
From my first day in kindergarten,
and all the way through.
But sometimes young people have it all figured out.
They leave home to see what this world's all about.
And so, my life took me over land and sea,
to cultures and languages new to me.
Oh, how I missed your sweet arms around me,
like the prodigal child, you were there waiting for me.
With tears blurring my vision as I glanced at the sky,
your flags waved at me wildly as I passed by.
Mississippi, you were there.*

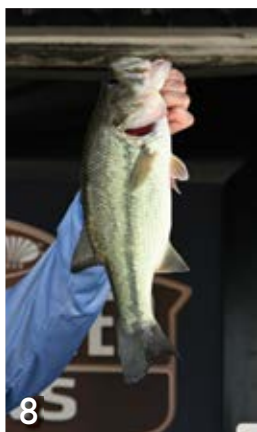
by Patsy Collins Rodgers,
a resident of Laurel and a
member of Dixie Electric

What's Mississippi to you?

What do you treasure most about life in our state? Send your brief thoughts to Today in Mississippi, news@ecm.coop or mail to P.O. Box 3300, Ridgeland, MS 39158.

Submit your beautiful digital photo of life in Mississippi to Today in Mississippi, news@ecm.coop

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Photo provided by the museum.

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NRECA calls for swift action to address grid reliability outlook

The U.S. grid reliability outlook is “worsening” amid projections for more power plant retirements and surging demand from data centers and other large loads in the next decade, the North American Electric Reliability Corp. said recently.

NERC’s latest Long-Term Reliability Assessment reinforces the need for smart energy policies that support reliable, affordable generation for electric cooperatives, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) CEO Jim Matheson said.

“Today’s report is yet another stark warning about the intensifying reliability risks facing America’s electric grid,”

Matheson said. “This report clearly highlights the need for smart, swift actions and serious conversations about how we will meet tomorrow’s energy needs as a country.”

Over half the areas that NERC analyzed in its latest long-term assessment are expected to face resource adequacy challenges in the coming decade.

In the next five years, areas at high risk of energy supply shortfalls include Texas and parts of the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, and Northwest. Regions at elevated risk of shortfalls — meaning demand could exceed supply during extreme conditions such as above-normal temperatures or fuel supply disruptions — include New England, New York, and parts of the Southeast and Southwest Power Pool.

The loss of always-available generation is one key risk. Although expected plant retirements have shrunk from last year’s long-term assessment, NERC said closures could total over 105 gigawatts of peak seasonal capacity in the next 10 years — enough energy to power up to 100 million homes.

At the same time, aggregated peak demand is expected to soar by more than 224 GW for summer and 245 GW for winter over the 10-year period, up by 69% and 65% from last year’s 10-year growth projections, respectively.

Power demand from data centers and other large industrial and commercial loads is driving much of that increase, particularly in Texas and the West.

Grid operations are also becoming more complex due to rising deployment of inverter-based, weather-dependent resources such as battery storage and solar energy, NERC said.

“The overall resource adequacy outlook for the North American [bulk power system] is worsening,” the new report said. “Projections for resource and transmission growth lag what is needed to support new data centers and other large loads that drive escalating demand forecasts.”

NERC called on industry, regulators, and policymakers to speed the addition

of new energy resources, manage the reliability risks of large load growth, improve coordination between electric and natural gas systems, and streamline siting and permitting of energy and transmission resources, among other recommendations.

NRECA has advocated for such policy reforms. The association has backed legislation in Congress to ease the federal permitting process for energy projects and urged key agencies to remove regulatory threats to power generation.

“Reliable and affordable electricity is the cornerstone of America’s national security and our economy,” Matheson said. “As electricity demand skyrockets, we urge policymakers to continue working with electric cooperatives to prioritize grid reliability and pursue smart energy policies that help set our nation on a more stable path.”

—NRECA

“
Today’s report is yet another stark warning about the intensifying reliability risks facing America’s electric grid. This report clearly highlights the need for smart, swift actions and serious conversations about how we will meet tomorrow’s energy needs as a country.

Sansevieria

'the snake plant'

— *is a stylish house plant for everyone*

Sansevieria Laurentii is a classic snake plant with tall, upright green leaves edged in golden yellow. It will brighten up a corner or add strong vertical structure to a room.

This time of the year, I really lean on houseplants to keep my indoor spaces attractive and full of life.

One of the most dependable and stylish houseplants I recommend is *Sansevieria*, commonly known as snake plant or mother-in-law's tongue. Though widely recognized as *Sansevieria*, its current genus name is *Dracaena trifasciata*. With dozens of varieties available, there is a *Sansevieria* for every home and every level of gardener.

These are durable plants.

To give you an idea of what I mean, my mother has a *Sansevieria* that is almost as old as me. It has survived moves, changing light conditions, and the occasional missed watering, and it is still growing strong today. That kind of longevity is hard to beat in a houseplant.

One of my go-to favorites is *Sansevieria Laurentii*, a classic snake plant with tall, upright green leaves edged in golden yellow.

This selection will brighten up a corner or add strong vertical structure to a room. *Laurentii* tolerates a wide range of light conditions from low light to bright, indirect light, but its colors look best with a little extra light.

If you want bold color indoors, consider *Golden Flame*.

The leaves of this striking variety emerge with rich golden-yellow centers. They mature thick and arching, bringing warmth and brightness even in low light conditions. This makes *Golden Flame* a great choice for offices, bedrooms or any room that doesn't get much natural sunlight.

For a modern and sophisticated look, I often suggest *Silver Flame*.

Its broad leaves have a soft silvery sheen with deep green edges, giving the plant a clean, contemporary feel. It pairs beautifully with modern décor and is a cool-toned contrast to other houseplants. Like other *Sansevierias*, it prefers bright, indirect light but adapts well to less-than-perfect conditions.

Many gardeners are surprised to learn that these plants actually bloom.

When a *Sansevieria* flowers, it sends up a tall stalk from the base of the plant, topped with small, star-shaped blooms usually creamy green to white in color. These flowers are often pleasantly fragrant, especially in the evening, and they may produce sticky droplets of nectar along the flower stalk.



Golden Flame thrives even in low light conditions, making it a great choice for any room that doesn't get much natural sunlight.

The broad leaves of Silver Flame Sansevieria have a silvery sheen, giving the plant a clean, contemporary look. It pairs beautifully with modern décor and is a cool-toned contrast to other houseplants.

