

# THE CURRENT

AN ALUMNI PUBLICATION OF THE MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL FOR MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE FOUNDATION DEC. 2015 ISSUE 2

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THE CURRENT  
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Dear Reader:

As the director of operations for the MSMS Foundation, I am honored to have been a part of the production of the much anticipated second issue of the MSMS alumni magazine, *The Current*. Realizing how well received the first issue was last year, I was both excited and nervous about the opportunity to help create the follow up to the debut of such a well-crafted alumni magazine.

We were charged with the task of creating an issue that would not only meet the expectations set forth by the success of the first issue, but expand our horizons to reach even more MSMS alumni, supporters, and friends.

As with the first issue of *The Current*, this second project was also the result of the hard work and collaboration of a committed group of people. On behalf of the Foundation, I would like to thank Owen McGuire and Crystal Lauderdale for their continued support throughout the project. Many thanks to the MSMS Foundation Board and Cynthia Henderson for making this second issue possible.

I would also like to thank everyone who gathered information, submitted stories, and took photos for the magazine. A special thanks goes to Sarah Sapp, Dillon Allen, Shannon Eubanks, Karen Sergent, Kilby Allen, Kristy Brannon, Wade Leonard, and Heath Stevens.

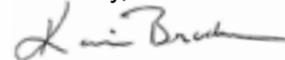
Thanks to Amazon.com and The Commercial Dispatch for allowing us to use material for this publication.

A special thanks to Angela Lang Chandler, Sejal Patel, Elliott Yates, Forrest Dillard Jenkins, and Chuck Yarborough, as well as to all alumni who contributed photos of the reunion weekend and who responded to the Foundation's alumni survey.

It is my hope that we have succeeded in enhancing the MSMS alumni experience, while broadening our scope of influence to reach even more of our supporters and friends with this issue. If you would like to support the MSMS Foundation in its mission to add value to MSMS, the students and the alumni of MSMS, please send a donation via the included envelop or by visiting the Foundation's website: [www.msmsfoundation.com](http://www.msmsfoundation.com).

If you have comments or thoughts on a future publication, please contact us at [info@msmsfoundation.com](mailto:info@msmsfoundation.com).

Sincerely,



Kassie Brooks  
Director of Operations for MSMS Foundation



## 2014-2015 FOUNDATION HIGHLIGHTS

The MSMS Foundation supports the mission of MSMS and seeks to continue providing value to the school, the faculty and staff, the students, the alumni, and our donors. Our primary objectives for meeting this goal are reflected in the following Foundation highlights from 2014 and the beginning of 2015.

- In 2014, the Foundation helped sponsor the summer enrichment camp for rising sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth graders. The camp hosted math and science based classes and activities designed to provide a fun and valuable learning experience for students.
- In 2014, the Foundation also hosted the Fall Alumni Reunion Weekend, in which members from the classes of 1994, 1999, and 2004 participated.
- This year the Foundation provided Room and Board Fee assistance to 12 students who did not qualify for fee waivers due to their families making a few thousand more than the waiver cutoff. The cutoff this year was \$37,167 for a family of three.
- The Foundation also helped the school purchase new equipment for the computer science lab this year.
- Six students from the MSMS class of 2015 were awarded scholarships through the Foundation.
- Earlier this year, the Foundation raised enough money to add four additional seats to the Class of 2017 through the *Add A Seat* campaign.

*"Thanks for the generous room and board fee donation. The gift was an immense help. You are a big help to students who receive the donations."*  
– Room and Board Fee Assistance Recipient

*"We are blessed to have 20 iMacs for students in our computer science lab. This will give students the opportunity to learn how to make iPhone apps. Mobile app development knowledge will be an invaluable skill as technology progresses."* – Joshua Crowson, MSMS Computer Science Instructor

These are just a few of the projects and activities we have funded in the recent past. More detailed information is available on the website at [www.msmsfoundation.com](http://www.msmsfoundation.com).



# A Square Peg in a Round Hole

A profile of Dr. Angela Lang Chandler

By Owen McGuire (2005)

Many MSMS students use this expression about themselves when describing how they felt at their previous school. It may not apply to everyone, but it applies to many, and it applies to Angela Chandler.

Dr. Angela Lang Chandler graduated from MSMS as a member of the school's inaugural class in 1990. Originally from Bay Springs, Miss., she attended college at Mississippi State University, where she majored in aerospace engineering before switching to chemistry/pre-med. Angela graduated from Mississippi State in December 1994 and headed to the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson. She remained at the medical center to complete her residency and worked five years as an attending physician.

Growing up in Jasper County, the future doctor knew she sought something more than her hometown could provide.

*"I had been begging my mom to find somewhere to send me since I was a little girl," Angela said. "I always felt out of place. I had friends, but I always felt like a square peg in a round hole."*

That square peg found inspiration in an interesting place: the television show *Facts of Life*. The early 1980's show is set in a fictional girls' boarding school.

"I would say to my mom, 'please send me to a boarding school. I want to go to school somewhere else.'"

Angela's mother was supportive of the idea, and promised her daughter that if there was somewhere to send Angela, her mother would send her. That opportunity soon became a reality. Angela's mother, a teacher, heard about a new residential high school opening in North Mississippi. This was, without question, the solution Angela had been hoping for.

"Getting accepted and going was an answered prayer," Angela said. "My parents were very supportive. There was no agonizing over the decision. I have zero regrets."

Angela's story of transiting into

MSMS may sound familiar to many of the hundreds of students who have come after her. Her previous school had not challenged her academically, and Angela had to catch up to the rigor of MSMS.

"It was challenging, it was the first time in my life I had to study. I had to learn how to study," she said.

Though she had to learn study and time management skills, Angela appreciated the types of courses that were not offered in Bay Springs.

"Going to MSMS allowed me to take precalculus, physics, things I would not have been able to take otherwise."

Many faculty members impacted Angela's life at MSMS. She says, without hesitation, that her favorite was chemistry teacher Dr. Nancy MacNeill. She also spoke fondly of physics teacher Helen Perry, both Jack and Claudia Carter, and

history teacher Judy Morris.

"Miss Morris is the first history teacher I ever had that made me like history," Angela said.

Angela described specific projects, such as Miss Morris's Depression Day and Dr. Mac making non-Newtonian fluid, as non-traditional teaching methods that made her fall in love with the faculty and the school.

It was not just the classes and faculty that benefited her academic life. Angela enjoyed being at a school where everyone is a square peg.

*"It was OK that we were all very smart," she said. "When you are trying to fit in with your peers, it's hard when the playing field isn't even."*

*At MSMS, the playing field is even."*

As a member of the inaugural class, Angela remembers helping build the culture of the school, describing it as starting everything from scratch. The student body chose the school mascot: the Blue Wave. Angela, along with classmates James "Mickey" Gousset and Christopher Smith, helped write the school's alma mater.

"They are still using it now, though I think it's been rearranged. But it's the same words."

Angela said that the first year at MSMS was confusing at times. The experience of a residential high school filled with some of the state's smartest students was an experiment to everyone involved, not just the students.

"It was uncharted territory. The teachers, the director...everyone had to find their groove."

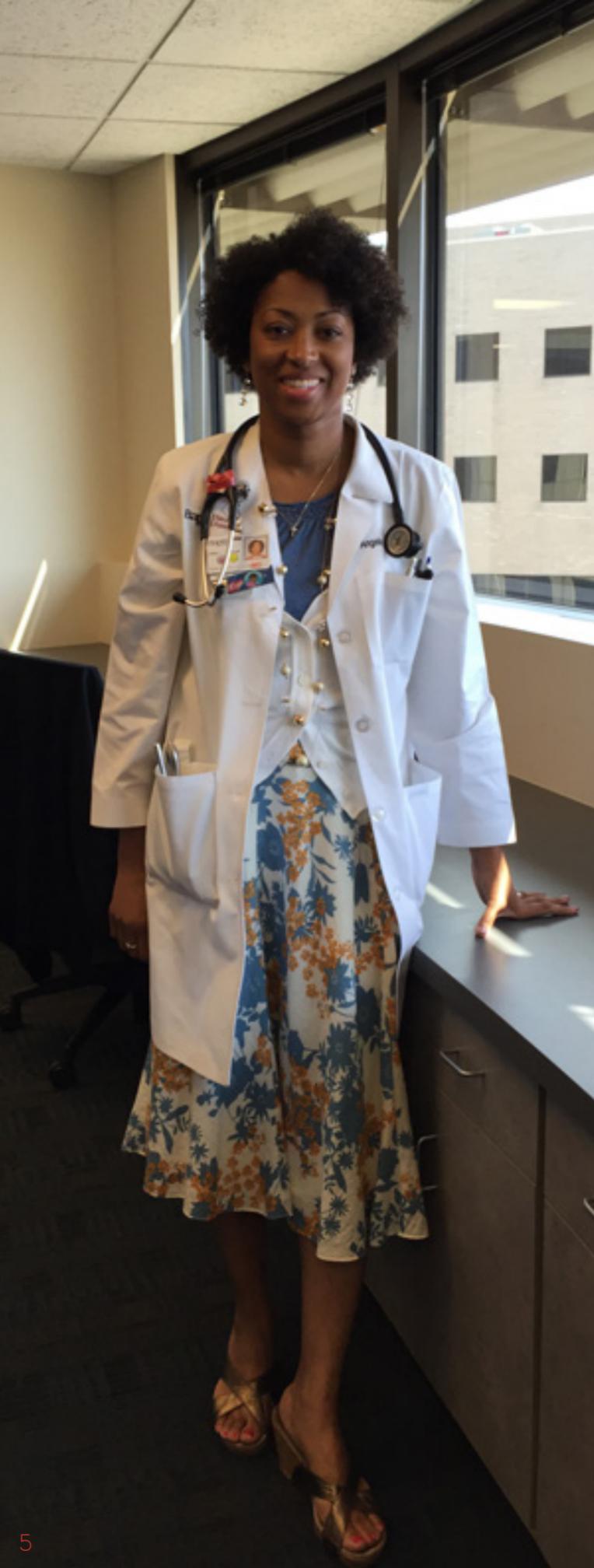
She even remembers that classes were suspended for a few days while teachers sorted out their lesson plans. Everyone was learning and growing together.

The school also had to find a groove with social life. Living in residence halls was a brand new experience for the school's first class of students, as there was no one before them. The first class had no Seniors to help guide them through dorm life. The novelty did not just affect the students, but the staff as well. Angela could not stress it enough: MSMS was new for everyone.

"The residence hall staff was trying not to baby us," said Angela. "They were trying to find the right balance between letting us have our freedom but also expecting us to live within the rules. Also, I think we were a bit tamer than the boys."

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Angela remembers her classmates being like family, and describes the residential school experience as being like a big, two-year slumber party. She is still close with many of her classmates, and hopes that this aspect of the school's culture is the same now as it was in 1990.

"I hope that the close bonds that the students form has not changed," she said. "It is a family. You know where everybody was from, you know your classmates. That is something you don't get at a school with 400 people in the class."

MSMS continues to impact Angela's life, and she says that many things she has experienced are a direct result of her time at the school. She was able to spend a week at the United States Air Force Academy. She spent eight weeks in a summer program at MIT. She received a full academic scholarship to Mississippi State, where she proudly graduated debt-free.

"I did not owe any money when I left Mississippi State. The same is not true for med school," she laughed.

