

**BEARCATS BOYS SOCCER TEAM WINS 4TH STRAIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE IN A ROW**

All photos Special to Long Beach Breeze



Members of the LBHS Bearcats, the 2024 State Champions, pose with the coveted golden ball trophy.



The 2024 Long Beach High School Bearcats boys' soccer team now reigns as the 6A Boys' Soccer State Champions.



The LBHS Bearcats boys soccer team won their fourth straight MHSAA 6A State Championship title with a 3-2 win over Center Hill High School at the Mississippi state championship game in Gluckstadt, Mississippi on February 17.

By Toni Miles

History has been made – and has repeated itself for a mind-boggling fourth time - with the Long Beach High School (LBHS) Bearcats boys' soccer team scoring yet another state championship title.

"It's an incredible accomplishment. It's so difficult to win a state championship, and for our program to do it for a fourth consecutive year is pretty amazing," says LBHS boys' soccer coach Matthew DeFillips. "It's a testament to the incredibly strong foundation

that has been built over the last decade by former players and coaches. I'm just really proud and happy for our team, school and community."

It came down to the wire at the February 17 MHSAA 6A Boys Soccer Championship Game in Gluckstadt, Mississippi, but the Bearcats managed to secure the state's top spot and coveted golden ball trophy once again, pulling off a 3-2 win over the Center Hill High School Mustangs in a nail-biter won by Easton Van Norden's free

kick score in the 79th minute of the championship game.

By securing the 6A title for the fourth year in the row, the LBHS Bearcats now join the Pearl High School Pirates (2005-2008) as the only program to win four boys' soccer state championship titles in a row.

The February 17 match, played in near-freezing temperatures, marked the eighth consecutive year in a row the LBHS boys' soccer team has played in the state championship game.

Three minutes into the game, Braiden Bonds scored the first goal for the Bearcats.

Eighteen minutes later, twenty-one minutes into the game, Center Hill's Michael Sanders tied the game 1-1 with a rebound off a free kick.

The Bearcats scored again in the 68th minute of the game, with Bonds scoring again, this time on a rebound off a free kick, giving the Bearcats a 2-1 lead over Center Hill's Mustangs.

cont. on page 8

**Donations being collected for LBHS students in need of prom attire**

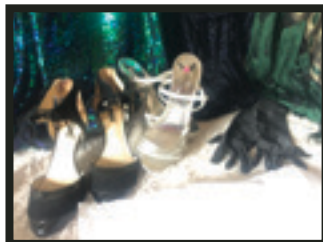
By Toni Miles

Prom night is one of the highlights of the school year, and memories from the special night are often cherished throughout one's life time - but what about students whose families are struggling and can't afford to purchase sparkly evening gowns or tuxedos for the special occasion?

Long Beach High School students are in luck. The Long Beach High School Prom Closet project will provide students in need with evening wear for prom night, which is scheduled for Saturday, April 27, at 7 p.m. for Long Beach High School.

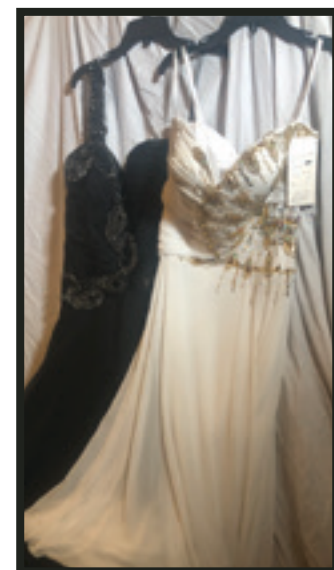
The group is now collecting slacks, suits, dress shoes, belts, ties, tuxedos, heels, gowns and dresses of all sizes to help meet the needs of local students who cannot afford to buy prom attire.

To donate, or for more information, contact Abigail Smith at [Abigail.Smith@lbsdk12.com](mailto:Abigail.Smith@lbsdk12.com).



Toni Miles

Gloves and shoes like the ones seen here are among the donations being collected by the LBHS Prom Closet project.



LBHS's Prom is scheduled for April 27. Volunteers with LBHS's Prom Closet project are hoping to collect enough donations to meet the needs of local students who would like to attend prom but cannot afford formal attire.

Toni Miles

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# EMERGE Center opens in Long Beach

All photos by Keith Clark

By Toni Miles

The City of Long Beach is now home to the Mississippi EMERGE Center, a vocational rehabilitation for the low vision and blind training center.

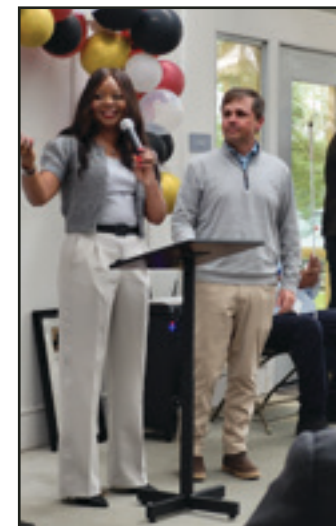
Long Beach Mayor George Bass, Mississippi's First Lady Elee Reeves and Dorothy Young, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services's (MDRS) Director of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, were among those on hand for the center's grand opening on Friday, March 1.

Under the umbrella of MDRS, and following MDRS's Structure Discovery Model, Mississippi EMERGE Center participants will live in off-site apartments as they train at the Advanced Discovery Training Facility, where they will learn home management, cooking, travel, braille reading and writing, and technology. The goal of the program is for those who complete the six- to nine-month training to leave with more independence and transferrable workforce skills that will land them internships, jobs and volunteer work in the area.