“

Whether kept indoors year-round or enjoyed outside during the warmer months, Sansevieria varieties remain some of my top choices for stylish, easy-care houseplants.



This blooming Sansevieria is decades old and has survived moves, changing light conditions and the occasional missed watering.

Blooms typically occur on mature, well-established plants, often in winter to early spring. Sansevierias are more likely to flower when they are slightly root-bound and growing in bright, indirect light.

What really makes Sansevierias houseplants all-stars for me is their durability. These plants store moisture in their thick leaves, allowing them to handle missed waterings with ease.

I plant my Sansevierias in well-draining potting mixes such as those blended for a cactus or succulent. Always use containers with drainage holes. I let the soil dry completely between waterings, since overwatering is the quickest way to run into problems with these plants.

Sansevierias thrive in typical indoor temperatures, and I've found they do best between 60 and 85 degrees. They tolerate dry indoor air well but should be kept away from cold drafts or chilly windows during the winter months.

As an added bonus, Sansevierias are known for their air-purifying qualities.

They absorb common household toxins and improve overall air quality. What is especially interesting is that Sansevierias release oxygen at night, unlike many other plants that do this primarily during the day. This makes them beneficial in bedrooms, home offices, or other spaces where clean air is especially appreciated.

You can move Sansevierias outdoors once temperatures are consistently warm and nighttime lows stay above 55 degrees. Keep them in protected areas in bright shade or filtered sunlight. While they can tolerate some morning sun, direct afternoon sun scorches the leaves, so protection is important. Areas under a patio, porch, or open tree canopy work well.

Whether kept indoors year-round or enjoyed outside during the warmer months, Sansevieria varieties remain some of my top choices for stylish, easy-care houseplants. The fact that they can be enjoyed for years, sometimes even decades, to come is a bonus. 🌿



by Dr. Eddie Smith

Southern Gardening columnist Dr. Eddie Smith, a gardening specialist and Pearl River County coordinator with the Mississippi State University Extension Service, is an internationally certified arborist, Produce Safety Alliance certified trainer, and one of the developers of the Mississippi Smart Landscapes program that encourages the use of native plants in the landscape.



BASSMASTERS

Columbus to host major pro tournament in March

More than 100 professional bass anglers will compete on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway during the first Bass Anglers Sportsman Society Bassmaster Elite Series event to be held in Columbus.

Set for March 26-29, the tournament runs out of Columbus Marina, located at 259 Marina Drive in Columbus. It starts at 7 a.m. each competition day with the weigh-ins scheduled for 3 p.m. at the marina.

"The Elite Series fished Ross Barnett Reservoir in Mississippi before, but this will be our first Elite tournament on the waterway," said Mandy Pascal, the hosting B.A.S.S. Bassmaster communications manager. "The anglers will compete for the \$100,000 first-place prize as well as points. Anglers who earn enough points for the season, qualify to fish the next Bassmaster Classic."

More commonly called the Tenn-Tom, the 234-mile waterway creates a water link from the Tennessee River to the Gulf of Mexico. Ten lock and dam structures divide the waterway into lakes with a total surface area of 44,000 acres.

"We're thrilled to host the Bassmaster Elite Series and represent Mississippi on the national stage to show the incredible fishing opportunities on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway," said Frances Glenn, tourism director for Columbus-Lowndes Convention and

Visitors Bureau. "This will absolutely be a major economic impact to our area."

Traditionally, an Elite Series event brings in more than \$1 million in economic impact to hosting communities. Anglers, and some families, stay all week in the communities. They need lodging, food, fuel and other supplies. Visitors come there to watch or participate in the festivities.

"Besides fishing, we will have live music, vendors and other events,"

Glenn said. "Everything is free and open to the public. That Saturday and Sunday, we will have some children's events at the marina."

Unlike many professional sporting events, fans can mingle with the pros after they weigh their catch for the day. Fans can talk to their favorite anglers, get autographs, pose for photos, and possibly get some fishing tips. Some vendors will offer demo boat rides and merchandise.

We're thrilled to host the Bassmaster Elite Series and represent Mississippi on the national stage to show the incredible fishing opportunities on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. This will absolutely be a major economic impact to our area.

“

IN MISSISSIPPI

“Some sponsors will have casting competitions for the kids,” Pascal added. “We will have the Jumbotron set up to broadcast the tournament live on the internet. The anglers are all very receptive and love sharing fishing stories with their fans.”

In April 2025, B.A.S.S. held a Bassmaster Open event on the Tenn-Tom. During that three-day tournament, Trey Schroeder won with 14 bass totaling 42 pounds, 12 ounces. He caught all of his fish at Columbus Lake. Most of his bass hit a white Sixth Sense swim jig tipped with a white Sixth Sense Stroker Craw trailer.

“The system can produce some big bass,” said Kellis Higginbotham, a local fisherman. “The biggest bass will probably be between six and seven pounds. I would try to get in some backwaters and find clear water with grass. I would throw vibrating jigs and soft plastics, but spinnerbaits, shallow-running crankbaits, and other lures might also work.”

For more tournament information, visit bassmaster.com. For local information, go to visitcolumbusms.org. Call 662-329-1191 or 800-327-2686. 🌿



by John N. Felsher

John N. Felsher is a professional freelance writer, broadcaster, photographer, and editor who lives in Alabama. An avid sportsman, he's written more than 3,300 articles for more than 170 different magazines on a wide variety of outdoors topics. Contact him at j.felsher@hotmail.com.

It's a bird!
It's a crane!
IT'S A SURVIVOR!

*Mississippi sandhill crane
recovery efforts see progress*

by Lici Beveridge

The Mississippi sandhill crane might be an endangered species, but it has been making strides in its quest for survival.

That's thanks to efforts to preserve its habitat, a captive breeding program and other measures. The Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, with 19,000 acres of wet pine savanna located in Jackson County, and neighboring refuges, are where most of the action takes place.

There are roughly 200 cranes on the Coast, according to Jeremy Edwardson, project leader for the Gulf Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which includes the Mississippi Sandhill Crane, the Grand Bay, and the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuges.

"They're known for their loud, bugling calls and elaborate dancing displays, which they use to strengthen pair bonds," he said. "Each crane has a distinct personality — some are bold and curious, others, more cautious."

Most cranes begin breeding at 4 to 5 years old, Edwardson said. They can live more than 20 years, given the right conditions.