Angela currently serves as a general neurologist for Baptist Neurology Associates in Jackson, Miss. She lives in Madison with her husband Derrick and their three children: Myles, Reece, and Simone.

As a young student in Bay Springs, Angela likely had no idea that being a member of the inaugural class of MSMS would hold such importance. It also might not have occurred to her while she was there.

*"All of us, the whole time we were there, we kept hearing about how special we were, that we were the first to accept the challenge," Angela explained.*

The importance is not lost on her now, after 25 years of contemplation.

"The truth is, we were special. We are special. I think I learned something from each and every person I encountered in our class. All of us went through something together that we can say nobody else knows what it's like."

Angela was among the first students to attend MSMS, the first students in the state to leave their schools and their homes and live in residence halls on a college campus in North Mississippi. She counts herself lucky to be among the first group of square pegs searching for something other than a round hole.

"We really did accept the challenge," Angela said. "And we all came through it very well."



## ALUMNI Q&A

### Sejal Patel

38, from Jackson, Miss.

1995 MSMS graduate, currently in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Graduate of LSU with a B.S. in Biological & Agricultural Engineering

Graduate of UT Southwestern Medical Center & UT Arlington with a M.S. in Biomedical Engineering

#### Why did you go to MSMS?

I was attending public school in Jackson, Miss. and felt the need for more of a challenge. One of my close friends told me that she was applying to MSMS and I thought it would be a great opportunity to further my education.

#### Describe your first day at MSMS. Was it exactly what you expected, or did anything surprise you? Is there one feeling that stands out in your memory?

At my first day at MSMS, I was very nervous because I had never been away from home. Coming from a traditional Indian family, I felt a culture shock with all that was going on around me. Unlike my local high school, I was surprised at the diversity of culture and people. The thing that stands out the most was learning how much farther ahead the students were academically.

#### What MSMS experience or teacher (academic or residential) at MSMS impacted you the most?

My biology teacher, Dr. Mary Davidson, was an integral part of my motivation to get through and focus on school. She inspired me to think big, and kept me out of trouble.

#### Do you think MSMS is important to Mississippi's students, the city of Columbus and/or the state itself? If so or if not, why?

I think MSMS is invaluable to the entire state of Mississippi, because it provides an important option for students who desire the need to expand their education.

## Alumni Q&A continued

### What aspect(s) of MSMS would you recommend changing or improving?

I think MSMS has come a long way from when I attended, and the majority of improvements I would have liked have already been implemented.

### What aspect(s) of MSMS do you hope never change?

The focus on advanced academics and the structured schedules (lights out, study time, class time)

### Do you have any advice for future applicants and students?

Always think big, and don't succumb to peer pressure. It's hard being away from home, and sometimes we feel the need to assimilate to others. Use this valuable experience to create your own thoughts and goals.

### Do you have any hopes for MSMS alumni, present and future?

I hope every MSMS alumni can make an impact on the world in some form or other.

### What do you do now?

I work for Nevro Corporation, based out of Palo Alto, Calif. as a Regional Manager, Therapy Optimization. I got to this position by working as a Field Clinical Engineer for about 12 years. This role gave me valuable experience in the field by learning the process of setting up clinical trials for a Class III medical device from trial to FDA approval.

### What is the best/most exciting thing about what you do now?

I get to see all of the hard work pay off by seeing the positive outcomes from patients who have been implanted from our FDA approved medical device. Many of these patients experienced debilitating pain when I first began this trial, and it brings me great joy to see how my company and I are helping them.

### What does a field clinical engineer do? What is a normal day like for you?

FCE is responsible for overseeing a clinical trial from a device perspective. We are in the OR during the trial phase and IPG (Implantable Pulse Generator) implantation phase to perform testing. We are also the ones in the clinics and office visits to program the

patient's device, under the guidance of the physician.

Currently I'm supporting our commercial field reps from a therapy optimization perspective. I travel about 40-50% of the time in the Western part of the US to train and support our commercial team. When I'm not traveling, my day consists of reviewing documents and providing feedback to our sales team to ensure we are getting the patient outcomes consistent with our results from the clinical trial.

### You recently achieved a major project milestone when Nevro received FDA Approval for the Senza® Spinal Cord Stimulation System. What was your role in this project?

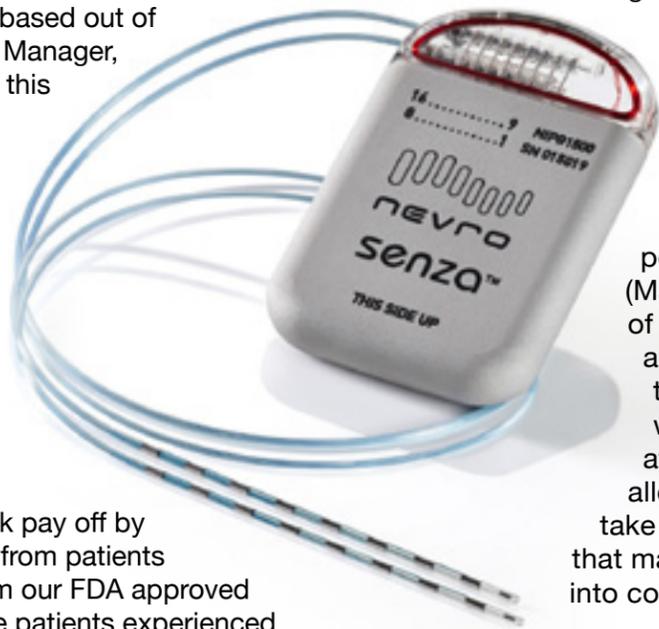
There were 10+ centers in the US that were part of the study. As an FCE, I was responsible for assisting in executing the study at one of the centers from a device management/patient outcome perspective. I worked with the Physician and the Study Coordinator to get the patients enrolled, implanted and programmed with our therapy. I followed these patients during the duration of the study to ensure they were getting pain relief from the therapy and would reprogram the device when necessary.

### How has MSMS help you professionally?

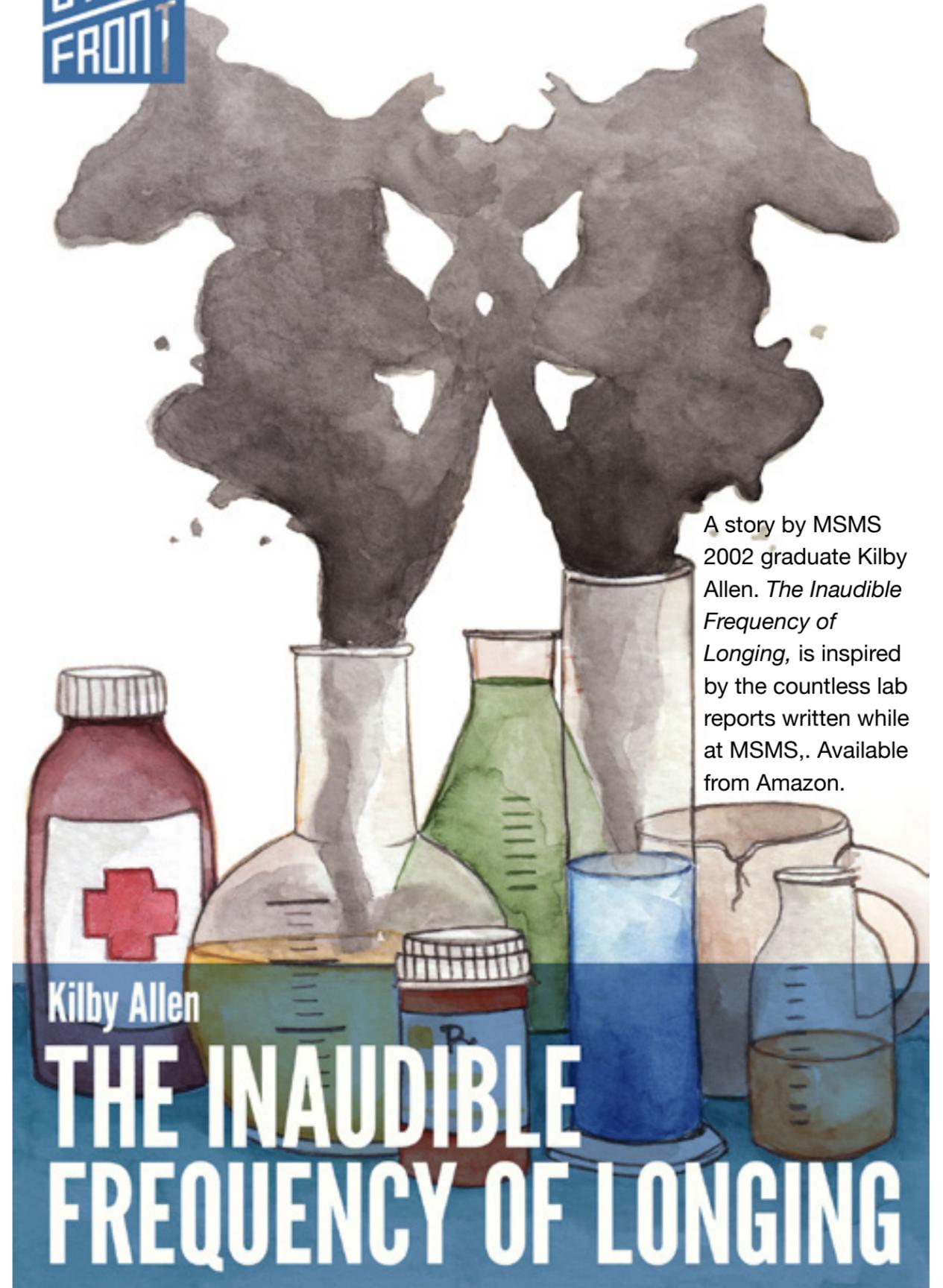
I honestly believe without MSMS I would not have perused higher learning (Master's degree). Being a part of the school and the students allowed me to venture out to more opportunities than I would have if I have stayed at my local high school. It also allowed me to grow up and take responsibility earlier in life that made a smoother transition into college.

### If a student at MSMS were interested in following your career path, what advice would you give?

I would say you are on a path of great success. Biomedical Engineering is a very exciting, growing field right now. There are still many advances in medicine that need to be made and there is a demand for BME graduates. I can personally say I've never had to apply for a job. I would also encourage girls to pursue engineering as there is still an imbalance in the gender ratio.



STORY  
FRONT



A story by MSMS 2002 graduate Kilby Allen. *The Inaudible Frequency of Longing*, is inspired by the countless lab reports written while at MSMS,. Available from Amazon.

Kilby Allen

# THE INAUDIBLE FREQUENCY OF LONGING

Art by: Brooke Weeber

story next page...



# Broken Down TI-83

*Kilby Allen is originally from Indianola and graduated from MSMS in 2002. She recently completed her PhD in English/Creative Writing at Florida State, and also holds an MFA from Brooklyn College and a BA from Sewanee. Her work has appeared in Nashville Review, Day One, CutBank and elsewhere. She lives in Beacon, New York and teaches at Iona College and Fordham University.*

By Kilby Allen (2002)

Last week I was cleaning out my desk, packing for another cross-country move, and buried deep in a drawer, under five years worth of accumulated stuff, was my TI-83 calculator, the constant companion of all MSMS students circa 2002. I've carried it with me for over a decade. It's traveled thousands of miles and lived in desk drawers in Mississippi, Tennessee, New York, and Florida, but, after MSMS, it never entered a classroom again. Unfortunately for my calculator, I've never really been a math person. And even though I know that I was supposed to learn how to use its graphing capabilities in statistics class, all of that

is a complete mystery to me now. Besides, after so many years, the calculator's screen is a smear of melted liquid crystals, unreadable.