According to the MDRS, Structured Discovery is a unique blindness skills training model that differs substantially from traditional approaches intended to help blind and low vision people to become self-sufficient. Structured Discovery training programs teach non-visual techniques and encourage problem solving through experiential learning and confidence-building activities. From time to time, the staff wear learning shades (blindfolds) to demonstrate their personal belief in the effectiveness of non-visual techniques. Staff walk the talk and function confidently with or without sight. The consistent use of Structured Discovery helps participants confront and challenge the negative social attitudes about blindness that unnecessarily limit the lives of far too many blind and visually impaired people.

Training sessions began on March 12 and are held from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Mississippi EMERGE Center located at 310 N. Cleveland Avenue in Long Beach.

For more information about the Mississippi EMERGE Center, visit [MDRS.ms.gov](http://MDRS.ms.gov), or call 1-800-443-1000.




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**Publisher/Owner**  
Clay Mansell  
ClayMansell@LongBeachBreeze.com

**Editor-in-Chief**  
Stephanie Tracy

**Managing Editor**  
Toni Miles  
Toni@LongBeachBreeze.com

**Office Manager**  
Doris Bynum

**Designer**  
Brad Henderson

**Writers**  
Dom Fimiano  
Marilou Horton  
Lindy Sholes

**Sales**  
Keith Clark  
Keith@LongBeachBreeze.com  
Dom Fimiano  
(Biloxi & Gulfport)  
Dom@longbeachbreeze.com

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## Cuevas hits the ground running as community affairs director

By Toni Miles

Courtney Cuevas was born in Long Beach and has lived most of her life in the Friendly City. She's a familiar face in the area, but also has made the rounds in the capitol of the United States.

Cuevas and her mother Theresa own Forget-Me-Not-Florist and Gifts in Long Beach. The duo's talents landed them a top spot in a national competition, and they made local and national news when they were selected by the then-First Lady herself to decorate the White House for Christmas in 2020.

This honor in the nation's capital wasn't Cuevas's debut in Washington, D.C., though.

Cuevas served as an intern for then-Mississippi District 4 Congressman Steven Palazzo, an experience that has better prepared her for her role as the community affairs director in Long Beach.

"My three-month internship on Capitol Hill definitely taught me more about myself and about government and politics," Cuevas said.

"That was my first kind of take with politics. I knew I always wanted to come back here to Long Beach and raise my children, so what better way than to try to get a job with the City."

And that she did. About a year ago, Cuevas was hired to serve as the City of Long Beach's community affairs director, and she is responsible for keeping citizens and others informed about important local events, notices and other important information. Not only does Cuevas devote countless hours to

posting about City and community events, she's actually been the driving force behind several inaugural events over the past year, including Long Beach's first-ever Fourth of July Jubilee (planned with Sawyer Walters), as well as the City's debut of the Spooky Halloween Trail held last year, which provided a safe venue for local children. The free fall festival event held at the Long Beach Senior Center grounds included Halloween decorations, lively booths, candy and other give-aways, attracted thousands of people and was full to capacity within its first hour.

"Courtney Cuevas put this event together," said Ward 6 Alderman Pete McGoey, who manned one

booths, along with his granddaughters, last year. "She did it with a narrow window of opportunity, just something to provide for the kids. Seventeen-hundred people committed to coming here, so, who knows, maybe next year it will grow even bigger."

Cuevas, who is a sixth generation Long Beach resident, as well as a graduate of Long Beach High School and the University of Southern Mississippi, where she majored in legal studies with an emphasis on pre-law and a minor in political science, put her business skills and savvy to use at a young age, before she even earned her college degree.

"I also own a business in Long Beach," Cuevas says. "I own Simply Jane Clothing Co., which is a women's boutique. I opened this business during my senior year in college in 2021. During that time, I did a lot of community

outreach with businesses and try to do as much as I can for Long Beach and the small businesses in Long Beach," as evidenced by the Fall Sidewalk Sale and Shop Small Passport, where local businesses were promoted in the city.

At only age twenty-four, Cuevas has hit the ground running in her role as community affairs director, and has appeared at dozens of events, from last December's Annual Wreaths Across America Program to honor and remember the area's veterans who have passed, to Coffee with First Responders, an early morning gathering and community networking event that was held at Bankhouse Coffee in February.

"Now in my role with the City, I can do these things on a bigger scale and try to make an impact on the city as best as I can," Cuevas says.

As for her job goals as community affairs director for the City of Long Beach, "The number one thing is information," Cuevas says. "I post information about all the [Long Beach] Board [of Aldermen] meetings on the website and social media platforms. I try to push out as much information - correct information - as I can. The second thing is to help businesses trying to retain or gain, and the third goal is trying to create a positive space and community for everyone."

Cuevas says her line is always open. "I am a Long Beach resident," Cuevas says. "I understand our city's residents' concerns and where they're coming from. If they ever need anything, they can email me or give me a call in my office."

As for any future political aspirations, such as running for office in Long Beach, Cuevas says, "I'm a live-in-the-moment kind of person, and, if that's where it takes me, then I think I'd be willing to go that route; but, as for right now, I am comfortable where I am. I think I can make a bigger impact in this position."



Photo courtesy Haute Designs

*Courtney Cuevas has been serving as the community affairs director for the City of Long Beach for several months.*

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# Meet Your Neighbor: Page Graham inspires with time at Gulf Park campus

Special to Long Beach Breeze

Page Graham of Long Beach, a senior at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) Gulf Park, is blending her passion for sustainability efforts along the Mississippi Gulf Coast and her academic experiences to encourage young people, particularly women, to consider a career in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) field.

Graham began her USM journey in 2016 studying biology, before taking a hiatus to take time for family. When she returned to USM in 2021, Graham looked at the school's Sustainability Sciences (Coastal System Dynamics) degree program and decided it was the perfect fit for her and her interests.