In 1975, when the refuge was established through the Endangered Species Act, there were fewer than 40 cranes. Fast-forward 50 years,

and the future of the Mississippi sandhill crane is looking a little brighter.

In early December, 13 cranes were released into the wild after they were given time to acclimate to their new surroundings. Until their release, the young cranes were cared for at two partnering facilities.

"The recent release at Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge is a key long-term recovery goal and helps strengthen genetic diversity and boost survival rates," Edwardson said.

The cranes became endangered because of loss of habitat from development, agriculture, and fire suppression, Edwardson said.

Mississippi sandhill cranes are a non-migratory subspecies found only in coastal Mississippi, according to

Edwardson. They eat a variety of seeds, insects, frogs, and other opportunistic foods.

"They are slightly smaller, have darker gray plumage and depend on wet pine savanna habitat, unlike other sandhill cranes that migrate across North America," he said.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says the cranes are unique in that they require separate nesting, foraging, and roosting habitats.

Those habitats can be found at the refuge, which is rich in native grasses, orchids, and carnivorous plants, Edwardson said.

“
Mississippi sandhill cranes are a
non-migratory subspecies found only in
coastal Mississippi, according to Edwardson.
They eat a variety of seeds, insects, frogs
and other opportunistic foods.



The cranes' habitat is maintained by periodic prescribed fire, control of invasive species and other management best practices. In addition, protecting the cranes also preserves the unique wet pine savanna ecosystem and its biodiversity, Edwardson said.

Visitors to the refuge can get a glimpse of some of the unique flora and fauna at the refuge, with two nature trails open to the public: the C.L. Dees trail, which is 0.7 miles, and the Fontainebleau trail, which is twice as long at 1.5 miles. The shorter trail is recommended for beginners, Edwardson said.

"Expect scenic views, native plants, and chances to spot birds and other wildlife," he said.

There are some dos and don'ts for hikers. Visitors must stay on the marked paths and are encouraged to bring water. Feeding the wildlife is prohibited.

While spotting a crane or two is a possibility, hikers may also discover longleaf pine, pitcher plants, orchids, and wiregrass. Animal wildlife include deer, squirrels, snakes, and several bird species.

The nature trails are open daily from sunup to sundown. The visitor center is open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, federal holidays excluded.

"The refuge offers a limited number of on-site programs, guided tours, and outreach presentations for schools and community groups," Edwardson said.

Although staff manage the refuge and care of the cranes, others contribute to keeping the crane population on an upward path.

The Friends of Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge is an official group that supports volunteer projects and fundraising. Donations help with visitor experiences and improvement projects, Edwardson said. To learn more about the Friends of Bon Secour, visit bonsecurfriends.org or follow the group on Facebook.

In addition to joining the Friends, supporters can volunteer, buy federal duck stamps, and share awareness about the cranes and National Wildlife Refuge System, Edwardson said. 🌿



To learn more, follow the refuge Facebook page or visit fws.gov/refuge/mississippi-sandhill-crane.

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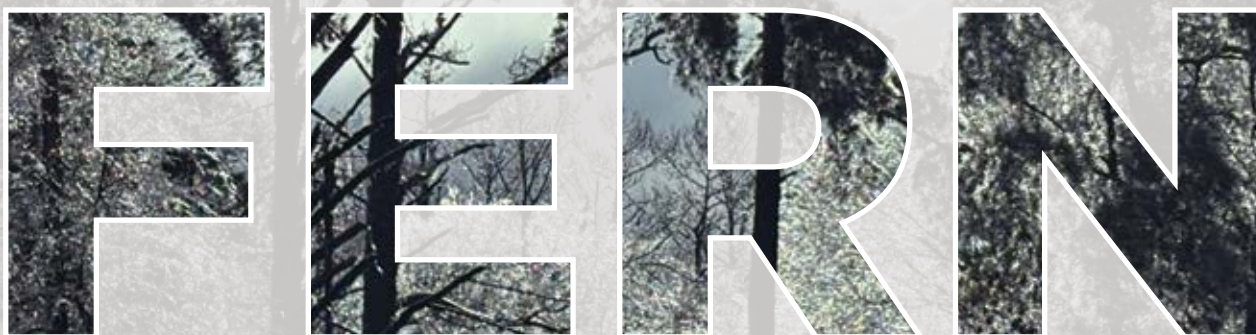
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Working to power up members in the aftermath of



by Jennifer Johnson

They're armed with skills to operate heavy machinery or safely work with 14,400 volts of electricity, a hard hat, and more grit and determination than most people you'll encounter. Crew workers at PEPA prove every day why that statement is correct, but Winter Storm Fern made it all the truer.

We've experienced days that are physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting. Through it all, we've continued to count on our most valuable asset: our people.

Rolling out with bucket trucks and heavy equipment on Jan. 25 and working through the night, followed by 15-16 hour (or more) days since, our crews have worked tirelessly to restore power to our customers.

Office employees have fielded constant phone calls and met with many customers in the office, taking care of business as best they can in a time when nothing is "business as usual."

At the time this article was written, PEPA outages were down from around 18,000 to fewer than 400, thanks in part to sister cooperatives

Dixie Electric Power Association and Singing River Electric, as well as five cooperatives from the state of Missouri.

“

We've experienced days that are physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting. Through it all, we've continued to count on our most valuable asset: our people.

Cooperatives operate by seven basic principles, including Cooperation Among Cooperatives. Folks in the co-op world know working together benefits all. That principle played out in real time in January 2026 when ice hung from every tree and power line, and calls were made to find additional hands to more quickly restore power in our service area.

Thank you

to the Missouri cooperatives listed below that have helped us in our recovery from this storm.

Black River Electric Cooperative

Crawford Electric Cooperative

Howell-Oregon Electric Cooperative

Pemiscot-Dunklin Electric Cooperative

SEMO Electric Cooperative

PEPA'S STORM *RECOVERY*



A lineman works in the aftermath of the ice storm that struck Pontotoc on Jan. 24, 2026.



Smiles in spite of the difficult task ahead.





PEPA General Manager Frankie Moorman conducts an early morning meeting with crews from PEPA and those who came to assist.



Power restoration on Clark Street

Pontotoc Electric Power Association
will be closed Friday, April 3, 2026, in observance of

Good Friday



PEPA dispatchers are on duty 24 hours a day,
seven days a week if you have an outage or emergency.