Still, for some reason, I can't get rid of it. It's the last relic, proof that, once, I took physics classes. Though, truthfully, I spent most of that time swinging on the bowling ball suspending from the ceiling, while my lab partner conducted the experiments. (Thank you, Quint Hunt.) By some miracle I'd managed to get into MSMS, and while I could understand the principles and theories behind the equations, when it came to

numbers and symbols, I was totally in the woods. If Math is a language, then I only have a traveler's understanding; I can order a sandwich and get to the train station, but after that, to quote Columbus, Mississippi's most famous wordsmith, "I have always relied on the kindness of strangers."

So, during my first year at MSMS I struggled to find a place within the academic community. First semester I was one of five kids in remedial geometry. When Mu Alpha Theta conference rolled around, I think that the only people left in Fant Hall were me and someone with the flu. I never once wore my lab coat outside of Hooper, and I certainly didn't keep my TI-83 in a belt holster, as did some of my fellow students. I squeaked by in Chemistry and Trig, but to stay on a privilege plan, I always had to do lots of extra community service hours. Part of the time, walking around campus, I felt like an imposter.

I joined clubs and took studio art classes. I did a brief stint on the soccer team. Mr. Yarborough let me switch into his Tales from the Crypt section, so I had the opportunity to wear a hoop skirt in a graveyard. But still, by the end of junior year, I hadn't found my niche.

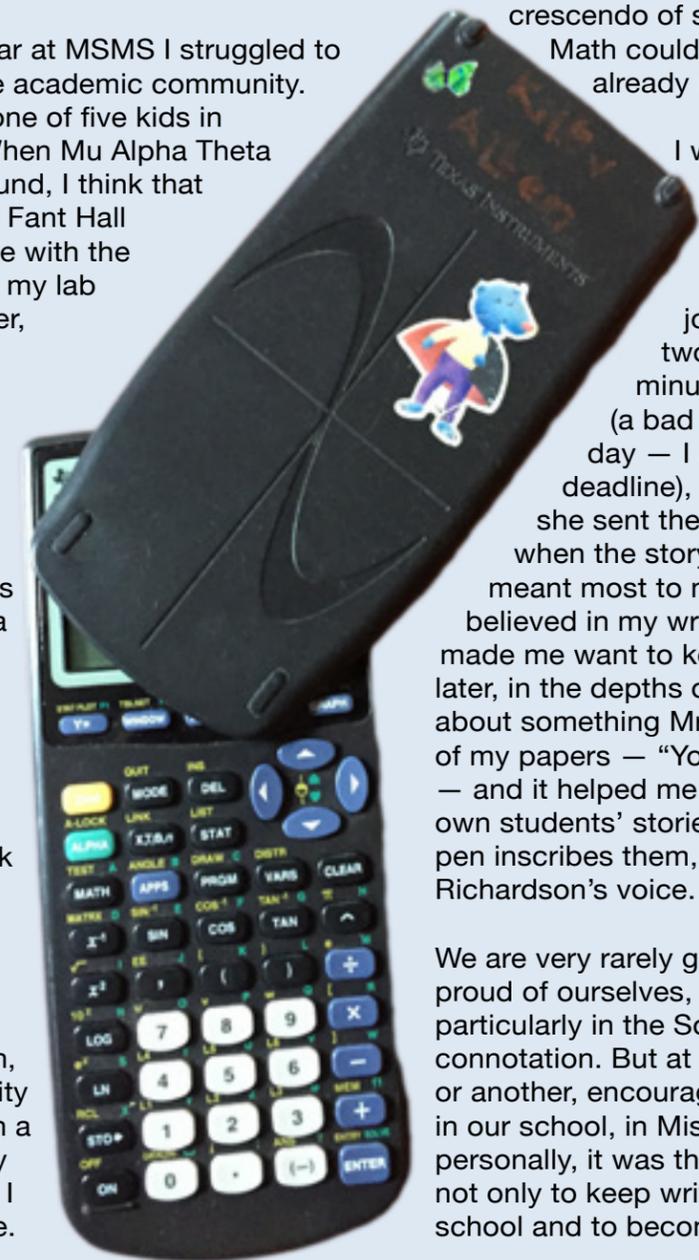
Senior year I registered for Emma Richardson's creative writing class. I always loved books, and as a child I wrote and illustrated dozens of never-to-be-seen anthropomorphized animal epics. But I'd put all that behind me when I started junior high. Most of

my teenage writing to that point had been research papers and lab reports. But Mrs. Richardson's class made me remember the value of stories. More than that, in reading and writing poetry for the first time, I began to understand the musicality of language: the bass line beat of the syllable, the gut-punch crescendo of surprisingly juxtaposed words. Math could never be my language. I was already married to English.

I was used to staying after class to talk to the teacher, but Mrs. Richardson was the only teacher who kept me after to tell me that I was doing a good job. When I turned in a story two days late, because at the last minute I panicked and started over (a bad habit which persists to this day — I am writing this now, hours over deadline), instead of reprimanding me, she sent the manuscript to contests. And when the story won those contests, what meant most to me was that Mrs. Richardson believed in my writing, in me. Her encouragement made me want to keep writing, and even years later, in the depths of dissertation hell, I thought about something Mrs. Richardson wrote on one of my papers — "You should be proud of this" — and it helped me keep going. I write it on my own students' stories now, but even when my pen inscribes them, I hear those words in Mrs. Richardson's voice.

We are very rarely given permission to be proud of ourselves, of our work. Pride, maybe particularly in the South, seems to have a negative connotation. But at MSMS we were all, in one way or another, encouraged to take pride in ourselves, in our school, in Mississippi. I know that for me, personally, it was that empowerment that drove me not only to keep writing, but also to go to graduate school and to become a professor.

I carry MSMS with me every time I walk into a classroom, every time I put pen to paper. And I know that's why I can't throw away my obsolete, broken down TI-83. How could I ever write without it?



# TAKING CARE OF EVERY MAN

*Make it on your own if you think you can. Somewhere later on you'll have to take a stand. Then you're going to need a hand. Everybody's just waiting to hear from the one who can give them the answers and lead them back to that place in the warmth of the sun where sweet childhood still dances. Who'll come along and hold out that strong and gentle father's hand? Long ago I heard someone say something 'bout Everyman. - Jackson Browne*

By Sarah Sapp (1999)

The Clinical Programs at the University of Mississippi's Robert C. Khayat Law Center help those in need of legal representation who can't afford a lawyer—people in need of answers and direction in situations where they are voiceless. *The Innocence Project* works to bring wrongful convictions back into court when they have exhausted the appeals process, the Transactional Clinic helps low-capital businesses and non-profits with formation and contracts, the Guardian ad Litem Clinic represents children in the legal system, the Criminal Appeals Clinic provides appellate representation to people who might not otherwise get it. Forrest Dillard Jenkins, MSMS class of 2000, serves the Civil Legal Clinic through her work with the Housing Clinic.

"We provide pro bono legal services for low-income individuals who are at risk of becoming homeless," said Jenkins. "Whether the client is a renter or a buyer, we engage a variety of different areas of law, from landlord-tenant to contract law to consumer protection to HUD and Fair Housing Act issues. Our primary goal is to try to keep people in their homes. Other goals are to improve the conditions people live in, or get them some kind of relief like getting back a security deposit that was illegally retained."

Jenkins comes from a family with values deeply rooted in education, exploration, music and empathy. The values her parents and grandparents instilled in her followed her through MSMS and undergraduate education

at The University of Mississippi, where she earned her bachelor's in business administration in 2004. It wasn't until her experience as manager at a local business in Oxford, Miss., supervising low-wage workers that she began to feel a deep urge to make a meaningful change.

"The workers there were paid minimum wage," said Jenkins. "Most of them were mothers, many single, and all doing their best to get by. It was routine to work 60-70 hours per week, which meant everyone was getting overtime pay. They absolutely relied on that."

"If someone got pregnant, she would quit the job for as long as she could make it without the paycheck and then apply again. That was 'maternity leave.' More

than one of them came to work following an incident of domestic violence and looked to me for some kind of help. On top of that, the power dynamics in that company were pretty terrible, and management above me clearly had contempt for those employees. I had a business degree, but that was not the kind of "management" I was going to get to do, and I had no context or experience to draw on to figure out how to make a meaningful change for either the employees or the business. That experience continues to drive me to do work that could help someone like my former coworkers to get the respect and dignity they deserve, to have their lives and problems matter to someone. After leaving her first job, she took a receptionist job at a large





*Forrest Jenkins works for the Housing Clinic, one of the Clinical Program housed at The University of Mississippi School of Law.*



law firm with an office in Oxford.

“I would read the pleadings and discovery documents, and I knew I was a strong enough writer and had strong enough analytical skills to be good at it,” said Jenkins. She attributes these skills to her education at MSMS and the humanities courses she took that were geared toward quality and analysis in a way she had not experienced before.

She credits then history and government teacher Judy Morris’ constructive criticism (e.g. papers and tests returned with “bullshit” scrawled across them in all-caps when fact was faked by flowery writing), for her writing skills today. “I learned a lot about being discerning and structuring a narrative in a way that is true to the facts. It profoundly changed the way I thought about how I should write.

“There are all kinds of lawyers, and all kinds of reasons to get into a given area of law,” said Jenkins. “I knew I didn’t want to do the same type of work that dominated the large firm where I worked, but I didn’t narrow it down beyond wanting to do something I would find impactful for people with the least access to our legal system.”

Her greatest accomplishment with the Housing Clinic has been helping an impoverished community in the Mississippi Delta get a new sewage and water system for the first time since the late 1960’s

“Before I started working here, the Housing Clinic had filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of the residents of a small neighborhood in the Delta that was having terrible flooding and sewage backup for years and years,” said Jenkins. “In the time I’ve been here, we have been able to settle that lawsuit.”

Consequently, a number of those affected residents now own their homes, and the abandoned and burned homes that blighted the neighborhood have been torn down. Jenkins hopes to continue helping those residents to organize themselves and have a great quality of life in their neighborhood.

Her passion for equality and helping others doesn’t stop in the courtroom. As a board member for LOU Homes, Inc., a non-profit organization with the goal of developing affordable housing for people to buy in the Oxford, Lafayette County and University area, she hopes to be a part of developing a plan to provide housing at a price point that a middle-income household can afford to buy.

It was her MSMS education that enabled Jenkins to hold out her hand to lead clients back to the place they call home.





# GAME SHOW MAVEN

A profile of Elliot Yates

Final Spin. Final Answer. Final Jeopardy. Elliot has experienced them all.

By Owen McGuire (2005)

Elliot Yates graduated from MSMS in 2004. A native of Philadelphia, Miss., he attended Mississippi College in Clinton until he graduated in 2009. Elliot was in graduate school at the University of Southern Mississippi when he felt the pull to move to New York City in 2012.

“I loaded up with my USM roommate and rode a U-Haul to Manhattan,” Elliot said.

“The next day, I got a call to work at an opera.”