"It's been a learning experience," Graham said. "Sustainability is a blending of all sciences. There is so much diversity in the knowledge of sustainability when learning about surveys, field work methods and gathering data."

Graham's academic program featured hands-on projects focused on the Mississippi Gulf Coast ecosystem, including opportunities to analyze organisms, his-

tory and water quality on the Gulf Park Campus at its Bear Point Bayou, while also studying various birds and trees found on the Mississippi coast.

Graham works at the Environmental Justice STEM Leadership Academy with the STEPS Coalition and at the Boys and Girls Club, where she educates sixth through twelfth graders on environmental issues along the coast and leadership strategies for environmental justice.

Dr. David Holt, associate professor of geography at USM Gulf Park, says he is proud of the way Graham took the lead in projects across campus.

"She is a driven student who searches for solutions and has a scientific mind to evalu-



Page Graham

Special to Long Beach Breeze

ate real-world problems, from addressing freshwater sources along the coast to teaching at the Environmental Justice STEMM Leadership Academy," said Dr. Holt. "She uses her class experience to show middle school and high school students how to look at things from a scientist's viewpoint and has even developed hands-on lesson plans for under-

standing composting and landfill decomposition in her work."

"Page shows by doing and is a great example of who we want our sustainability majors to be," said Dr. Holt.

Graham's involvement in the student organization, Women in STEM, provided a framework for her to engage in a supportive community for other women scientists and engineers.

"I'm glad we have this organization and are inclusive in showing that women are present in STEM," she said.

Graham continues to be drawn to coastal system dynamics and providing pathways for scientists everywhere to live and work on the Gulf Coast, while planning for her own career in the sustainability sciences field after earning her degree.

"My short-term goal is to graduate, while my long-term goal is to be a good example for my daughters as well as others in their generation as a woman who is also a scientist," she said.

## MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

ate real-world problems, from addressing freshwater sources along

*Congratulations* Long Beach High School Boys Soccer 4x State Champs

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#	NAME	GRADE	#	NAME	GRADE	#	NAME	GRADE
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8	Landon VanCourt	12th	11	Cole Edwards	10th	23	Matthew Kayji-Wint	9th
10	Jason Marshall	12th	28	Joaquin Aguirre	10th	2	Bryson Guillot	9th
6	Alexander Mink	12th	9	Addison Carroll	10th	22	Caleb Shaver	9th
00	Alan Long	11th	7	Luke Blockhurst	10th	15	Collin Gonzales	9th
31	Jarin Shockley	11th	13	Daxus Arkin	10th	21	Jackson Cropper	9th
17	Drew Dixon	10th	18	Asher Stewart	9th	20	Kaden Massey	9th
16	Colton Dahl	10th	14	Mason Watts	9th	24	Landon Tyre	9th
5	Bralden Bonds	10th	25	Gunnar Borden	9th			

*Thank you!* A special thanks to Coach DeFillips and Coach Johnson for your outstanding leadership and for fostering an unbeatable team camaraderie and winning spirit. It was a memorable season for the players and parents.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GADDY IMAGES



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**Library plans movie day for April 20**

*By Guest Columnist Renee Rayburn, LBPL Youth and Technology Services*

The Long Beach Board of Trustees will hold a meeting on Tuesday, April 9, at 4 p.m. at the library. The public is invited to attend. The Friends of the Library do not have a meeting scheduled for April.



Family Movie Day will be on Saturday, April 20, at 10 a.m. in the children's wing.

As a reminder to everyone, the library hours are Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. We are open on Saturdays from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. On Saturdays, we hold our book sale.

Prices are ten cents each for magazines, twenty-five cents each for paperbacks, and fifty cents each for hardbacks, audiobooks and movies.

The library will be closed from Saturday, April 27, through Monday, April 29,

for a state holiday. We will reopen on Tuesday, April 30 at 9 a.m.

For more information about any of our events or offerings, please give us a call at 228-863-0711. The library is located at 209 Jeff Davis Avenue.

We would like to thank you all for your continued support. As always, thank you for your patronage, and stay safe!

**Annual Blessing of the Jeeps set for April 13**

*By Toni Miles*

Jeepers are a common sight throughout South Mississippi year-round, whether it's the bright-lighted decorated Jeeps that roll down city streets during Mardi Gras or Long Beach's Annual Jeep-A-Gras parades or those rugged terrain vehicles often spotted in auto shows and non-profit fundraisers that take place along the Coast.

On Saturday, April 13, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Jeepers everywhere can converge on the Coast and head over to St. Thomas Catholic Church in Long Beach to get a blessing, while helping out the church's teen program as well as a local animal rescue foundation.

The Priest of St. Thomas Catholic Church will be on hand to pray for a safe riding season for each Jeep and their passengers. He will bless each Jeep with holy water at this year's Annual Blessing of the Jeeps at the church, located at 720 Beach Boulevard East.

The Annual Blessing of the Jeeps takes place in April of each year to kick off Jeeping season. During this event, participants showcase their Jeeps and have the opportunity to engage in raffles, giveaways and more, while also raising funds for both the Life Teen program at St. Thomas Catholic Church and also for Batman's LBMS Animal Rescue Foundation of Long Beach, which helps animals in the area with food, cleaning supplies, shelter and more.

The cost of registration is \$15 per Jeep and must be made before the April 13 event. To register for the event or for more information, visit the Blessing of the Jeeps-MS Facebook page.



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# Bigfoot presenter draws crowds in Long Beach



By Toni Miles

Bigfoot is alive and well, or at least the legend of Bigfoot is, if the crowd that turned out for a recent presentation on the legendary beast in Long Beach is any indication.