Please call us at 662-489-6711 (Pontotoc) or 662-983-2727 (Bruce)

A MEAL WORTH *Sharing*

The ice storm in late January through early February brought out the best in so many people in our communities. We are thankful for those who brought meals, snacks, or hand warmers, prayed for the safety of our crews, or were kind to us through this difficult season.

RECIPE FOR KINDNESS

INGREDIENTS

Take **one open heart**, fresh and true,
Add **a cup of patience** in all you do.
Fold in **a handful of gentle words**,
Sprinkle with **laughter** that soars like birds.
Mix with **understanding**, slow and deep,
Stir in **forgiveness** you promise to keep.
Season with **hope** and **a dash of cheer**.

Serve it with love to all who are near.
And here's the secret — the more you give,
The richer and brighter your days will live.

-Author Unknown

WARNING - WARNING - WARNING

If Your Hands, Arms, Feet, or Legs Are Numb - If You Feel Shooting or Burning Pain or An Electric Sensation - You Are at Risk Don't Let Creeping Nerve Death Ruin Your Life

Get The Help You Need - Here's What You Need to Know...

Purvis, MS - If you experience numbness or tingling in your hands, arms, legs, or feet or if you experience shooting or burning pain, this is important. Please read this carefully.

Peripheral Neuropathy is when small blood vessels in the hands, arms, feet or legs become diseased and tiny nerves that keep the cells and muscles working properly shrivel up and die.

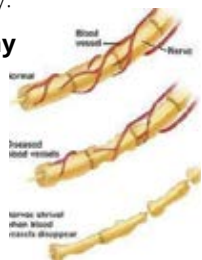
Early-warning symptoms include tingling and numbness, mild loss of feeling in your hands, arms, legs or feet, inability to feel your feet, which increases your risk of foot-injury and falling.

More Advanced Symptoms Include...

- Loss of coordination & dexterity, which puts you at increased risk of accidents.
- Inability to feel clothing like socks and gloves.
- High risk of falling, which makes walking dangerous, and makes you more dependent on others.
- Burning sensations in your arms, legs, hands or feet that may start mild, but as nerves and muscles die, may feel like you're being burned by a blow torch.

Ignore the early warning signals long enough and you risk progressive nerve damage leading to muscle wasting, severe pain, loss of balance and a lot of staying at home wishing you didn't hurt.

When every step is like walking on hot coals, sitting still may be the only thing you feel like doing. But there's little joy in sitting still all day long.



Without treatment, nerve degeneration that begins with slight tingling or numbness may lead to a hot burning sensation and intense pain. Without treatment muscle wasting, loss of mobility and loss of independence is often the next stop.

Now here's the scary part....

- Nerve damage CAUSES cell damage.
- Cell damage SPEEDS UP nerve degeneration

Without treatment this can become a DOWN-WARD SPIRAL that accelerates.

The damage can get worse fast. Mild symptoms intensify. Slight tingling, numbness or lack of feeling can turn into burning pain.

Before you know it, damage can become so bad you hurt all the time.

Unless this downward spiral is stopped and nerves return to proper function - the damage to nerves and cells in the affected area can get so bad your muscles begin to die right along with the nerves and cells. And that sets the stage for weakness, loss of mobility, disability, and dependence on others.

If you have early warning signs of peripheral neuropathy, (tingling &/or numbness, loss of feeling or pain) it's CRITICAL you get proper treatment.

It's critical, because with proper treatment the symptoms can often be reversed. Without it, you are playing Russian Roulette with your health.

Once your nerve loss reaches 85%, odds are there's nothing any doctor can do to help.

The most common method your doctor may recommend to treat neuropathy is prescription drugs



Drugs like Gabapentin, Lyrica, Cymbalta, & Neurontin are often prescribed to manage the pain. But, damaged nerves and dying cells do not heal on their own.

Pain pills do not restore healthy nerve function. They just mask the pain as the nerves continue to degenerate and cells and muscle continue to die.

Taking endless drugs and suffering terrible side effects that may damage your liver & kidney and create even more problems, is not a reasonable path. You deserve better.

Three things must be determined to effectively treat neuropathy. 1) What is the underlying cause? 2) How much nerve damage has been sustained? 3) How much treatment your condition will require?

With proper treatment, shriveled blood vessels grow back & nerves can return to proper function. How much treatment you may need depends on your condition.

At **Purvis Chiropractic** we do a complete neuropathy sensitivity exam to determine the extent of your nerve damage. The exam includes a detailed sensory evaluation, extensive peripheral vascular testing, & a detailed analysis of the findings.

Dr. Rob Acord, D.C. will be offering this complete neuropathy sensitivity exam for **\$47**. This special offer goes away at the end of this month as we have a limited number of exam appointments available.

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GRAMMY MUSEUM MISSISSIPPI *Turns 10*

Photos by Chad Calcote. Others provided by the museum.



A decade after turning a field of dreams into reality, the crown jewel of the state's music heritage is bigger than ever.

by Jim Beugez

The decision to build a world-class music museum and educational center in a town of 11,000 residents, in the center of one of the most rural regions in America, doesn't necessarily make sense on paper.

But Cleveland isn't just any old town, just as the Mississippi Delta isn't flyover country for the thousands of music tourists who pilgrimage from around the world each year.

When Mississippi touts itself as "the birthplace of America's music," it's because this is where Charley Patton, Son House, and Robert Johnson — the pioneers of blues music, which later formed the foundation of American pop music — developed their sound.

And the reason why the Recording Academy, which oversees the GRAMMY Awards, chose to put a museum here is because this is where it belongs. It's the undisputed spot where the vectors of blues, rock and roll, soul, country, R&B, and hip-hop converge. And like the cultural impacts of the state itself, the GRAMMY Museum Mississippi consistently punches far above its weight class.

Now in its tenth year of operation this month, the GRAMMY Museum Mississippi just notched its biggest year yet in 2025, clocking more than 30,000 visitors — 89% of whom came from outside of Bolivar

County, notes Emily Havens, executive director of the museum since it opened in 2016. The Taylor Swift exhibit alone had a \$34 million economic impact.

"Those are restaurants people visit when they come to visit the museum," Havens said. "Those are the hotels people are staying at. That's people buying gas or shopping at our boutiques in Cleveland."