A lifelong fan of game shows, Elliot frequently applies to be on his favorites and seeks out auditions.

He began his game show journey on *Wheel of Fortune*. Elliot was still a student at USM when the show called to say he had been chosen as a contestant, and was actually in a rehearsal for the school’s choir when they called. It is fortunate

that he did not miss it.

“My phone had been on silent for the past 10 years,” he laughed, “and this is the one day that I did not have it on silent.”

His episode of *Wheel of Fortune* taped in November 2010 and aired in January 2011. Elliot made it to the final puzzle, which he correctly solved (the answer was KAYAKING). Solving that puzzle brought his total winnings to \$48,360.

An opportunity presented itself for Elliot to audition for *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* It just so happened to be the same day that Elliot and his roommate moved to New York. That was no deterrent for him.

“We parked our moving truck at an airport and took a taxi to the audition.”

As you can probably guess, the audition was a success. Elliot taped *Millionaire* in September

2013, appearing on two episodes that aired on March 5 and 6, 2014. Elliot made it to the \$100,000 question. However, with no more lifelines and unsure of the answer, he decided to walk away with the money in his bank: \$58,500.

Though the money is an enjoyable reward, Elliot seems as excited about his comparison to the show’s host at the time, Cedric the Entertainer.

“I had people tell me that I was more entertaining than he was, so that felt good.” His enjoyment of that compliment comes as no

surprise when you know that Elliot’s dream job is to one day be a game show host.

In November 2014, Elliot was able to realize his lifelong dream of appearing on *Jeopardy!* Elliot did more than just appear on *Jeopardy!*, he appeared again and again. By the end of his run, Elliot was a four-day champion, claiming over \$65,000 in prize money.

Again, while the money is obviously a great reward, Elliot seems to have enjoyed his moment in the spotlight just as much, if not more. You know those

moments on *Jeopardy!* after commercial breaks when the show’s host, Alex Trebek, does short interviews with the contestants? Elliot wanted to be prepared.

“I sat with my friends and planned what stories I was going to tell,” he explained. “I knew those were my moments to talk about whatever I wanted on national television.”

There was a specific moment during competition, Elliot said, when one of his MSMS teachers came to mind. The category was “-metrics,” meaning each answer needed to

have that ending. The contestant next to him mistakenly answered one of the questions with “trigonometry.” Elliot said when he buzzed in with the correct answer, “trigonometrics,” he could not help but think of former MSMS math teacher Dr. LeRoy Wenstrom.

Elliot says MSMS helped nurture his love of trivia.

“With the environment at MSMS, you are not an outlier because you think those things are interesting.”

He also mentioned fellow classmate Emily Liner’s obsession with *Jeopardy!*

“She and I used to sit in the Hooper lobby and watch *Jeopardy!* and keep up with how well we were doing,” Elliot remembered. He also cheekily added, “Beating her every time gave me some confidence.”

With the game show résumé that Elliot has compiled, one cannot help but wonder what he will take on next. He seems to have a pretty clear idea.

“I once made an *Amazing Race* audition tape with my cousin and would still love to be on that show,” he said. “I would be terrible on *Price is Right*, though. I live in Manhattan. A gallon of milk costs \$90.”

For now, Elliot is an opera producer in New York City, but if you know of a game show in need of a host, give him a call. Hopefully his phone won’t be on silent.

# 25 YEARS OF TALES FROM THE CRYPT

By Crystal Lauderdale (2000)

**The ancient Egyptians had a saying: “He lives whose name is spoken.” To ensure immortality, the most important names were forever etched in stone.**

If the Egyptian belief holds true, close to 1,000 people buried in Columbus, Mississippi’s Friendship Cemetery have been kept alive for the last 25 years, as Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science students have researched their lives and spoken their stories every spring during *Tales from the Crypt*.

The award-winning history project, which combines primary research and dramatic performance, marked its silver anniversary this April. Sixty-eight high school juniors spent nearly a full school year exploring local archives, writing scripts and producing skits to portray real people from the 19th and 20th centuries. For five evenings during Columbus’ *Spring Pilgrimage*, students delivered graveside performances, filling Friendship Cemetery with candlelight, music and life. Marking the event’s milestone year was one very special character: Carl Butler, the creator of *Tales* who taught history at MSMS from its opening in 1988 until 2003 when he died of cancer.

Master history teacher Chuck Yarborough worked with Butler on *Tales* beginning in 1999 and has led its development since Butler’s death. He says visitors

often asked Butler what families of the deceased might think about the portrayals. Butler would always reply, “We’re paying tribute to these people. We’re celebrating the contributions they made to this community.”

“The Portrayal of Mr. Butler’s life is quintessential *Tales from the Crypt*,” Yarborough says. “We’re celebrating his contributions to the community and nation, through the students who have gone out into the world after learning from him.”

Butler, who was born in 1939, inherited a love of history and old houses from his parents. His mother was also a teacher, but he did not originally set out to be an educator himself. Instead, he had political aspirations. He attended Florida State University, spent time in the Air Force and later received a Ph.D. in political science from Vanderbilt. He got married in 1968, and in 1969 he and his bride settled into Temple Heights, a planter’s townhouse built around 1837 in historic Columbus, Mississippi. In 1972, Butler ran for congress.

“He did not win the election,” his widow, Dixie Butler,

says. “But he always said he still won because he got to be a teacher, and it turned out he really enjoyed being a teacher.”

For years, Butler was a swimming coach in Columbus, taking more than 20 teams to the state championships and even coaching one national champion.

“Even when he was coaching swimming,” Dixie Butler recalls, “They always went to see historic sites on the way to each meet. He was always teaching them.”

In 1988, Butler joined the opening faculty of MSMS. Johnny Franklin, the school’s inaugural director, wanted to ensure every course in the new curriculum included a research component. At the same time, Butler had been trying to brainstorm an evening entertainment feature for Columbus’ annual Spring Pilgrimage. Eventually, they combined the two objectives, and *Tales from the Crypt* was born.

Bill Winters was the school’s Coordinator of School Support from 1991-1994 and again from 1996-2013. He was also a good friend of Butler’s and helped with

logistics and parking for *Tales* during the first year and many that followed.

“When we did *Tales* for the first time, there were no expectations,” Winters says. “We didn’t know what was going on. We had no security. It was very low key.”

He and Butler thought they would have maybe 75 visitors that first night. They had more than 300.

“From there, it snowballed and got bigger and bigger and bigger,” Winters recalls. “We had many nights when we had up to 900 people. We’d fill that cemetery up with cars everywhere we could put them.”

Yarborough believes *Tales* is a growing success because it meets both the needs of the students and the needs of the community. Because of *Tales*, he says, the community has gained a source of quality family entertainment, positive attention from outsiders and a better understanding of itself.

“Ultimately, communities thrive when people see commonalities and connections,” Yarborough says. “To me, local history is one of the best ways to do that.”

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The archive at the Columbus/Lowndes County Public Library continues to flourish, in part, because students not only use it extensively to conduct *Tales* research, but also offer their finished reports to enrich and expand the archive. The \$5 admission fee charged at the event not only covers production costs, but is also enough to generate a small profit. Half of that surplus is donated to the Columbus Cultural Heritage Foundation to support local preservation efforts. The other half is donated to projects chosen by the students. In 2011, they donated \$2,500 to the Mississippi Red Cross for disaster relief following a series of spring tornados, and in 2009 and 2010, they donated \$4,500 to Mississippi Public Broadcasting's *Mississippi Edition*, which focuses on culture and politics in the state.

While the community enjoys these rewards from the program, students gain research, collaboration and presentation experience they typically wouldn't have until college. For high school students, most research experience comes from literature courses and is limited to secondary research – the study of others' written interpretations and analyses of a primary source. For *Tales*, students must conduct their own primary research, locating, examining and interpreting original source documents such as birth, death and tax records, court logs and land archives. In most cases, students are drawing the first conclusions and presenting the first reports ever on their subjects.

It's by examining these details and touching these documents firsthand that students are learning to see the big picture of history.

"They really get to explore and celebrate the complexity of our story. Some of that is uplifting and wonderful, and some of that is not," Yarborough says. "The best performances over the years have always challenged people's preconceived notions."

One of his favorite portrayals, delivered by Erin Williams in 2004, did just that. Williams' research subject was a child, so she chose to explore the parents' much-



longer story instead. What she uncovered was the account of a husband and wife who lived during the late 1800s and had five children, all who died before the age of two. Williams, dressed in black, portrayed the mother. She told a story about falling in love, getting married, having a child and then losing it. She described the process of overcoming that experience and having another child only to lose it as well, and then another and another.

Yarborough has watched the performance on DVD multiple times because he's fascinated by the crowd's reaction. By the time Williams is speaking about the fourth child, the crowd is visibly judging the long-passed mother. Some are snickering, Yarborough says. Some are elbowing each other. Some are cracking jokes about how there must be something wrong with this woman. All of a sudden, Williams stops. She stands tall and picks a single audience member. Looking them right in the eye, she says, "Of course, every time a child dies, a mother falls under suspicion."

The crowd goes silent, Yarborough says. They are guilty as charged.

Williams' performance was among those submitted to the History Channel for the *Save Our History* award in 2005, for which *Tales* was a finalist. That year the program also won the Governor's Award for Excellence. Since then, the Mississippi Heritage Trust, the Mississippi Historical Society and numerous media outlets including the *New York Times*, the *Atlantic* and



*National Public Radio* have recognized the program.

"[The students] learn to explore race, gender, religion and other issues in a way that is more than just talking about stereotypes," Yarborough says. Next year, one of the possible research subjects is a Jewish member of the community who converted to Methodism in order to fit in and be more successful.

It may surprise some that high school students can connect with long-passed characters and portray their challenges so reverently, but it doesn't surprise Yarborough.

"If you trust young people with the power of voice, they use it well," he says. "That's always been my experience."

Portraying the life of Carl Butler this year was a unique challenge for student Jake Bozlee of Long Beach because so many visitors – alumni, friends, members of the community – still remember him. It would have been unfair to ask Bozlee to perform as Butler himself, Yarborough explains. "Any performance would just not have lived up to him."

Also, Yarborough wanted to pay multiple tributes with this special anniversary performance: a tribute to Carl Butler, a tribute to *Tales* itself and a tribute to all of the students who have participated in the program over its 25 years.

But how could they wrap everything into one man's story?



It was the students who thought of telling Butler's story through the eyes of his pupils. They invented a character for this purpose who was a combination of those Butler taught – a former swimmer turned anxious *Tales* performer, worried about meeting Butler's high expectations.

Bozlee begins his performance rehearsing some lines and telling the audience about his teacher.

"Do you even know who I'm talking about?" he asks. "Master teacher, haunted house owner, the King of Columbus; Do you know who I'm talking about?"

"He would have enjoyed it and been proud and been laughing at the same time," says Dixie Butler, speculating how her husband would have reacted to the performance if he were alive. "I think he would have been applauding the students."

"[Butler] wasn't a guy who trafficked in pride," Yarborough says, "but I think he would have been proud that the program has continued and grown."

"Mr. Butler meant more to the community than the sum of his accomplishments," Bozlee recites, coming to the end of his performance.

"Teacher," he says, drawing his hand across the word forever etched in stone. "They could have written so much more."