The Long Beach Public Library recently hosted the Science Café, which featured Bigfoot researcher Mike Familant, who spoke with attendees at Long Beach City Hall on Monday, March 4, about his and his team's thirteen years of experiences researching and collecting evidence.

Dozens of people showed up for the presentation, which included a table with various casts of feet alleged to be of Bigfoot, also known as Sasquatch, at various locations throughout the world.

The legend of Bigfoot stems from a 1958 news article that featured a letter from a reader about loggers in northern California who had discovered mysteriously large footprints. Since the article, Bigfoot "spottings" have been reported throughout the world, along with other alleged evidence of the elusive beast's existence.

Familant is the full-time lead investigator and producer of the show, *In the Shadow of Big Red Eye*. More information about the team's expeditions is available on his Facebook page, "In the Shadow of Big Red Eye," and at ShadowOfRedEye.com.

# Community bike rides begin April 4

Special to Long Beach Breeze



The Long Beach 1st Thursday Community Bicycle Rides will begin for the season on April 4, with rides also set for May 2, June 6, August 1 and September 5. There will be no ride in July, due to the Independence Day holiday.

The free ride for all ages begins at 6 p.m., with riders meeting at the Harper McCaughan Town Green, at the corner of Jeff Davis and 3rd

Street.

Riders should bring their own bikes and helmets to take an easy loop through Long Beach. Each month, there will be the option to join a post-ride Dutch treat dinner stop.

For more information, call or text 228-297-7229.

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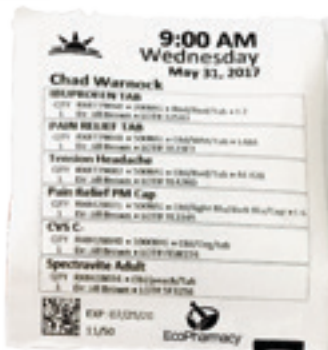


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Sunday (March 31st): Resurrection Sunday, 10AM

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**Include your church in this section!**

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cont. from front page

## Bearcats boys soccer team wins 4th straight championship title in a row

Minutes later, Center Hill's Michael Sanders scored again, tying the game 2-2 in the 75th minute on a penalty kick.

With just under a minute to left to play, the Bearcats' Easton Van Norden scored the winning goal with a free shot after being fouled.

Bearcats senior Braiden Bonds was named Most Valuable Player in the game, securing two of the LBHS Bearcats' three points in the state championship game.

"When the final whistle blew, I felt excitement and relief, all at the same time," Bonds says. "Excitement, because I knew how hard the team worked to get there, and also because it was the first State Championship that I have ever won. Relief, because I and the rest of the underclassmen really wanted to help get the seniors their fourth State Championship in a row - and we did it."

DeFillips says he is proud of Bonds and the entire team.

"The goals are obvious moments that stand out, but goalkeeper Alan Long made a really big diving save with an attacker barreling down at him to keep the game tied going into halftime, which was a huge moment," DeFillips said. "Freshman Landon Tyre, who had a shaky appearance in South State, played a really solid final ten minutes of the game and had a couple important clearances late in the game. Easton van Norden's perfectly-placed game-winning free kick goal in the final seconds of the game will be a play I will never forget. To do that in that game and in that moment was incredible."

"One word that describes this team is resilient," DeFillips said. "We believe in striving together which means to compete. We show up and compete every day on and off the field, and I think you see that in the way that we fought together all season long. We get everyone's best game, and we just refuse to quit, and we just keep striving together."

"This group of seniors is really special, and I'm just so happy that they are able to go out the same way they came in, as State Champions. Each one of them scored a game-winning goal in the playoffs to help us survive and advance, and ultimately win a fourth state championship. We're going to miss them, and we thank them for their contributions on and off the field. We were a young team this season, and that will continue."

The championship game was a wrap for some, including van Norden.

"Once I realized that we had won state, I was very happy and relieved," van Norden says. "It was a stressful game, and we really had to battle our way through up to the very last minute. We prepared for the season the way most teams do, working on fitness and the fundamentals. I do not plan on playing soccer after high school, but I am glad that I got to end my soccer career on such a great note."



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# Stand Your Ground: A universal lesson from the wilds of South Africa

All photos by Toni Miles

By Toni Miles

A guttural roar jarred me out of sleep, reminding me I was thousands of miles away from home. I threw on the cargo jacket I'd bought for this trip and clumsily laced up my new hiking shoes. A Mississippi Gulf Coast girl at heart, I had to leave my low-heeled, jewel-studded flip-flops behind, at least for a few hours, on this day trip out in the South Africa bush.

I grabbed my handy video camera and sticks (tripod) and rushed out of the safari hut, hoping to catch the majesty of the sun rising, lighting up the glorious mane of the male lion who continued to bellow out his bone-jarring roars, letting everyone within a five-mile radius know not only was he awake, but still king of the wild.

Fortunately, I found the perfect place to set up – thankful for the thin wire fence that separated us on this safari and wildlife rescue reserve for unwanted, neglected, abandoned and abused wildlife, including this lion and his pride.



A lioness throws me a deadly stare, sizing me up. Never was the lesson "Stand Your Ground" more crucial than when on this shoot.

With somewhat steady hands, barely breathing and just feet away from this four-legged beast, I set up my camera and hit "record." So far, so good, but I decided not to try to press my luck, and left the camera to do its work and catch video of the time lapse of this morning's sunrise.

In an incredible stroke of "luck," which I prefer to call Divine Providence, I had landed the opportunity of a lifetime to work as the "B" utility camera operator (and ultimately to work as a producer and writer) for a national TV wildlife series being filmed in South Africa.