Over the past decade, music fans from all 50 states and 39 international countries have come to visit exhibits celebrating Swift and artists like Michael Jackson, Garth Brooks, The Supremes, and John Lee Hooker. In many cases, the featured artists make a visit themselves to speak and perform for locals on the Sanders Soundstage.

"Between exhibit openings and public programs, having the ability for people attending those programs to ask questions and to hear advice and stories right from the storyteller is a very powerful thing," Havens said.

The museum takes a distinctly Mississippi-styled approach to its educational mission by highlighting the state's musical legacy through interactive exhibits like a songwriting pod. Students and visitors can engage virtually with blues artist Keb' Mo' while learning how to build a song by pairing pre-recorded music and lyric segments together. In the Roland Room, they can experience the real deal by learning to play musical instruments solo or in groups.

“
Between exhibit openings and public programs, having the ability for people attending those programs to ask questions and to hear advice and stories right from the storyteller is a very powerful thing.

That's all a prelude to taking free music lessons for guitar, piano, drums and voice, a central piece of programming that is free to the community. "Kids walk into the museum after school with their guitar on their back, and they know where they're going, and they're comfortable. They love it there, and they're learning, and it's their museum. For me, that's one of the great rewards."

Professional songwriter Tricia Walker, who helped kickstart the Delta Music Institute at nearby Delta State University and has served as a board member at the museum, shares Havens's sentiment. "It's one thing to study history and legacy, but where are we going? Who's going to be next? The educational arm of the museum really points toward the future."

“

Kids walk into the museum after school with their guitar on their back, and they know where they're going, and they're comfortable. They love it there, and they're learning, and it's their museum. For me, that's one of the great rewards.



One of the museum's central features is the Mississippi Music Table, which allows visitors to discover Mississippi-born artists while seeing how they connect to the larger industry in an interactive, touchscreen format. Users can track these artists' achievements and see the broader cultural and historical context of who influenced them, and in turn, the artists who have taken inspiration from them.

The Mississippi Gallery, another permanent exhibit, gives visitors an opportunity to hear a selection of hit songs performed or written by Mississippians. "That might be my favorite," Walker said, "because it's an opportunity to learn things about Mississippi musicians that I didn't know. For example, Eddie 'Chank' Willis, a guitar player from Grenada, played on all the Motown records. But if you're not the kind of person who reads all the credits on the record albums, you'd never know him."



You can look at these people and go, ‘Wow, they all came from small towns, and look at the impacts they made.’”

Two new exhibits, both open through 2026, explore a pair of distinct eras in pop music through artifacts and interpretive displays. “The Killer, The Preacher, and the Cowboy: The Family Legacy of Jerry Lee Lewis, Jimmy Swaggart, and Mickey Gilley” details the intertwined lives of three distinct entertainment icons, who also happened to be cousins, all hailing from the Ferriday, Louisiana and Natchez region.

But “80s Rock: The Wildest Decade in Music” caters to a specific kind of music fan — the ones who fell in love with the spandex-clad, poofy-haired pop metal that ruled MTV during the “me” decade. The exhibit features memorabilia related to Guns ‘N Roses, Mötley Crüe, Ozzy Osbourne, and Heart, among others, including stage clothing worn by the late Osbourne, a drum kit used by Crüe drummer Tommy Lee, and iconic images of the era courtesy of photographer Mark Weiss.

During a recent Q&A with members of Twisted Sister on the Sanders Soundstage to promote the exhibit, lead singer Dee Snider shed light into the real band behind the ‘80s anthems “We’re Not Gonna Take It” and “I Wanna Rock.” While younger bands like Poison and Warrant (also featured in the exhibit) were partying

like rock stars, the more seasoned Twisted Sister took their fame in stride, often opting to read and relax on the tour bus instead of burning out on late nights.

One of Havens’s favorite moments from the chat underscores how mild-mannered the band could be. “Dee got called up to the apartment with the band, and he was sitting across from all four of the other band members,” she said, recalling a story Snider shared at the event. “And they literally told him if he didn’t quit drinking so much coffee, they were gonna kick him out of the band.”

Music and music tourism doesn’t always look like a traditional business, Walker notes, but tourism is the fourth-largest industry in Mississippi and an economic engine that city and state leaders can appreciate. And the GRAMMY Museum Mississippi is the piece that explains why tourism officials promote the state as “the birthplace of America’s music.”

“It’s like the folks in Nashville don’t always go to the Grand Ole Opry, and it took a while for them to realize the value of what the Opry was,” she said. “In Mississippi, for the longest time we claimed to be where all the great music came from. But to actually build something that you can see and touch — the GRAMMY Museum Mississippi is that centerpiece now.” 🌸

SPARKMAN REMINDS YOU:

***Move over
on roadways.***

Last month, our crews worked tirelessly to restore power after the ice storm. So always remember to **MOVE OVER** when you see them on the roadside. Slow down and change lanes if it's safe to do so, or reduce your speed significantly if you can't move over.

Our lineworkers are working in hazardous conditions to get your lights back on, and a few extra feet can make all the difference in keeping them safe.

Remember, Mississippi's Move Over Law requires drivers to move over or slow down for emergency and utility vehicles — it's the law! By giving our crews room to work safely, we can help speed up power restoration and ensure everyone gets home safely.

Slow down. Move over. IT'S THE LAW.

a message from your local electric cooperative

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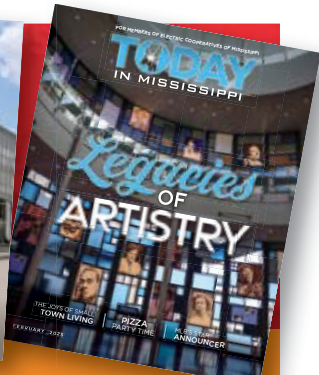
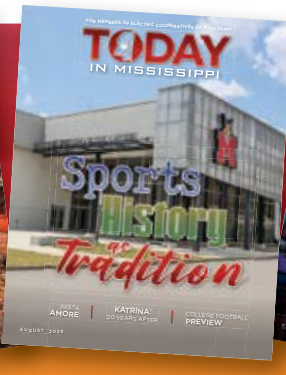
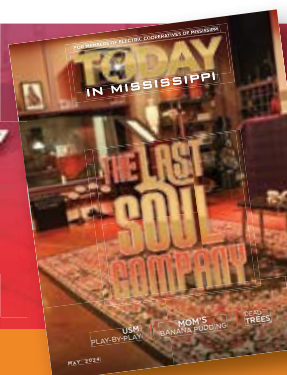
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PONTOTOC ELECTRIC

HISTORIC WINTER STORM *Fern* HIT HARD

by Steven Ward

On Jan. 24, Winter Storm Fern swept into Mississippi bringing rain, sleet, freezing rain, snow, and savage winds that crippled significant parts of the Delta and the northeastern portion of the state.