## Celebrating the Life of Dr. Mary Lofton Davidson

By Sarah Sapp (1999)

**Dr. Mary Lofton Davidson once said, “It doesn’t matter where they’ve come from. It’s where they’re going.”**

If you had the privilege of taking a class with Dr. D, you would quickly learn that she believed every organism, down to the kingdom Monera, had a purpose and should be treated with care. In this context, however, she wasn’t talking about bacteria under a microscope. She was referring to the brilliant little misfits from every tiny town across the magnolia state, from every imaginable background, who found academic refuge at MSMS and, consequently, an inevitably bright trajectory.

Beyond her quirky teaching techniques and loveable “Dr. D” dialect (say it with me: phospholipid bilayer), she was a role model to students. “Dr. Davidson’s presence greatly influenced my time there,” said Kiara Boone, class of 2007, in remembrance of Davidson as the school established The Dr. Mary Davidson Memorial Fund in 2010. “My roommate, Valexia Edwards, talked about the way that Dr. Davidson encouraged her. When I asked her about Dr.

Davidson, she replied that ‘There were times when I felt overwhelmed or discouraged, and Dr. Davidson was always there by my side to talk me through those trying times.’ As a fellow minority female in the science field, Dr. Davidson prepared me for what laid ahead.” Catherine Alecia Clay, class of 1995, found a mentor in Davidson, as well. “She was a great inspiration in my life,” said Clay. “As an African American female, she was a role model. She was one of the reasons that I chose to become an educator. I pray that I will have an impact on the lives of my students like she impacted my life.”

Many students remember her for encouraging independent research, allowing students to come up with their own hypotheses, collect their own samples, record their own data and draw their own conclusions. Even if the study failed or your hypothesis was wrong, you learned something. David Elion, class of 2006, credits Davidson as one of the major reasons he chose

to pursue a career in research, “I even wrote about her in my personal statement for graduate school applications,” said Elion. “She was the first teacher I had who allowed me to really have an experience in conducting research independently. Serving as a guide and mentor, she was very supportive in a number of science competitions I participated in while at MSMS. Throughout my schooling, up until college, Dr. Davidson was the only primary example I had of a black professional in a STEM field, and I can honestly say that without having met her, my career path up until this point would have been completely different.”

It isn’t hard to see why she received numerous awards for her excellence in teaching, including the *Presidential Award for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Teaching*, *Mississippi Teacher of the Year*, *Disney American Teacher Award in Science* and induction into Mississippi’s *Hall of Master Teachers*. In 1992 she received the *Milken Educator* award for her dedication to preparing her students for the future by instilling sound values, as well as helping assure a command of her subject and its related skills. Dr. Davidson not only taught her students the principles of problem solving through scientific application, she also encouraged them to apply this approach to their own lives. Dr. Davidson interacted closely with her students, serving

as a role model and deriving personal satisfaction from helping them reach their full potential and goals.

The fact that she cared about biology with such passion was infectious, according to class of 1996 graduate Desmond Walker. “I still carry an inquisitive mindset to the subject because of her,” said Walker.

“Currently, I’ve pledged \$5,000 in her honor to the MSMS Foundation.”

Her passion was so infectious, many students credit her for their own love for the subject matter. “She’s the reason why I decided to get a degree in biology,” said MSMS grad Tiera Towns. “She even tried to Skype our class lesson when she went out of town. She couldn’t get the Skype to work and was calling it “Skyfe” instead of Skype.”

“I had her for biology,” said Challon Perry, class of 1998. “She was very passionate about her work and life outside of MSMS. I remember a number of times helping her make church programs or helping her with some correspondence for some church function. She always encouraged me to go the extra mile, and I felt that she always had my back. I just hope that I did her justice by bringing as much passion and enthusiasm to biology during my tutoring days in Gen. Bio at XULA

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as she did during my time at MSMS. She was an awesome teacher and person.”

Since I personally loved her and her AP Biology class, I offered to be Dr. D’s lab assistant my senior year, the year we moved in and out of a temporary space across campus while Hooper was being renovated with new science labs. I learned quickly while helping pack and unpack her lab that she had a sentimental attachment to most things, including every frozen or preserved creature that had previously been studied in one of her classes. I noticed a small jar behind a stack of books I was packing for her that, upon closer inspection, was full of formaldehyde and a small, well-preserved, unidentifiable rodent. After hearing my bloodcurdling scream from across the lab, she rushed over to see what was the matter. “Oh! There it is!” she exclaimed, offering no explanation as she sauntered away with her long lost specimen. I genuinely believe she knew exactly the date and time, down to the second, that she first encountered this specimen, as she did every single specimen I found thereafter. I wondered if the jar mouse knew Ninja, her pet squirrel who died some years back that she kept in the freezer in case a student came along who knew taxidermy.

Throughout her 21-year tenure at MSMS – from the school’s official opening in 1987 to her death in 2010 – she always kept students on their toes with her unexpected friends.

“On the first day of cell biology during the fall semester of my junior year, we were in the big lab room at the end of Hooper, across from Dr. Mac’s classroom,” said Ann Marie Picone, class of 2009. “It was filled with interesting fish tanks and terrariums, and we had no idea what was inside them. Dr. Davidson read through the syllabus and did all the typical first day of class items before she walked to one of the tanks, pulled out a rock and returned to the front of the class. She

then picked up a pencil and started tapping the rock and poking the holes in it. We had no idea what she was doing until two of the biggest Madagascar hissing cockroaches I’ve ever seen came crawling out onto her hand. She calmly let them crawl around her hands as she kept telling us about all the work in store for us in cell biology. I’ll never forget that day - it stands out as a moment that perfectly encapsulates the crazy, wonderful place that was MSMS.”

While most of us associate cats and Dr. D with dissection lab, she loved them, as she did most animals in general, beyond their educational purposes. “Junior year, my roommate and I decided we were independent enough to have a pet, so we adopted a cat and brought it “home” to Fant Hall, said Lee Katherine Hutchison Herczogh, class of 1994 . “Who knows what we were thinking. We were inevitably found out, and when I lamented my case to Dr. Davidson, she told me to tell Charlotte she would take the cat. She did, and she took it to live with her niece.”

After her passing in 2010, her lab and equipment were dedicated to her memory in hopes that generations to come would feel her passion for science, love of research and kindness toward every living thing, no matter where they’ve come from or where they’re going.

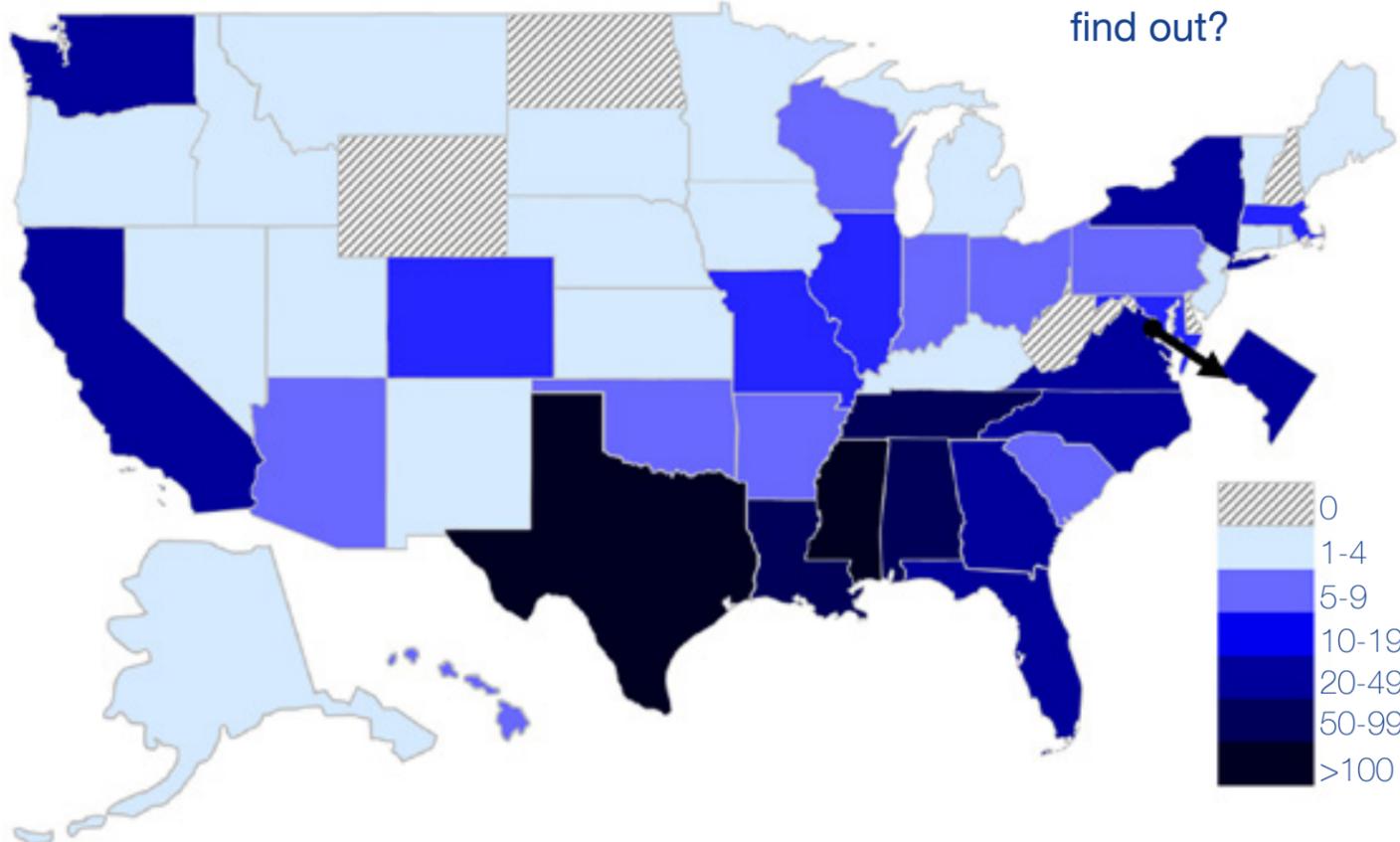
# MSMS Alumni Economic & Social Impact Survey

By Dillon Allen (1996) & Cynthia Henderson (1995)

On June 13, 2015, the MSMS Foundation officially started the MSMS Alumni Economic & Social Impact Survey. Over the years, there have been various surveys completed that asked alumni questions about degrees, and majors, and educational outcomes, but the Foundation wanted to know how alumni have impacted Mississippi and the nation.