All the research in the world could not have adequately prepared me for the splendor – and very real danger – I would encounter during this once-in-a-lifetime trip, where I would experience memories that would last a lifetime, but, perhaps more importantly, equip me with lessons from the wild that I still carry with me to this day.

Once my time-lapse video of the breath-taking sunrise had wrapped, I hopped onto the back of an open truck trailer and rode with the rescue sanctuary crew members who were heading out – behind the lions' fences – to feed the hungry pride.

Perhaps after more than twenty-five years of working in journalism, including decades in TV news where I survived (and covered) Hurricane Katrina on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in 2005, outwitted a group of beauty school students whose instructor had sicked them on me while filming the scene of a drive-by shooting at a gas station next door to their cosmetology school in Jackson, Mississippi, and numerous other close calls while working in the industry, I figured the lions shouldn't pose much of a threat.

As we trekked deeper into the lions' territory and I got a clearer, up-close-and-personal look at these salivating beasts, I started to rethink my calculated decision to venture out on this feeding frenzy.

Trying to multitask – shouldering my trusty video camera in the proper frame and lighting – while silently making yet another plea bargain and promises to God in exchange for saving my life once again – I miraculously managed to get solid video as the crew threw carcasses of cattle that had died of natural causes at a nearby ranch – to the blood-thirsty group.

Witnessing first-hand how the animal kingdom operates by the "Rules of the Wild," the alpha and top-ranking lions fed first, followed later by the lower-ranking ones. Knowing where I stood as a human on the feeding chain, I was just glad I wasn't on the menu, and that they hadn't taken much notice of me.

I breathed a sigh of relief, or maybe I just actually breathed, for the first time since this outdoor adventure began, as we finally rolled away from the wild feast of the beast - but it wasn't over yet.

There were more lions to feed. This time around, we'd have the "safety" of a wire fence as the workers fed the group of lions on the other side.

With a little more confidence, I cautiously approached the fence and tried to gently maneuver the lens of my camera inside the small, square holes formed by the wire fence, so I could get a "clean shot"



A simple wire fence like the one seen here is all that separated me from the alpha male lion during a shoot in South Africa.



Taking a much-needed break for play time with one of the rescued lion cubs.

of the feeding free-for-all.

**BIG MISTAKE.** Thank God, my face was shielded behind my camera and my eyes focused on the viewfinder as I started to roll (record), because, had there not been that barrier, I darn sure might have fallen out of a heart attack, when the alpha male of the pride decided I had dared to trespass on his territory.

I was at a loss for words to adequately describe how utterly terrifying it is, and how your blood literally runs cold, when faced with life-threatening terror, as I was when Alpha Leo decided to give me a good run for my money, or at the very least tried to scare me to death, considering my vulnerable position and the very thin wire fence that separated us from each other.

Yes, I fell backward, but I did not let go of the camera (twenty-plus years of training is hard to break)! So much for the shot. Despite my apparent despair and a need to change my cargo pants, the feeding crew burst out in laughter. Fortunately, at least one person there had a heart. Maddy, who our crew dubbed "The Lion Whisperer," calmly approached me, extended her hand and shared some very valuable advice, at least after the fact.

"You can't show fear," she told me. "Stand your ground."

I dusted myself off, made more bargains with God, pride bruised but determined to get "the shot." I approached the fence and set up the shot once again and rolled. At least I would get my death on video. Maybe it wasn't all in vain. If it bleeds, it leads, right?

Once again, the King of the South African Bush charged me, more agitated this time, grunting and showing his long, sharp incisors, salivating, so close I could smell his rancid breath and definitely feel his extreme displeasure. When I refused to move and stood my ground, he decided to turn and walk around, only to charge me again. Still, I stood. After one more charge, he finally decided he was wasting his time and needed to eat – the chickens, and not me.

And I got my shot.

Little did I know less than twenty-four hours later, I'd face a similar situation while shooting on location in the mountainous and hilly terrain of the African bush, this time around as the show's talent, experienced military veterans, "stalked" some warthogs. As the lone cameraman, I trailed behind them and our guide to get some nice low-angle shots. That's when I heard the snorting.

Slowly, I turned my head to discover a filthy, battle-scarred two-hundred-pound warthog zoned in on me, ready to attack. I quickly did the math and figured I was on my own this time; there was no way the guys dozens of yards ahead of me could help.

Remembering the valuable lesson from my lion encounter just hours earlier, and, once again, making yet more bargains and pleas silently with my Maker, I looked the hairy, angry beast right in the eye and sent a mental message, "You may get me, but you will know you've been in a fight."

It was time to stand my ground, and I did, successfully. Just a few minutes after that standoff, I caught up with the crew - only for all of us to be vastly outnumbered by a massive group of warthogs that surrounded us at that point. Once again, I prayed – and stood my ground, as did the rest of the crew.

Disaster averted, once again.

Upon return to the States, I offered up thanks for my good fortune and life intact, able to venture in the new territory of writing a season of TV episodes for a wildlife show, which turned out to be a success, but, even more importantly, a very valuable lesson in life.

"Stand Your Ground," turned out to be the title I used for one of the seven episodes. It's something I'd learned about first-hand, and something that's parlayed over into my daily life since.

If we live long enough, all of us will, at some point, find ourselves facing times in our lives where we must decide whether we will stand our ground.

We'll all face predators of all forms - corrupt people, organizations, leaders and other decision-makers who abuse their positions of authority to rob, crush or slander those they are tasked to care for or govern; bullies who threaten our children in the school yard or, worse yet, inside our schools and classrooms; people hellbent on the moral decay of our society, beliefs, families and rights.

Yes, taking a stand can be costly; but, deciding not to do so can be disastrous, deadly and adversely affect not only our lives and generation, but the future of generations to come.