The number of downed trees, broken utility poles, and damaged power lines Fern caused was enormous.

"Today, I don't have an exact number of broken poles, but I think it's safe to say it will be about 10,000, maybe even north of that," Electric Cooperatives of Mississippi (ECM) CEO Michael Callahan said.

"I know of one system with 1,800, another with 'in excess of 1,000.' Everyone has said the same thing. 'It's the most poles I've ever had broken in my system.'"

The ice Fern wrought on the state was staggering. The ice spanned an area 25 miles wide and 1 ½ thick starting north of Vicksburg to the northeast part of the state.

The electric cooperative power outages Fern caused across the state topped 163,000 meters in the service territories of 15 different co-ops.

"The record ice buildup on trees and power lines is more ice than we have ever experienced, and the damage to trees was more than I have seen during hurricanes," said Keith Hayward, CEO of North East Mississippi. The Oxford area experienced significant damage — more than 28,000 outages reported on Jan. 24.

Power restoration following a catastrophic weather event is dangerous for linemen. Dealing with the aftermath of ice damage is more perilous than any other kind of storm.

“The ice caused slips and falls leading to twisted ankles and knees, broken arms, and collar bones. Falling trees and limbs have had linemen scrambling for cover and taken out a couple of our pickup trucks,” Callahan said.

One lineman came into contact with an energized line, Callahan said. At press time, the lineman was listed in critical condition.

Gerald Gordon, vice president of ECM Safety and Loss Control, said although the northeastern part of the state was hit hard and suffered extensive power outages, the Mississippi Delta co-ops also endured severe power struggles.

“This storm moved up the river and took out power over that entire area,” Gordon said.

Density is another challenge to power restoration when a storm is this massive.

“Statewide, our 25 distribution cooperatives average 8.6 meters per line mile. To contrast that number, investor-owned utilities are about 30 to 35 meters per mile, and municipal systems have around 40. Unfortunately, Fern went through the heart of the Delta, where that meters per mile number hovers around 4 to 6 per mile,” Callahan said.

“Linemen have to cover a lot of miles to turn fewer people on.”

Michael Neely, general manager of Yazoo Valley Electric, said downed trees, ice, and extreme cold temperatures all impacted power restoration.

“In prior events, crews could move quickly once the precipitation stopped. Fern locked us into unsafe conditions for days,” Neely said.

In the northeast, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) — the generation and transmission power provider to distribution co-ops in that part of the state — had transmission lines that bring energy to substations that were severely damaged in the storm. That put a system like Tippah Electric — who lost power to all 14,592 meters — behind for days on power restoration.



NORTH EAST MS ELECTRIC

With power and water infrastructure down, some co-ops didn't have places to house and feed extra linemen, another impediment to recovery.

Still, the manpower for Fern power restoration was significant.

More than 1,200 linemen from other Mississippi co-ops and 13 states came to help restore power through mutual aid agreements, Gordon said.

Winter Storm Fern was historic.

“Fern caused system-wide destruction, persistent freezing temperatures, and blocked roadways. The sheer scale of reconstruction required was massive,” said Brad Robison, CEO of Tallahatchie Valley EPA.

Frankie Moorman, general manager of Pontotoc Electric, said the storm knocked out power to 18,504 meters, more than 88% of the entire system.

“This storm touched every square-inch of our service territory. Crews had to be ready for anything, and they handled it like the professionals they are,” Moorman said.

Gordon said every possible person and crew who could respond, did.

“It's hard to quantify all the damage. And it's harder to work around the damage of an ice storm than a hurricane,” Gordon said.

Gordon also said each co-op did the best job they could during recovery under the harrowing circumstances left behind by Mother Nature.

“Winter Storm Fern tested more than our power system — it tested our communities. We have seen neighbors helping neighbors, patience in the face of hardship, and a resilience that reminded us why serving this area is more than a job — it's a calling,”

Robison said. ❁



NATCHEZ TRACE ELECTRIC



The Farmhouse Kitchen

with Vicki Leach

How do you spell sandwich?

When I married my sweet hubby, I thought he was the smartest guy I'd ever met. He's written four books — textbooks — which probably shows how smart he is, but I learned the first year we were married that he had a fatal flaw — he can't spell worth a toot. I typed his first manuscript, from handwritten notes on yellow legal pads, in chicken scratch that I had to decipher. I'd come across a word, do a double take, shake my head, and confront him.

"Did you MEAN to spell would 'woul'd'?" I'd ask, only to have him argue me down to the point where I'd pull out the Daniel Webster and show him in tiny little letters the error of his ways. Ever tried to tell the smartest man you ever met that 'sandwiches' is NOT how you spell that 'versatile, globally celebrated culinary delight' we've all loved since the 18th century?

Speaking of sandwiches, I hope you enjoy these culinary delights I love to make for my smart man. 🍴



by Vicki Leach

Vicki Leach is a full-time chef/culinary instructor at Mississippi State University in the Department of Food Science, Nutrition, and Health Promotion. She teaches Science of Food Preparation, Foodservice Organization, and Quantity Food Production. She lives in a 130-year-old farmhouse that speaks to her old soul.

Grilled Pimento Cheese Sandwiches *Makes 6 sandwiches*

INGREDIENTS

- 1 ½ cups shredded cheese — mild cheddar, Monterey jack, sharp cheddar, or any combination
- ½ cup Duke's mayonnaise
- 4 ounce jar pimentos
- Dash cayenne pepper
- Dash salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons either mayonnaise or softened butter
- 12 slices country potato bread or another buttery-type bread

Combine shredded cheese, mayonnaise, and pimentos in the bowl of an electric mixer, and blend until combined well. Season with a dash of cayenne, and with salt and pepper.

Spread softened butter or mayo on one side of each slice of bread. Place 6 slices of bread — buttered side down — on countertop and top with 2 heaping tablespoons of pimento cheese mixture. Divide mixture evenly among the bread slices. Top with the remaining 6 slices, with buttered side up.