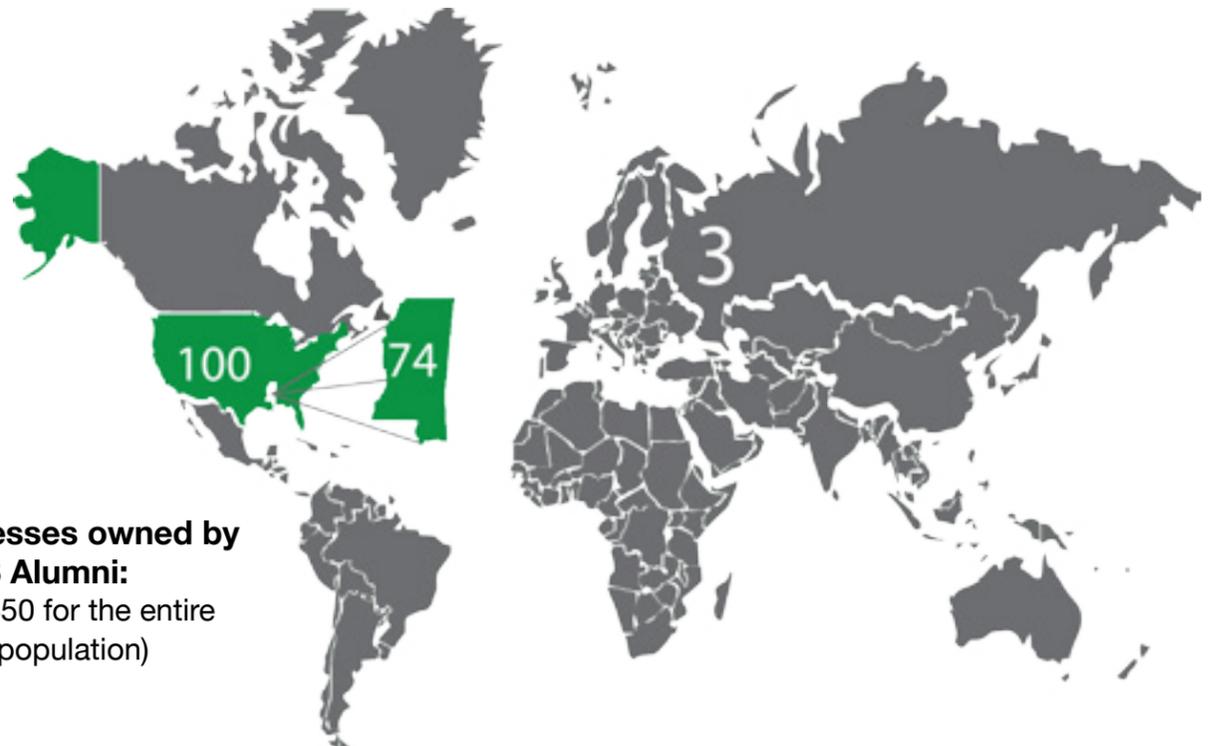
Over the course of a month long campaign, we obtained results from 1,147 of approximately 3,000 alumni. This puts our response rate over 38%; For alumni surveys from universities, a 'great' response rate is 14%. As you might guess, MSMS alumni are more engaged and more awesome than the generic university alumni. For all of you who participated, we sincerely thank you for your effort. For those who didn't, please stay connected with the Foundation via social media and look for next year's survey.

So what did we find out?



**Alumni residing in Mississippi:**  
36.3% or 410 (~1060 for the entire alumni population)

**Alumni who would be interested in returning to Mississippi if career opportunities were available:**  
18% of those currently outside Mississippi are sure they want to return, while another 45% (63% total) might return if the dice fall the right way for their family.

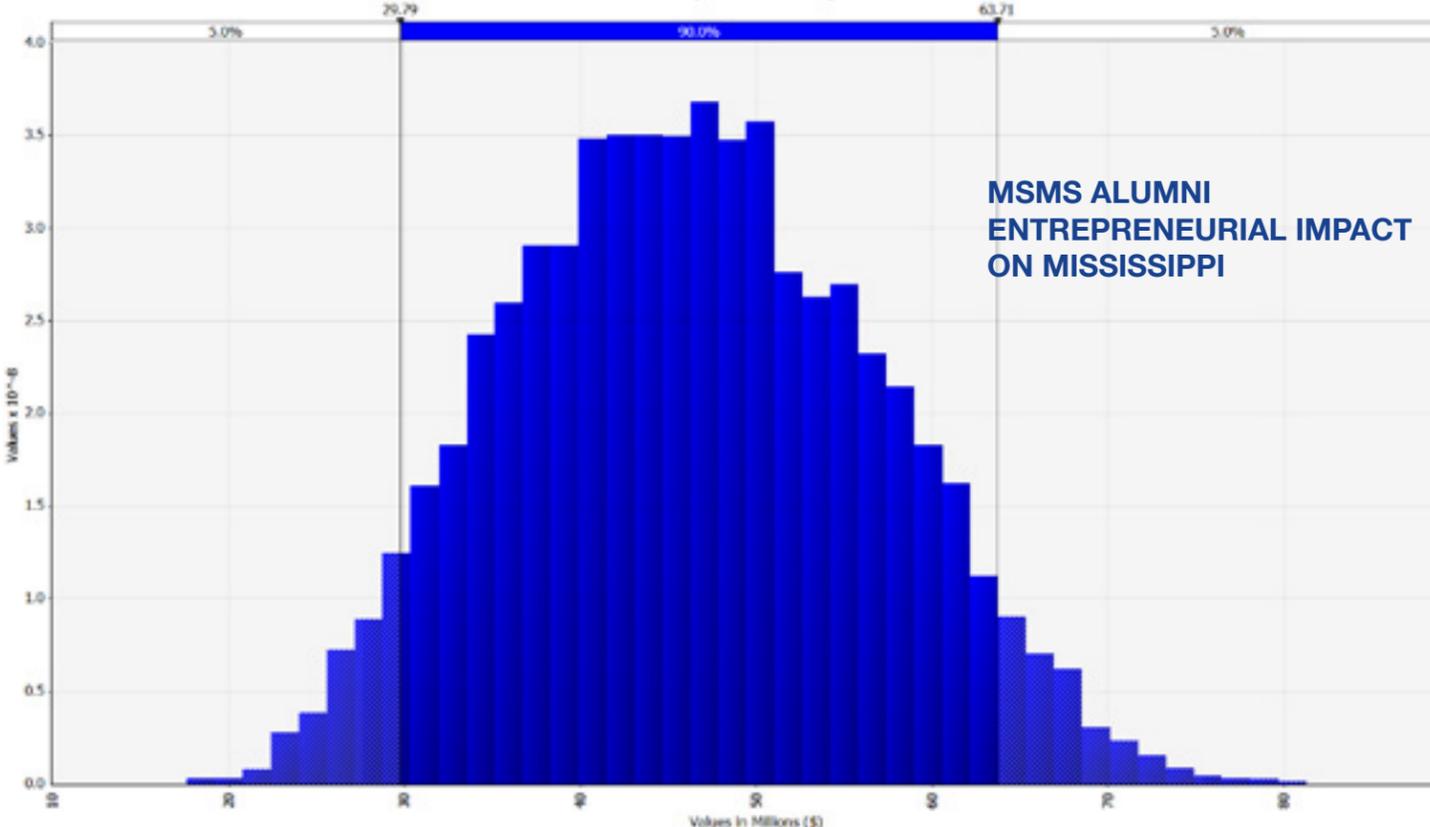


**Businesses owned by MSMS Alumni:**  
177 (~450 for the entire alumni population)

**\$ impact of MSMS Alumni Businesses in Mississippi:**  
\$29-63 Million annually based on business reporting in the survey.

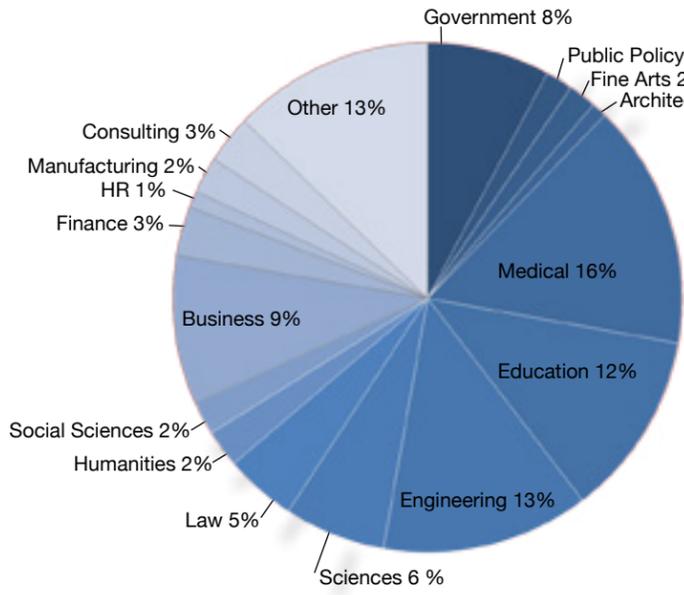
**\$ impact of MSMS Alumni's Household income:**  
\$129-165M annually (\$38-47M in MS) from survey respondents (~\$325-420M for the entire population or \$98-120M in MS)

**Median Income:** ~\$85,000  
**Average Income:** ~\$125,000

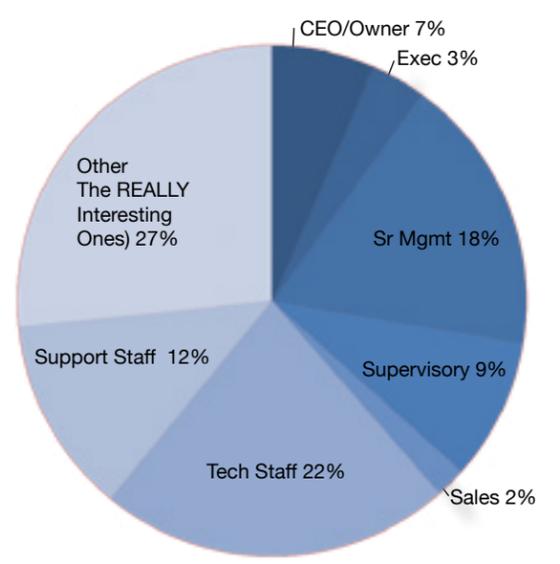




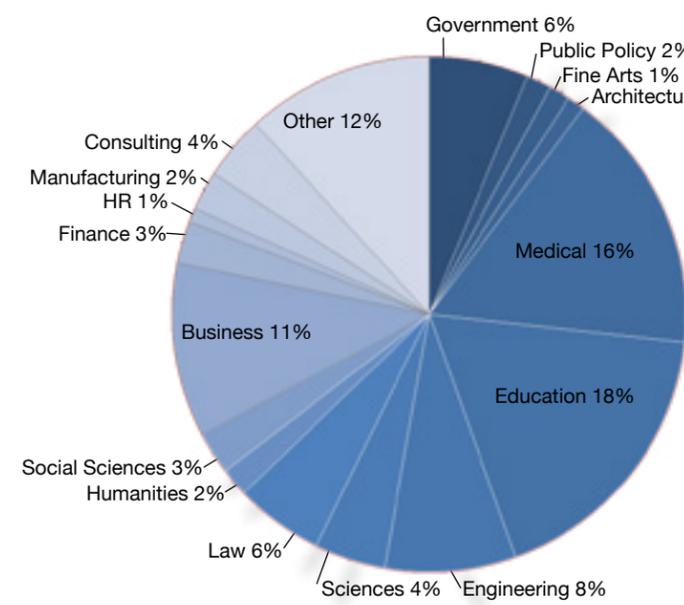
"Electrospinning apparatus & uncompressed fibrous mesh" Data encoding & decoding Polymers Medical device software "Acoustics" Setup and control of wireless devices "Manufacturing algorithm to increase speed & accuracy" Recombinant protein production Dynamic flow of patients in a healthcare provider Haptic sensor to prevent lost mobile devices Tumor-targeting leukocytes Algal lysis and content extraction Integrated circuit design Graphics hardware design for accelerated real-time rendering Vibrio cholerae rapid assay kit for oysters LEGO-like material for building flyable aircraft Orthopedics continuum of care for joint replacement Voice-enabled universal flight information finder Fluid flow-compensated thermowell Surgical tools Game streaming Software user interface design Digital Image Transformations Voice/video electronically signatures Intelligent peer-based ethernet traffic shedding Comms channel inhibition in degraded conditions Realtime Visual Demonstration of Full Body Mouse/keyboard activity monitoring & software characterizations 3D printing process for Aircraft/Rocket Airframes RADAR