In the wise words of eighteenth-century Irish philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

I hope you decide to take the road less traveled and "stand your ground." I know I am.



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# Special Olympics Mississippi Area 3 Gulf Coast games set for April 12

By Toni Miles

Some special athletes in South Mississippi are warming up and ready to return to the field as the Special Olympics Track and Field Games for the area are scheduled to take place on Friday, April 12, at Campground Baptist Church off Highway 53 in Gulfport.

These April events are being enthusiastically embraced by many, as Special Olympics games for the area have been on hiatus for several years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Special Olympics Mississippi Gulf Coast Area 3 services Harrison, Hancock, Stone and Pearl River counties.

As the games resume, the division is also welcoming a new director, Sharon Patterson. Patterson and others who devote their time to the area's Special Olympics games and other activities say they are as excited - if not more than - those who compete in the local games.

"Our area games (such as the April 12 track and field games) are to prequalify and ensure that our local athletes are put into the proper division for equal footing at the state games," Patterson says.

Established in 1968, the Special Olympics is a non-profit global organization that serves athletes with intellectual disabilities, working with hundreds of thousands of volunteers and coaches each year.

The Special Olympics state games are set to take place May 10-12 at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi and will include competitions in various categories, including track and field, swimming, bowling and various other competitions.

The track and field prequalifiers for Area 3 on April 12 will begin with check-in from 7:30 until 8:30 a.m. The Opening Ceremony and Games begin

at 9 a.m., followed by a lunch (provided) from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m.

Events at the April 12 games will include: 10M (meter) Wheelchair Race, 10M Walk, 25M Wheelchair Race, 25M Assisted Walk, 25M Run, 50M Run, 50M Walk, Volleyball Skills, Softball Throw, Bocce Singles and Banner/Sign Making.

Mississippi Coast Special Needs Soccer Association will have a soccer goal set up for play at the event, and Ace Cheer Company, from Wiggins, Mississippi, will have a performance featuring special athletes.

Games are open to all Special Olympic Athletes ages eight and up, but all participants must have a current physical to participate in the games on April 12. Registration is also required and must be made to Director Sharon Patterson at SMPatterson79@gmail.com.

Patterson says volunteers are always needed for administration, coaching and assisting with the events.

Law enforcement officers throughout Mississippi are also helping to raise funds for the organization with a Law Enforcement Torch Run (LETR) for Special Olympics Mississippi. They are collecting donations through various fundraisers, including the sale of T-shirts for this year's Torch Run. LETR T-shirts are \$20, plus the cost of shipping, and they can be ordered online through April 10 at WillPromo.com/SOMS/shop/home.

For more information, to volunteer or make donations, visit the Special Olympics Mississippi, Area 3 - Gulf Coast Mississippi's Facebook page, or email Patterson.

Campground Baptist Church is located at 20577 on Mississippi Highway 53 in Gulfport. For more information, call 228-860-0811.



Photos Special to Long Beach Breeze

Snapshots from the 2024 Special Olympics Gulf Coast Mississippi Fall Games



## OBITUARY

### Eric Scott Froelich

Eric Scott Froelich died at his home in Gilroy, California, in January. He was born on February 14, 1960, in Asheville, North Carolina. A year later, the family moved to Long Beach, Mississippi. Eric lived there until graduation from Long Beach High School in 1978, where he was recognized for his brilliance and intellectual achievement. He was designated the Star Student from Long Beach High and awarded a scholarship. He was also awarded a full scholarship to Michigan State University.

During his high school years, Eric was a champion swimmer on the Gulf Coast Swimming Team. He was the state champion in long-distance swimming in 1977 and excelled in the crawl, butterfly, backstroke and breaststroke.

Eric completed his Bachelor's degree in computer science in 1982 and was immedi-



ately hired by IBM. He went to work at the company's location in Poughkeepsie, New York. From there, IBM moved him to California. After several years, Eric established his own software company, ALTARE, in 1987 in Gilroy, California. IBM became one of his most prestigious customers.

In 1995, Eric sold ALTARE and pursued many interests throughout the rest of his life, including investments, music, medicine, math, science and astronomy, as well as physical fitness and nutrition. He became an expert in each field with which he was involved. He was a gifted musician.

Eric will always be remembered for his extraordinary generosity to his family and friends, for his musicianship playing the piano and for his brilliant mind.

He is survived by his mother, Louise Dunn; brother, Grant Froelich; and sisters, Melanie Alcalá and Rhonda Lawyer.

# Garden Club enjoys guest speaker, donates Camellias

Special to Long Beach Breeze

The Long Beach Garden Club held their February meeting at the Long Beach Senior Center and welcomed guest speaker Carmel Lopez-Lampton, who visited from Jackson to speak with the group about the design and history of the Governor's mansion garden.

The Garden Club also held a small tree planting ceremony for Mississippi's arbor day (observed on February 9), donating five Camellias dedicated to the Quarles family. The ceremony took place at Greenvale.

For more information about Garden Club meetings and events, find them on Facebook as "Long Beach Garden Club – Mississippi."



All photos Special to Long Beach Breeze

# Wilburn named National Coach of the Year Finalist

By Toni Miles

It's been an all-around successful year for Long Beach High School (LBHS) soccer for the 2023-2024 school year. The latest good news is the announcement that LBHS's Lady Bearcats Soccer Coach Andee Wilburn has been named among the top eight high school soccer coaches in the nation.

Not only this, but Wilburn has also been named a finalist for the National High School Athletic Coaches Association (NHSACA) Coach of the Year award.

Each year, the top eight coaches in sixteen sporting categories, along with assistant coaches and athletic directors, are recognized as finalists for the NHSACA awards. Coaches are recognized not just for their current season of coaching, but for their "lifetime achievements."

