

★ NEWS ★



Biology students were treated to an undulating class this November when snake expert Terry Vandeventer visited with a variety of snakes. Vandeventer emphasized the importance of snakes in our ecosystem and encouraged students to protect—not harm—the reptiles. Vandeventer is pictured with a rattlesnake.

Merritt joins PRCC Foundation staff

Title: Coordinator of Alumni Services

POPLARVILLE - Paula Merritt has joined the Pearl River Community College Development Foundation staff as Coordinator of Alumni Services.

Merritt, a 1994 graduate of PRCC, will be in charge of organizing and coordinating PRCC alumni chapters in Pearl River, Forrest, Lamar, Marion, Jeff Davis and Hancock counties.

"I plan to be really active with all the chapters and meet with officers of the chapters," said Merritt. "One of my goals will be to establish a high level of enthusiasm and commitment from our alumni."

Another of her goals will be to increase awareness of the services provided by the Development Foundation and Alumni Association to current students and alumni.

Merritt, a graduate of Poplarville High School, enjoyed her two years at PRCC. She was a member of the String of Pearls and the RiverRoad show choir, a River Navigator, and class favorite her freshman year. She graduated from the Medical Office Technology program and currently attends William Carey College.

"My memories of Pearl River were both fun and rewarding," she said. "PRCC prepared me for a career in the workforce and helped make me a better-rounded person. That's why I am happy to have the opportunity to come back and work here."



Merritt

Another goal will be to reorganize a student foundation/alumni association on campus.

"I want to make students aware of the functions of the Foundation and Alumni Association before they graduate from Pearl River," said Merritt. "That's how you cultivate your alumni association."

You start with making contacts with the students while they are in school.

Donna Wilson Lee, Executive Director of the PRCC Foundation and Alumni Association said, "We are extremely

thrilled to have Paula in the Alumni Office. Her past experience with coordinating volunteers and organizing events will be very beneficial in helping us to realize the full potential of our county alumni chapters. I am sure that Paula's enthusiasm will prove to be contagious and we are expecting a great deal of growth in alumni participation from her efforts."

Since her graduation from PRCC, Merritt worked in blood banking for 10 years, nine of those with United Blood Services as a community relations representative, and one year with the Blood Center.

Merritt is the daughter of C.J. and Katherine Merritt of Poplarville. She has one sister, Marie Carpenter, of Poplarville.

Interested PRCC alumni who want to participate in alumni functions can contact Merritt at 601-403-1193.

Labor of love

Gray Nichols, an artist, takes welding class to expand his craft

HATTIESBURG - Gray Nichols is a 44 year-old craftsman and he is very good at what he does.

He describes himself as an artist, and he makes things that people like, especially at this time of year.

What Nichols does is takes sheets of copper, some flower pots, pump motors, a little patience and his sculptures turn into copper fountains, which he sells for anywhere between \$300 and \$3,000. It takes him about a day and a half to do one. He has orders for about 25 to finish before Christmas.

"I am going to be very busy the next couple of weeks," he said.

The tools of his trade are the humble hammer, chisel, a gas torch and brazen rods. He purchases the copper from a local scrap yard or from local roofers. The flower pots he picks up locally. His wife acquires the water pumps on the Internet.

"It's a labor of love for me," said Nichols, who is originally from San Diego, but makes his home in the Carnes community. "It is a relaxing thing. I have done thousands of them. It takes me about a day and a half to do one. No two of them are ever alike. When I turn the power on and watch the water flow, it gives me a lot of satisfaction."

So the question becomes, why is this married father of four enrolled in Pearl River Community College's welding program at the Forrest County Center in Hattiesburg?

"Basically, I am taking welding to expand on what I do," said Nichols. "I have been asked to give bids on some larger projects, and welding bigger projects takes different techniques. I am not into the full landscaping thing, but what I could do is set fountains up. This (welding) program will just help me expand what I do."

Just last week, Nichols put in a bid for a fountain 18 to 20 feet high and as big around.



Gray Nichols with one of his copper fountains.

"Some of the requests I have gotten are for bigger and bigger (fountains), and I have to learn more than just brazen," said Nichols. "That's why I am taking this course."

James Patterson, welding instructor at the Forrest County Center, says Nichols is older than most of his students and works hard.

"The average fellow can't do what he does," said Patterson. "He tells me he sells his work to art galleries. There are different levels to welding and he wants to take his craft to a higher level. He used to be a carpenter, so that will help him in his work."

This isn't the first time Nichols has attended PRCC. Back in 1983, he took Emergency Management Training classes and became a paramedic. He began doing copper fountains about 10 years ago.

"When I was about 20 years-old, I was doing sand sculptures," he said. "In San Diego, that was a big deal. I went from that to copper sculpturing, and it all sort of evolved from there."

Nichols moved from California to Mississippi to be near family and wound up staying.

Most students in Patterson's welding classes have another goal in mind - a job. It's a one-year (two semester) program.

Said Patterson, "Our students earn a certificate saying they finished all the requirements of welding to be able to enter the work force as an entry-level welder. If they want to, they can get a job."

They may have to travel to get it, but right now there is a big demand for welders since Hurricane Katrina. Local companies like Howard Industries are hiring people right and left. They can start

out at \$10-11 an hour and work up to \$20 an hour in some cases."

For Patterson, the art path in welding is a first, unique in a field with only practical applications.

Nichols may have created a new genre for the art world in this area.

What Nichols does with his copper fountains has given him a rewarding past time. It not only returns satisfaction for accomplishments, but it also lends itself to artistic business for this talented individual who enjoys building objects of art of his own and realization.

When Nichols says, "I am an artist," he is acknowledging his gift for turning something as mundane as penny copper and raw construction materials into a majestic fountain.

For more information about Gray's Copper Works, call Gray Nichols at 601-270-4972.

Damages

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"The 2005-06 school year had begun with much promise," said Dr. Lewis. "We had record enrollment. The largest band in our school's history and a football team that was ranked No. 1 in the country in the pre-season polls were precursors to a fantastic school year. The year held much promise and still does."

Indeed, the news is not all bad this fall.

Construction work on two new dormitories on the Poplarville campus and a classroom-library building at the Forrest County

Center in Hattiesburg that began before Katrina is going strong today.

"Work could begin soon on the new courtyard here on the main campus," said Clint Tapper, Director of the Physical Plant. "That plan has been approved by the state. We are now taking bids."

New lighting in the athletic complex for baseball, softball and soccer has been approved and work could begin soon. We are taking bid on that project, too. We expect to have new lights in place for the start of baseball and softball seasons."

Answers to crossword puzzle

Wildcat Crossword
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This fall, the students and staff in the Career/Technical Building won first place in the Halloween Decorating contest, which is sponsored by the Recruitment and Orientation Office. Donna Warden, (above) secretary, decorated the hallways of the building with some groovy 60's decorations, and students dressed as has some hip hippies. The chicks from Cosmetology pictured are (sitting, from left) Diary Stogner of Poplarville, Rachael Courtney of Picayune, Brandi Seals of Wiggins, Ashley Riley of Hattiesburg, Amanda Mize of Columbia, (second row) Flo Allen of Poplarville, Amanda Ladner of Poplarville, Amanda Keith of Purvis, Aril Loro of Poplarville, (back) Ricki Viator of Poplarville, Paulett Pearson of Hattiesburg, Aria Magee of Columbia, Courtney Carson of Columbia, Delois Stovall, Cosmetology Instructor, Erica McLemore of Lumberton, and Lottie Sandifer of Lumberton.