**Top 3 career fields for all Alumni:**  
Medical (16%), Engineering (13%), Education (12%)

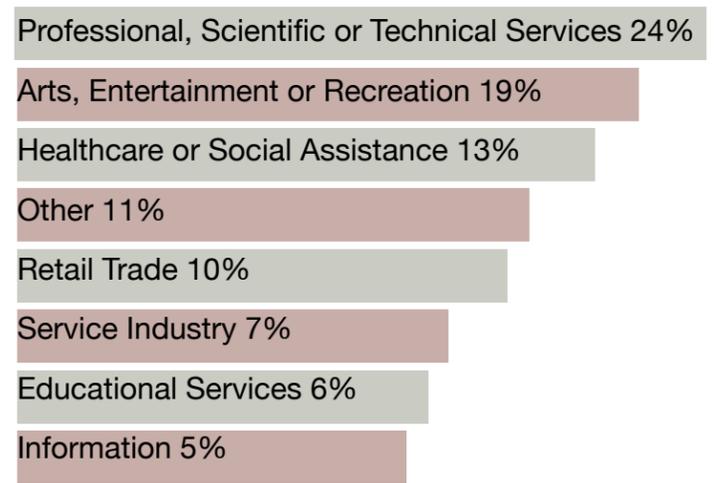


**Positions held by all Alumni:**  
Other (27%), Technical Staff 22%, Senior Management (18%). CEO/Owners make up 7% and Executive Staff are 3%.



**Top 3 career fields for Alumni in Mississippi:**  
Education (18%), Medical (16%), and Business (11%)

**MSMS Entrepreneur Sectors**



In summary, this was a fascinating look into the long-term impact of the investment the state made in each of us. Based on our analysis of household incomes, businesses owned by MSMS Alumni, remuneration sent back to Mississippi, the ROI on the MSMS's annual budget is more than \$10. So for each \$1 spent by the legislature, the state earns \$10.

Beyond economics, our alumni are making a meaningful impact in many fields as evidenced by the 16% who have published in peer-reviewed journals,

22% who are published otherwise, and 2% who hold one or more patents. 20% of alumni send some form of remuneration home to Mississippi, 80% give to charity either financially or of their time and 12% give to political campaigns.

For more detailed information on the contributions our alumni have made including interactive tag clouds and deeper statistics, visit the Foundation's web page at <http://msmsfoundation.com/survey>.

# THE MSMS BUTTERFLY EFFECT

By Shannon Eubanks (1990) & Kristy Brannon (2005)

“Does the flap of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?”

It began with an epiphany by Shannon Eubanks (1990) only one semester from finishing his bachelor’s degree in Chemical Engineering at Mississippi State.

“Simply put, I hated engineering,” said Eubanks. So, only 20 hours away from a degree, Eubanks decided a change in majors was in order.

Eubanks’ path was already circuitous. After graduating from MSMS, he enrolled at Ole Miss as a History major, but family issues forced him to leave after only one semester. He then enrolled at Jones County Junior College in Ellisville, Miss., in Pre-Engineering before transferring to Mississippi State as a Chemical Engineering student.

Eubanks sought guidance from a friend who also worked in the Career Counseling Center at MSU. She simply asked, “What do YOU want to be?” After a few moments, Eubanks responded, “I want to teach, and maybe coach as well.”

Eubanks transferred to the School of Education and, after three additional semesters of classes, graduated MSU certified to teach chemistry, physics, mathematics, general science, and social studies.

Eubanks taught high school mathematics, chemistry, and physics while he also coached football, but after a while quit coaching to focus on getting his master’s and specialist degrees in Administration.

In 2004, Eubanks was offered the principal job at Enterprise Attendance Center, a small, rural, K-12 school in Lincoln County, Miss. “My wife was from the area and we decided that it was a decent place to raise a family.”

However, Enterprise was so far off the beaten path that very few teachers who weren’t from the area applied to work there. “The school is great, but again, being small and rural means that sometimes there aren’t many choices when it comes time to fill a teaching position. But sometimes, we do get lucky.”

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This question, asked in 1972 by American mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz, gave rise to the now-famous Butterfly Effect of Chaos Theory. In essence, small, seemingly insignificant acts lead to greater, unforeseen outcomes.

An example of what can be coined as the “MSMS Butterfly Effect” is in the story of how the actions of one alum leads to a chain of events that affect the outcomes of two new MSMS enrollees.



## THE FIRST FLAP

Enterprise Attendance  
Center Principal Shannon  
Eubanks (MSMS Class of 1990)

## THE SECOND FLAP

**Kristy Cline Brannon (2005)**

Kristy Cline Brannon (2005), decided early on that her heart lay in education. MSMS had instilled a love of learning in Brannon, especially hands-on and problem-based learning.



“A year and a half into my college career, I decided to be a teacher. I loved science and wanted to share the amazing experiences learning science gave me at MSMS.”

Throughout most of her college career, Brannon found one way or another to serve, as resident assistant and director in the dorms at Mississippi College, and as local Habitat for Humanity president. So becoming an educator seemed a natural choice.

“So often there are teachers who can’t work outside their comfort zones or are stuck doing the same things. I wanted to change that. I want to see my students challenged and growing in their problem solving abilities and their love for a subject. I love it when a student who started my class hating science, math, or word problems has an Eureka moment and are no longer intimidated by the subject but instead have grown to love it.”

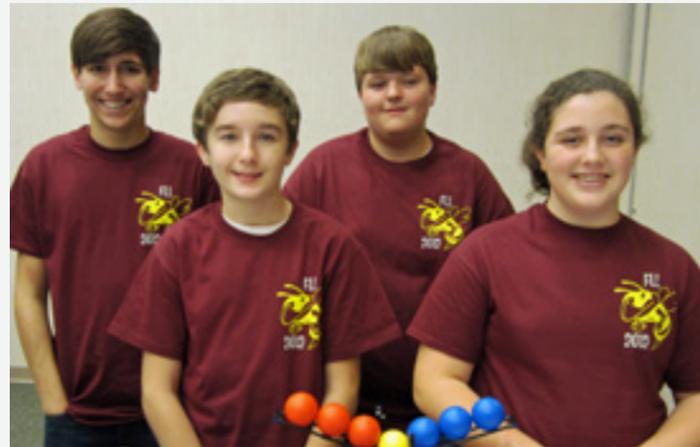
Brannon’s first teaching job was a challenge. She didn’t agree with the educational philosophies of some of the administration; likewise, her administrators made assumptions based on where she went to school.

“At one point, an administrator told me that I needed to dumb down whatever I was teaching in the classroom and that I obviously wasn’t teaching on the students’ level.”

In May of 2011, Brannon nervously began to apply for teaching jobs at other schools. “I loved teaching and investing in students, but I was terrified of signing on and being stuck at a school where I would be put in similar difficult situations.”

Brannon had multiple principals inviting her to interview, with several very excited at the prospect of an MSMS alum on staff.

## THE HURRICANE



**Kristy Brannon’s Robotics Students (from left) Dustin Dunaway, Noah McKone, Logan Holmes, and Hannah Rutland. Dustin, Noah, and Logan would later be invited to attend MSMS.**

Brannon’s second interview was with Eubanks. Right out of the gate, Brannon felt they were on the same page.

“Shannon told me he wanted someone to challenge his students, to not see them as underprivileged, rural, or poverty-stricken but as students who were capable of more. Needless to say, I was sold and took the job, teaching seventh and eighth grade science.”

Likewise, Eubanks felt he had lucked into Brannon.

“I needed a junior high science teacher, but I wanted someone who actually knew science. So often in rural schools, junior high science teachers are coaches who took enough science classes in college for a General Science certification. I had a coach leave and was able to fill that slot in a different area, so it was very fortuitous that I had an opening when Kristy applied.”

Brannon taught at Enterprise under Eubanks for three years, during which time Brannon was free to challenge her students without fear of being pushed to “dumb down” her teaching.

*“I had room to explore my teaching style and grow a rigorous curriculum that better prepared students for the demands of high school,” said Brannon.*

When she asked to host a science fair, Eubanks said go for it. When she asked to start a robotics program, Eubanks gave the green light.

“We had similar goals and expectations because of our MSMS background. We wanted whatever is best for our students.”

## THE AFTERMATH

While at Enterprise, Brannon met two inseparable students: Dustin Dunaway and Noah McKone. Not only were Dunaway and McKone enthusiastic and inquisitive, they had very involved and supportive parents.

Noah’s dad, Dr. Kevin McKone, was a physics professor at the local community college and was looking for a robotics team coach at Enterprise. Brannon jumped at the chance.

As robotics sponsor, Brannon got to know both of them, and their families, a little bit better. It was then that her MSMS hat and teacher hat collided.

“I received a flyer about MSMS summer camps for middle school students. I presented the flyers to several of my top-achieving students, including Noah and Dustin.”

That summer Dunaway attended camp and came back to school in the fall excited about the new experiences he had had. He was so excited about MSMS that it began to infect students around him, including McKone and other members of the robotics team.

That spring, Brannon called Rick Smith, Director of School Advancement at MSMS, to set-up a tour for the interested students.

*“I have never been more proud of MSMS or its faculty than the day of our tour. I started with a handful of students and several sets of very skeptical parents. We left with students who couldn’t contain their excitement and parents who realized that they didn’t want to hold their children back from the experiences MSMS could offer,” said Brannon*

While Dunaway and McKone are both excited to attend MSMS in the fall as members of the Class of 2017, they both are a little sad.

“Enterprise is like our family and we’ll be leaving that,” said Noah. “But everyone we’ve talked to at MSMS is thoughtful and nice.”

Dunaway echoed McKone’s sentiments, but feels like Enterprise’s teachers have prepared them to do well at MSMS. And he also feels like he has an upper hand.

“I’ve attended MSMS summer camp for two years and gotten to know some of the teachers and get a good



**Noah McKone (left) and Dustin Dunaway at MSMS New Student Orientation.**

feel of the campus,” Dunaway said. “You could almost say I became obsessed with MSMS.”

Likewise, Eubanks was excited with the enthusiasm.

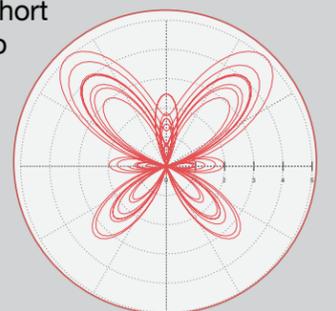
“We’d had a student attend MSMS before (Katie Caves, Class of 2008), but it was beginning to look like she was an aberration. My students just didn’t seem interested. But that changed when Kristy came on our staff. She was able to plant seeds that, even though she left us a couple of years ago, still are bearing fruit today.”

This past year Enterprise had five students in a Sophomore class of 60 apply; four were interviewed, three were invited to attend. Enterprise also had two middle school students attend MSMS summer camp with plans on more attending next year.

Enterprise also recently had Erika Dixon (middle school science) serve on the MSMS Advisory Board and currently has local parent Debra Byrd serve on the Board.