Preheat griddle to medium. Place 2 sandwiches on the griddle and cook for about 3 minutes until bottom begins to toast and cheese starts to melt. Flip sandwich and cook an additional 3 minutes. Remove to a plate to cool slightly.

Cut each sandwich on the diagonal and serve with your favorite soup or salad.

Fennel Crusted Strip Steak Sandwiches

INGREDIENTS

2 New York strip steaks (¹⁰⁻¹⁴ ounce)
Roasted garlic oil as needed
Vegetable oil for pan searing (about ² tablespoons)

INGREDIENTS - FENNEL SEASONING

¼ cup fennel seeds
¼ cup whole peppercorns
3 teaspoons coarse kosher salt

Use a spice grinder and grind fennel seeds, then peppercorns; mix together with the salt.

Brush steaks on both sides with garlic oil. Sprinkle a generous 1 tablespoon of seasoning mix onto steaks, coating both sides. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Heat the 2 tablespoons of oil over medium high heat in an oven proof skillet large enough to hold both steaks. When rippling, sear steaks on each side just to brown. Place skillet in oven for about 7 minutes (they'll be medium-rare to medium). Bring out of oven and allow to rest for about 5 minutes. Slice steaks into ½ inch slices and build sandwiches as desired.

I like to layer mayo, lettuce, tomato, the steak, and homemade blue cheese dressing. 1 steak will make 2 small and 1 large sandwich. Your choice.

For outdoor cooking, grill until medium-rare, cross-hatching both sides. Remove from grill and slice into ½ inch slices. Fan onto plate for a pretty presentation.

Fried Green Tomato BTT Makes 4 sandwiches

INGREDIENTS

2 large green tomatoes, sliced ½ inch thick, ² slices per sandwich
12 pieces thick sliced bacon, 3 slices per sandwich
Lettuce, preferably spring mix (about ½ cup per sandwich)
Mayonnaise to taste
Cornmeal mix for fried green tomatoes
Your favorite Remoulade or Comeback sauce
Ciabata rolls or another sturdy bread
3 cups blue cheese dressing

To cook bacon: Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Line a ½ sheet pan with parchment paper. Lay bacon slices flat on parchment neatly and closely. Cook for 17 to 19 minutes, until bacon is browned and fat has rendered. Remove pan from oven, and remove bacon to a flat surface to cool and crisp.

To make sandwiches: Spread bread bottom with mayo. Layer lettuce, bacon slices, and tomato slices on bread. Top with a couple of tablespoons of remoulade if desired, and top with the other bread slice. Cut in half and serve.



Cornmeal Mix for Fried Green Tomatoes

INGREDIENTS

1 cup plain yellow cornmeal
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon salt (extra for tomatoes)
1 teaspoon black pepper (extra for tomatoes)
1 tablespoon Tony Chachere's Creole seasoning

Mix all together and store in airtight container.

To fry tomatoes: Slice into thick rounds and sprinkle both sides with salt and pepper. Dredge both sides with cornmeal mixture. In a medium skillet, heat about ½ inch of mild vegetable oil. Place tomato slices in hot oil and cook, turning once until gently browned. Remove and drain on paper towels until ready to build your sandwich.

Blue Cheese Dressing Yield 3 cups

INGREDIENTS

1 cup mayonnaise
½ cup sour cream
½ teaspoon Worcestershire
¼ teaspoon garlic powder
½ cup heavy whipping cream
(more cream or milk as needed)
1 cup blue cheese (I like Maytag)
As needed salt and pepper

Process everything together in the bowl of a food processor.

Events open to the public will be published free of charge as space allows. Submit details at least two months prior to the event date. Submissions must include a phone number with area code for publication. Email to news@ecm.coop. **Events are subject to change.**

Mid-South Military History & Civil War Show.

March 6 and 7. Southaven. The South's oldest military history show, will be at the Landers Center on I-55 and Church Road, Exit 287. Open March 6 from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. and March 7 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$10 each day for adults, a two-day pass for \$15, and children 12 and under free. Parking is free. Vendors from across the country will have quality artifacts from the American Revolution through the 20th Century available to buy, sell, or trade. These include books, documents, prints, uniforms, weapons, relics, photographs, and Native American items. Musicians, re-enactors, and food trucks will be on site. On Saturday, historians will speak on topics from the American Revolution, Civil War, and World War II. Civil War re-enactors with a cannon will be there as well. Details: 901-832-4708 or email dwharrison@aol.com.

Big Spring Singing Gospel Jubilee.

March 7. Pearl. The event begins at 6:30 p.m. at the Pearl Community Center, 2420 Old Brandon Rd. Featuring The Freemans, Terry Joe Terrell, Tim Frith and the Gospel Echoes, and The Revelations. Details: 601-906-0677 or 601-720-8870.

Gulf Coast Military Collectors Show. March 27 and 28. Biloxi. The event will be held at Joppa Shriner's, 13280 Shriner's Blvd. The show Friday will be from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Historic artifacts and souvenirs from all periods and wars will be bought, sold, traded, and exhibited. Admission is \$7. Details: 228-224-1120 or email terrell.hamilton@gmail.com.

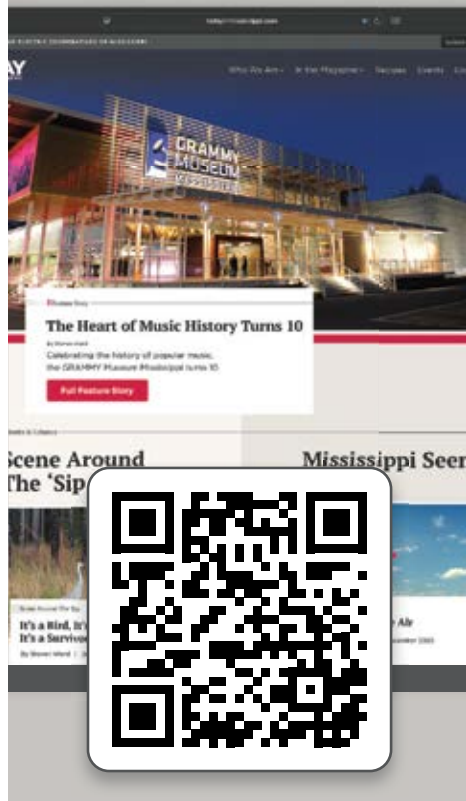
GULFPEX 2026 Postage Stamp and Postcard Show.