"This is an outstanding accomplishment, and we are very proud of Coach Wilburn and all he has done for the soccer programs at Long Beach High School," said Dr. Talia Lock, superintendent of Long Beach School District (LBSD). "He sets the bar high for his student-athletes, and they continue to rise to the challenge under his leadership. He is so deserving of this honor."

LBSD Athletic Director Shane Rutledge says he is grateful to have Coach Wilburn on his staff.

"Coach Wilburn is a great example of what coaching in education-based athletics is all about. As an athletic director, I appreciate the

time, effort and dedication he has put into honing his team's skills. He has a positive impact on the development of his players, both on and off the field," Rutledge said.

Wilburn says he is honored to be a finalist and grateful to be recognized for the work he has put in during his career.

"It is great to be recognized and to be selected as a finalist for Coach of the Year on the national level through NHSACA," Wilburn said. "To be in the top eight in the nation along with some great coaches is a great honor. Being recognized for the work that I have put in and my teams have put in over the last twenty years is amazing!"

"I would like to thank my family for their support throughout the years of coaching, the parents who have supported me, and our administration at LBSD," continued Wilburn. "I would like to thank the many teams that I have coached and the hundreds of players that I have coached, most recently with Long Beach girls soccer."

"I hope the positive impact made upon those players is as great as the positive impact those players have made upon me."

Under the direction of Wilburn, the LBHS boys' soccer team played for the state championship title six times, winning the last three titles before securing their fourth state championship title on February 17.

This year, the LBHS Lady Bearcats soccer team, in their first year under Wilburn's leadership, made it to the South State Championship game, narrowly losing in penalty kicks.



Special to Long Beach Breeze

*Andee Wilburn, Long Beach High School girls head soccer coach, has been selected as a finalist for the National High School Athletic Coaches Association's (NHSACA) National Coach of the Year award. The NHSACA National Coach of the Year will be announced this summer at the NHSACA Coaches Convention in North Dakota.*

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# VFW awards essay winners

*Special to Long Beach Breeze*

Winners in the Voice of Democracy Patriots Pen Essay Competition and Teachers of the Year were recently announced by VFW Post 3937. They included Briana Carver, who not only won the essay competition for Post 3937, but was also named the district winner and was runner-up to the state winner.

Harper McCaughan Elementary School student Jacob Taylor also won the essay competition for Post 3937 and was additionally named the district winner.

Naomi Rutledge was named Elementary Teacher of the Year, and Matthew Garvin was named High School Teacher of the Year.



*Special to Long Beach Breeze*

*Pictured (l to r) are VFW Auxiliary President Post 3937 Margaret Levens, student Briana Carver and VFW Post 3937 Scholarship Chair and District 1 Chaplain Jennifer Resendez.*



*Special to Long Beach Breeze*

*Pictured (l to r) are VFW Auxiliary President Post 3937 Margaret Levens, High School Teacher of the Year Matthew Garvin and VFW Post 3937 Scholarship Chair and District 1 Chaplain Jennifer Resendez. Not pictured is Naomi Rutledge, who was named Elementary Teacher of the Year.*



*Special to Long Beach Breeze*

*Pictured (l to r) are Harper McCaughan Elementary School Assistant Principal Wayne Ulrich, VFW Post 3937 Scholarship Chair and District 1 Chaplain Jennifer Resendez, Harper McCaughan Elementary School student Jacob Taylor, VFW Auxiliary President Post 3937 Margaret Levens, and Harper McCaughan Elementary School Principal Brian Rolison.*

# Long Beach wins award from Historical Society



*Special to Long Beach Breeze*

*Long Beach Mayor George Bass (left) accepts an Award of Merit given to the City of Long Beach from the Mississippi Historical Society. The City of Long Beach was recognized at the Society's 2024 annual meeting for the restoration of Greenvale, the home of W.J. and Merinda Quarles.*



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# THE PASS POST



## PCES celebrates "Music of the Culture"

Photos by Toni Miles



PCES students perform Sikyi "Ghanian Rhythm," a musical performance reflective of traditional dance music popular among people and the youth of Ghana in Africa.



Students perform The Color Purple.



A student performs a dance routine choreographed by Markos Williams at the program.



Three PCES students sparked from head-to-toe, as they sang "Stop in the Name of Love" as "The Supremes."

By Toni Miles

The Pass Christian Middle School gym reverberated with song, dance, musical performances, excitement and even a song by "The Supremes" in late February at "Lift Every Voice and Sing: Music of the Culture," during this year's annual Black History Month Program, put on by Pre-K through fifth-grade students at Pass Christian Elementary School (PCES).

This year's program included poetry readings, dance and dramatic performances, singing and a Sikyi ensemble, reflective of traditional dance music of the Ashanti people and youth of central Ghana in Africa.



Students sing "This Little Light of Mine."

"With the theme of 'Lift Every Voice and Sing: Music of the Culture,' the school aims to delve into the rich history of African American culture through the universal language of music," says Mercedes McMickle, a PCES second-grade teacher. "This program not only focuses on educating and entertaining the audience, but honors the profound contributions of Black musicians throughout history. By embracing the theme of Music for the Culture, PCES aspires to foster inclusivity, inspire creativity and empower the community to embrace and appreciate diversity."

## Art in the Pass to bring crowds and fun April 6-7

The Pass Post

The annual Art in the Pass is set to return to War Memorial Park on April 6 and 7. The vetted fine arts festival typically attracts over one hundred artists from a multitude of states, as well as thousands of visitors from across the Southeast. The event includes art, food, live entertainment and fun for the whole family.