“It is amazing how in a few short years Enterprise has come to embrace MSMS,” Eubanks said. “It has come like a storm.”

A storm, perhaps, that began with the flapping of two wings.



# SCHOOL UPDATE

## Moving Forward

By Wade Leonard (1999)

Whenever he speaks to an audience, whether that audience is composed of parents, students, faculty, staff, the public, or a combination of all five, MSMS Executive Director Dr. Germain McConnell always talks about the school's mission. Over the past few months, the wording of that mission has been modified and massaged to better reflect not only the value the school offers to its students, but the value the school offers to the state, the nation, and the world.

The official mission of MSMS "is to enhance the future of Mississippi in the global society by meeting the individual needs of gifted and talented students by providing innovative learning experiences and leadership development in a residential environment. In addition, we will provide quality educational leadership for other educators and aggressive outreach programs that impact students across Mississippi."

With focus now squarely directed at this mission, the sense at MSMS is that the school has a clear direction and a clear motivation. The issue, as always, is ensuring the school has the funds to get there, but even under the long shadow of continued flat funding, there is a palpable sense of optimism at MSMS.

"The enemy of great is good," Dr. McConnell likes to say, quoting Jim Collins, the author of *Good to Great*.

The sense at MSMS is that greatness, true greatness, is just within reach.



### Outreach

For the past three years, MSMS has been named by national publications as one of the best high schools in America. In their most recent ranking, the *Daily Beast* named the school number 23 in the southeast and number 57 in the country. For the past two years, the school's graduating classes have been offered in excess of \$20 million in scholarship dollars. Obviously, the school is doing something right.

By no means, however, is the school resting on its laurels. Rather, attention is being focused toward not only maintaining and improving the unique and rigorous academic environment for which MSMS is famous, but expanding the reach of the school as a leader and innovator in Mississippi education.

The school has also adopted a local elementary school, Fairview Elementary in Columbus, where MSMS students will be engaged in several activities such as serving as reading buddies and implementing a science and mathematics club. In addition to the *Adopt a School* initiative, approximately 40 students are presently engaged in mentoring, a number that has nearly quadrupled from last year.

While MSMS is proud to reach out to the local

community, its goals are broader than Lowndes County. The school exists to serve the entire state, and several programs the school has initiated and expanded over the past year are meant to reflect that fact.

For two years in a row, MSMS has taken its popular *Science Carnival* on the road, so that students outside of the Golden Triangle community can experience science MSMS-style. The school's math faculty has already submitted preliminary plans for outreach in mathematics that will impact students statewide. The school's summer enrichment camps continue to grow. This summer, MSMS hosted approximately 150 seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth graders during the camps' two weeks. These academically inclined students came from all corners of Mississippi. Interest in the camp statewide has been so high, that MSMS is considering adding a third camp in 2016.

These programs are but in addition to the several other outreach and public service oriented programs the school hosts, such as *Tales From the Crypt*, the traditional *Science Carnival*, and the *Middle School Science Bowl*. All of which are growing in interest and impact.



## Moving Forward

On the ground, so to speak, MSMS has several new offerings for current students this year. Firstly, the school will now offer students the opportunity to graduate with distinction in the areas of mathematics, biology, chemistry, or physics.

“Graduating with distinction is important because it distinguishes our students from students at other schools. We offer high level classes, and this distinction allows universities to see the work our students have done while still in high school,” said Director for Academic Affairs Kelly Brown.

In the future, the school plans to expand the areas of distinction to engineering as well. The school is also ramping up research opportunities for its students. Students will now be able to take a class called Survey of Scientific Research, which will act as a precursor for students wishing to engage in the school’s research program with Mississippi State University.

The Coordinator for the research program, Jed Leggett, has been



given an additional title and new responsibilities. He is now the school’s Coordinator for Curriculum Enhancement, which will take him and MSMS down some exciting paths. Leggett is currently building an engineering curriculum which is designed to be largely student based.

“We will provide them with the information they need to understand the different fields of engineering, but the goal is to have the students complete works of engineering in the field of their own interests,” said Leggett.

Leggett is also working to create online platforms that will host courses for both blended learning at MSMS and pre-MSMS courses for students all over Mississippi. An example of such a course being discussed is a programming course that will provide students with core programming skills before they come to MSMS.

“I love what I’m doing,” said Leggett, who is also a 2003 graduate of the school. “I feel like I am participating in and shaping the future of education in Mississippi.”

## Improving Facilities

The school also had the opportunity over the past few months to give a face-lift to some areas of the campus. Namely, MSMS was able to replace 104 sets of furniture in Goen Hall (the ladies’ residence hall) and replace the carpeted areas of the building with tile flooring.

“Goen was in desperate need of new furniture,” said Director for Student Affairs, Tanya Walker. “Everyone really seems to be enjoying the new additions.”

MSMS also has plans in the works to convert the current Performing Arts Center into a theater space large enough to accommodate the entire campus population. Currently, performance space is limited. While larger performances often take place in MUW facilities, the school is beholden to the university’s schedule.

Even more ambitious plans have been proposed that include constructing all new residence halls and adding a tower to Hooper Academic Building.

“I would like to see all building projects either completed or started in the next five years,” said Dr. McConnell. “We will be working diligently over the next two years to make the plans a reality.”

## The Means To Get There

For many years, MSMS has labored under flat funding from the state. Currently, the school’s allocation for financial year 2016 is about \$4.4 million, which is about \$1 million short of what the school needs to serve a student population of 270. This coincides with the fact that interest in MSMS has increased at a consistent rate. During the 2014-2015 application process, MSMS looked at over more than 200 qualified applicants for admission into the school.

“Initially, it looked like we were only going to be able to offer 105 spots to this class,” said MSMS Director for Admissions and School Advancement Rick Smith. “That’s 30 fewer spots than the class that came before.”



When the school made this information known, the school’s alumni acted. All together, the MSMS Foundation raised nearly \$100,000 to make it possible to increase the class size of the Class of 2017. These donations came almost exclusively from alumni, \$60,000 alone was given for this purpose by 1999 alumnus Chad Edmonson.

These donations along with resource reallocation means that the Class of 2017 has grown from 105 students to a much healthier 130 students.

“There were students who were relegated to alternate status in this class who in years past would have easily made the initial cut of accepted students,” said Smith. “Interest in the school is increasing, and with the help of the Foundation and others we can ensure that no qualified student is turned away.”

MSMS is not relying solely on alumni giving, however, in late September the school hosted its first ever *Open House*, during which state and local business, political, and community leaders were invited to take part in the success that MSMS represents.

“I do not believe in begging,” said Dr. McConnell. “But I know that MSMS is a great investment.”

A common attitude of those who graduated from MSMS is “it doesn’t matter what I want to do or where I want to go. All things are possible. Getting there is merely a question of the amount of effort I am willing to invest.”

It seems this attitude is beginning to take hold at MSMS itself. Despite budgetary shortfalls and other money woes, the feeling at the school is optimism. The feeling is that the school will surpass the wildest dreams of its greatest dreamers. With the help and support of our alumni, our state and national leaders, and those who believe in the transformative power of the school, MSMS will abandon “good” and firmly embrace greatness.

Wade Leonard serves as MSMS’s Coordinator for Alumni and Public Relations. He is also a 1999 graduate of the school. He can be reached at [wleonard@themsms.org](mailto:wleonard@themsms.org).



# ALUMNI WEEKEND 2015



# MSMS ALUMNI REUNION

By Owen McGuire (2005) & Cynthia Henderson (1995)



For two years at MSMS, you go to school with the same people. You live in the same building, eat meals in the same cafeteria, and study during the same time slot. MSMS is a unique experience that forges strong relationships. After 10 or 20 years, it is easy for classmates and friends to end up far apart from one another, but it is not easy to break those relationships.

On April 10, 2015, alumni from the classes of 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005 celebrated their class reunions. Alums from these classes and others converged on campus in Columbus to reconnect with each other and reminisce about high school. In the Hooper lobby, visitors checked in, received their t-shirts, and shared smiles and laughter as other alums came in the door.

Everyone gathered at Friendship Cemetery at sunset to attend the 25th annual performance of *Tales from the Crypt*. *Tales* was founded by late MSMS history teacher Carl Butler in the spring of 1990 with students from the school's inaugural class. In 2005, that responsibility was passed to Chuck Yarborough who has kept the spirit of the event intact.



The student performances were as entrancing as ever, as they showed a glimpse into the past of Columbus and highlighted some of the city's former citizens.

One performer that alumni found particularly moving was Jake Bozlee who, for the first time in the history of *Tales*, paid tribute to its founder. Mr. Butler is buried at the cemetery, and Bozlee portrayed one of his student-athletes. Joshua Smith, Class of 1995, recalled a touching line about the single descriptor written on

# WEEKEND 2015

the tombstone. "After the bit, 'Teacher... They could've written so much more...' I couldn't speak."

On Saturday, attendees had many options for morning activities. Tours were led at Temple Heights, the home of Dixie Butler and her late husband Carl. On campus, alums were invited to sit in on a school update presented by Dr. Germain McConnell, the Executive Director of MSMS, followed by an MSMS Foundation update presented by Cindy Henderson, President of the MSMS Foundation. After campus tours and class pictures, reunion attendees went to Huck's Place in downtown Columbus for a buffet lunch. After lunch, Mr. Yarborough announced that the school's history classroom will be permanently dedicated to Mr. Butler.

The afternoon featured a *Jeopardy!*-style trivia challenge in Hooper Auditorium. The reunion classes were each represented by one person: Shannon Eubanks for the Class of 1990, Brian Finch for 1995, Cole Daughdrill for 2005, and Abigail Wippel, Class of 2015, for the current student body. Mr. Eubanks dominated the competition with an impressive showing.

The weekend's final activity was *Mississippi Brews, Bites, and Blues*, held downtown at the Columbus Arts Council building. The event also served as a fundraiser for the Foundation, as guests were able to purchase raffle tickets in hopes of winning a prize. All alumni were invited to the event, and alums from the classes of 1990, 1991, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2005, and 2009 were present. Free beer was provided by Mark and Leslie Henderson, themselves MSMS alumni and founders of Mississippi's own Lazy Magnolia Brewery. The Hendersons also provided the grand raffle prize, a Lazy Magnolia gift basket. MSMS music teacher Dawn Barham and her band Juke Joint Gypsies were the entertainment for the night. Alumni spent the night dancing, enjoying the drinks and food, and remembering how fun it was to spend two years with the same people.



Stay tuned! If you are in the classes of 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006 or 2011, your reunion will take place on April 8 and 9, 2016.

## WANT TO SUPPORT MSMS?



Sign up for updates from the MSMS Foundation  
[www.msmsfoundation.org](http://www.msmsfoundation.org)



Network with other alumni  
[www.msmsaa.org/onthenet.html](http://www.msmsaa.org/onthenet.html)



Contact your legislator & ask them to support any MSMS friendly legislation



You & your business can make a donation of money, equipment, or matching donations to the MSMS Foundation



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- Sign up for the newsletter: **The Brainstorm**
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**MSMS Foundation**  
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The MSMS Foundation seeks to add value to MSMS, the students, and the alumni of MSMS. We invite you to share in this mission with us by making a contribution to The MSMS Foundation online ([www.msmsfoundation.com](http://www.msmsfoundation.com)) or by returning the enclosed envelope.



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