March 27 and 28. Biloxi. Hosted by the Gulf Coast Stamp Club. Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The show's theme recognizing the 250th Anniversary of the United States will feature patriotic stamp and postal history exhibits. Thirteen vendors from across the country will have stamps, postcards, albums, stamp supplies, and more for viewing and sale. There will be free stamps for kids and dedicated volunteers to show them how to organize and mount stamps in an album and answer any questions about stamp collecting. Opportunities for free stamp identifications, evaluations of collections, or sale of collections will be available. Admission and parking are free. St. Martin Community Center, 15008 Lemoyne Blvd. Details: 228-238-5433.

Star Spring Festival. April 18. Florence. Now in its 15th year, the annual festival continues its long-standing mission of raising funds for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, uniting families, local businesses, and visitors in support of a life-saving cause. The 2026 event will once again feature its popular car show, showcasing classic cars, big rigs, tractors, and off-road vehicles, alongside local vendor booths, family-friendly entertainment, and a variety of food options. Local artisans, small businesses, and returning sponsors play a vital role in making the festival a signature community event year after year. The event will be held at 301 Mangum Dr. Details: 601-842-7947 or email starspringfestival@yahoo.com.

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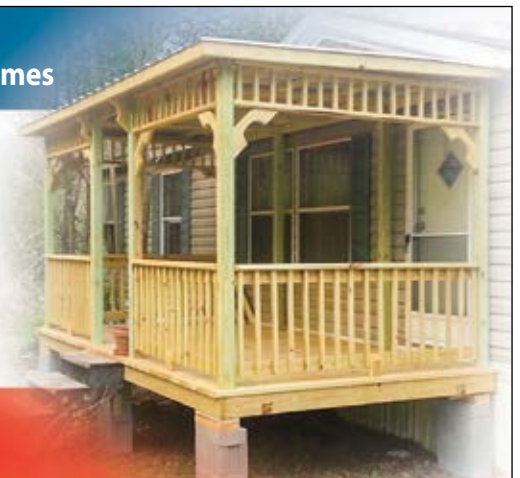
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It's kite flying season, although I haven't flown a kite in years. Box kites were my favorite. I guess that's because they were different. But I liked the regular kites, too. We had a ready-made launch site for kites back in Greenville, where I grew up. I would walk home from school and exchange my books for my kite and hike over to the levee. Up on top, you are 40 feet above the average terrain. If you catch it just right, when a March cold front comes through, the wind is at your back, and there is nothing but open sky in front of you. You'd have no problem sailing your kite as high as the length of your string.

Sometimes I'd stay until almost dark. It would take that long to reel in a particularly good flight. One of my flash-bulb memories of youth is standing on the levee at dusk with my kite in my hand about to head back to the house. I'm looking out across the Delta, past the cow pastures immediately adjacent to where I was, on over to where the streets of Greenville started picking up on the far side of North Broadway. There was a single light bulb shining on a distant back porch away off in a neighborhood. Just for an instant that lonely light bulb and the cold air and darkness settling in made me feel very odd. Like I was out of place. Suddenly, it wasn't the lightbulb that was far away. It was me.

Another good place I discovered for launching kites is Fort Hill in the Vicksburg National Military Park. You are a couple hundred feet above North Washington Street up there. No power lines or trees to interfere with a good flight. The Spanish built the first fort complex at Fort Hill. Fort Nogales is what they called it because of the black walnut trees in the area. (Nogales means walnut trees in Spanish.)

There is a great plaster or papier mache model of the layout of Fort Nogales at the Old Courthouse Museum in Vicksburg. The fort was very elaborate with several outposts on every little rise nearby. The Indian Mound inside the Vicksburg National Cemetery has a gazebo on top.

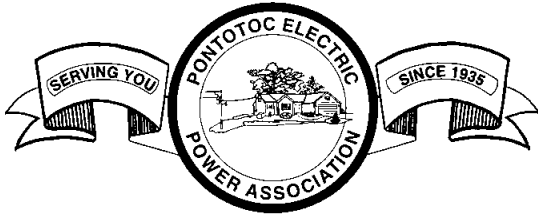
A little while back I was out in the garage cleaning up. Cleaning up doesn't amount to much more than rearranging the piles of old records, radios, scraps of left over wood from former projects that may yet come in handy, and other valuable things I'll likely need someday. Stuffed for safe keeping between a refrigerator and a storage shelf was

a kite. This would have been the last kite the youngest grandchild, Emily-Ann, and I would have flown. That was years ago. But now that it's March, I may pull it out and give it a try. I'm sure there's some string in here somewhere. 🌸



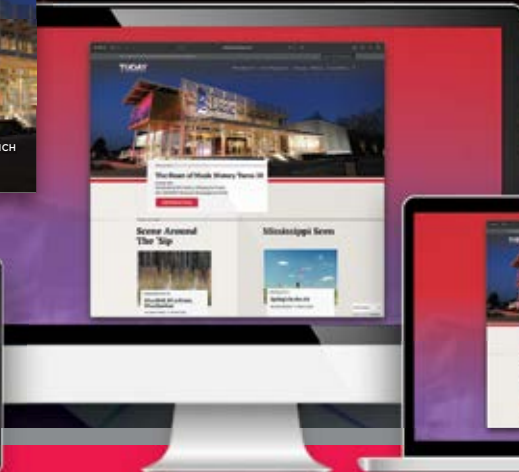
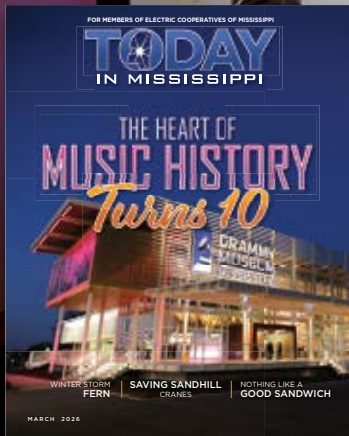
by Walt Grayson

Walt Grayson is the host of "Mississippi Roads" on Mississippi Public Broadcasting television and the author of two "Looking Around Mississippi" books and "Oh! That Reminds Me: More Mississippi Homegrown Stories." Walt is also a reporter and 4 p.m. news anchor at WJTV in Jackson. He lives in Brandon and is a Central Electric member. Contact him at walt@waltgrayson.com.



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