In addition, the Celebrate the Gulf Marine Education Festival is held concurrently each year, bringing several dozen exhibitors to showcase topics ranging from upland habitats and wildlife to the recreational and commercial services that the Gulf of Mexico provides. Attendees are invited to get a festival poster signed by the winning artist, and talk to Student Science Showcase winners to learn about the science local students are doing in the community. There will also be live animal shows, free family caricatures and photo booths, and activities for children of all ages.

The festival begins each day at 10 a.m. and concludes at 5 p.m. War Memorial Park is located at 103 Fleitas Avenue.



## Evening of Art and Poetry planned

Special to The Pass Post

With April being National Poetry Month, the Pass Christian Art Association, the Pass Christian Library and the Friends of the Library will join forces to present "An Evening of Art and Poetry" on Friday, April 26, from 5 until 7 p.m. The Pass Christian Art Association Spring Show, which has a "Poetry and Lyrics" theme, will be featured in the library conference room



The evening will include a reception honoring the artists and feature poetry readings by both poets and artists. The event is free and open to the public. Everyone is welcome to attend and celebrate the artists and enjoy poetry readings, as well as share their own or a favorite poem, for those who wish to do so.

The art show will be on display through May 18 at the library.

The library is located at 111 Hiern Avenue in Pass Christian. For more information, call 228-452-4596.

## Monthly bike ride continues April 11

Special to The Pass Post

Pedal in the Pass, the monthly bicycle dinner ride which takes place on the second Thursday of each month from March through October, will continue on April 11, weather permitting.

Interested riders are asked to meet near Scenic Drive in War Memorial Park for the ride, which starts at 6 p.m. Participants can enjoy an easy, no drop bicycle ride through downtown Pass Christian and then are welcome to join the group for an optional dutch treat dinner to follow at one of the downtown restaurants

All ages are welcome, and bikes and helmets are required. Future ride dates include May 9, June 13, July 11, August 8 and September 12.

For more information, call 228-452-2453.

## National Library Week event planned

Special to The Pass Post

The Friends of the Pass Christian Public Library will gather on Friday, April 12, at 10 a.m. for a National Library Week celebration, including a Coffee with Friends event. The event is free, and will include refreshments, as well as the reveal of the 2024 One Book, One Pass author and book. The Friends will also hold their annual meeting and election of officers at that time. The event is open to the public. For additional information, call the library at 228-452-4596. The library is located at 111 Hiern Avenue.



## Memory Café planned for April 19

Special to The Pass Post

The Friends of the Pass Christian Public Library will gather on Friday, April 12, at 10 a.m. for a National Library Week celebration, including a Coffee with Friends event. The event is free, and will include refreshments, as well as the reveal of the 2024 One Book, One Pass author and book. The Friends will also hold their annual meeting and election of officers at that time. The event is open to the public. For additional information, call the library at 228-452-4596. The library is located at 111 Hiern Avenue.

## PCHS cheerleaders bring home UCA Nationals trophy

Special to The Pass Post

The Pass Christian High School cheerleaders recently won tenth place in the UCA National High School Cheerleading Championships. The team competed in the varsity coed non-tumbling game day category at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida. This year's event feature more than a thousand teams from across the country.



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# LBMS students qualify for National Beta competition

*Photos Special to Long Beach Breeze*  
*Snapshots from the 2024 Junior Beta State Convention in mid-February*



By Toni Miles

The 2023-2024 Beta theme, "Beta: A Voyage of Adventure," is a fitting description for the seven Long Beach Middle School (LBMS) students who qualified to compete at the national level this summer in Savannah, Georgia.

The local Beta Club members secured

their spots to compete in Beta's National Convention 2024 after competing, and winning, in academic and performing arts events at the 2024 Junior Beta State Convention in mid-February.

LBMS winners who qualified are Ayden Tichenor and Jake Blackhurst, who were awarded first place in the Performing Arts Solo, Duo, Trio com-

petition; Emily Ao, who won fourth place in seventh-grade math; Kara Williamson, who placed fourth in the Sculpture category; Avery Kittle, who was awarded fifth place in Accessory Design; Isabella Cornette, who secured third place in Quilling; and Silas Pingul, who placed second in Fiber Arts.

During the national convention,

attendees will get to explore Savannah, take part in national exhibitions, participate in the Beta Serves Project and celebrate the achievements of other Betas. These students will also compete in their respective categories for the chance to win first place on the national stage at the annual convention in June.



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# Call of the Coast art show continues

Special to Long Beach Breeze

Works celebrating the "Call of the Coast" by eight artists are currently featured at Coast Episcopal School's Gail Keenen Art Center (GKAC) through Friday, April 19.

Art lovers will experience the talents of Erin Austen Abbott, writer, author and photographer, whose works involves her family, home and adventures; California native Mary Ann Breen, influenced by the



Pacific Ocean, Sierra Nevada Mountains, redwood forests, Mojave Desert and Death Valley; Christina Juran, who credits the soul of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast to her deep connection to nature, earth and home, reflected in works using both formal and non-traditional materials; Jennifer Kayes, whose passion for creating beautiful and unique oil paintings in eclectic and bohemian style; Marian Knobbe, inspired by the beauty of elusive mingling of land and water; Tommie Larsen, a studio and plein air contemporary impressionist who draws inspiration from time in nature and all its inhabitants; Julia Reyes, visual artist and creative entrepreneur; and Megan Zaniewski, self-taught hand-embroidery artist who creates natural portraits. Many of the pieces will be available for purchase.

Call of the Coast is the third and final show of the 2023-2024 year to be curated at GKAC by MS Gulf Coast artist and photographer Ann Dinwidie Madden. For more information, call 228-452-9442.

Coast Episcopal School is located at 5065 Espy Avenue in Long Beach.

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