

RANKIN LEDGER

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Rankin farmers band together

By JUSTIN FRITSCHER
jfritscher@jackson.gannett.com

A group of small Rankin County farmers have big plans — and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's attention.

The South Rankin County Farmers Association was the first stop for two USDA top officials touring Mississippi last week.

The association is composed of small farmers who have banded together because it's hard to be profitable independently.

"We started buying in bulk after everyone was talking about feed prices, the costs of fertilizer, fence posts — it's so expensive," said Lt. Col. Carl Holden, the association's president. "We've decided we want to cut the middle man out. Now we are the middle man."

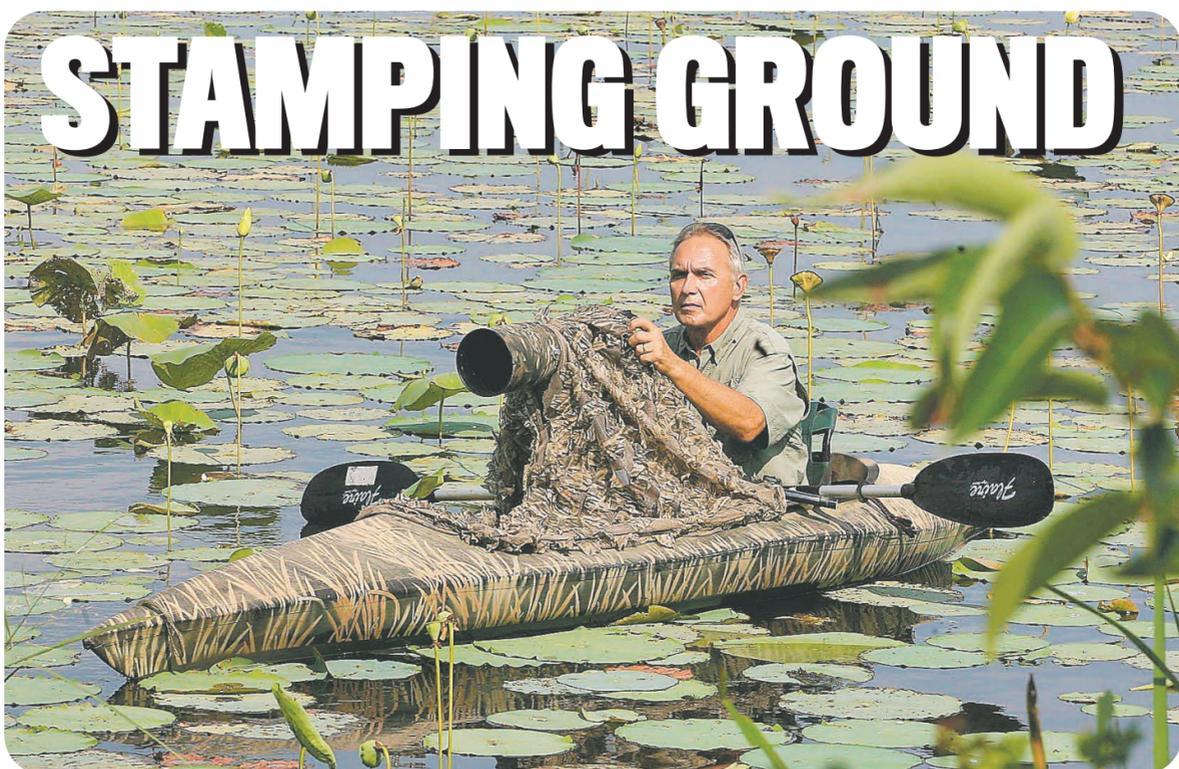
The association started in 2003 so farmers could buy in bulk to lower production costs and learn from one another.

But now the operation is much bigger.

The co-op's success drew the USDA officials to the association's 25-acre site July 6 in the Thomasville community.

At the co-op's first facility, which was built in 2008 to store supplies and hold meetings, Holden unveiled its plans for the future, which include livestock demonstra-

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STAMPING GROUND

Photos continue to capture attention of wildlife officials

By JUSTIN FRITSCHER
jfritscher@jackson.gannett.com

Steering through lily pads, Joe Mac Hudspeth swiveled his camera tripod mounted at the corner of his "poke boat," a stumpy-looking kayak.

He heard something. Maybe a gallinule. Or a heron.

The Brandon resident is a wildlife photographer — a well-known one.

This poke boat is one way he gets close to wild birds and animals, a craft he's mastered over the years.

"I spend more time scouting than I do hunting," Hudspeth says. And by

hunting, Hudspeth means with one of his cameras, like the Canon EOS Elan with a 500 mm F4 lens that he was using Thursday while cruising the upper end of Ross Barnett Reservoir.

Many of his images are taken at the Reservoir, including a photo he snagged of two mallards, which was chosen this year by the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks to adorn its duck stamp.

The department made its announcement earlier this month — no surprise to the photographer who has had photos selected 13 years in a

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Wildlife photographer Joe Mac Hudspeth Jr. uses the Ross Barnett Reservoir as the backdrop for most of his photography. Using a 500 millimeter lens, Hudspeth camouflages himself and the camera to get up-close photographs of Mississippi wildlife.



Joe Mac Hudspeth | Special to Rankin Ledger

This pair of mallards, with water dripping from the drake's bill to the hen's head, will grace the 2010-11 Mississippi Waterfowl Stamp.

Enjoying summer



Melanie Thortis | Rankin Ledger

Eleven-year-old Drew Bowman is all smiles as he runs up to see a one-pound catfish his friend, Henry McKnight, caught at Crossgates lake in Brandon. The neighbors were enjoying their summer days with a little fishing at the lake.



Justin Fritscher | Rankin Ledger

Residents are readying for this weekend's Reservoir Community Picnic, which begins at 5 p.m. Sunday at Pelahatchie Shore Park. Organizers include (left to right) Larry Swales, Hoopy Stringer, Dana Stringer, Larry Simons and Sharon McBeth. Swales' grandchildren, Aiden and Jackson, also helped out.

Reservoir picnic set for Sunday

By JUSTIN FRITSCHER
jfritscher@jackson.gannett.com

The Reservoir Community Picnic, set for 5-7 p.m. Sunday, was created to find a way to bring the community together.

Organizers, like Chancery Clerk Larry Swales, say it still lives up to that mission.

"We were sitting around talking about having an event of some sort," Swales said. "That's when we decided to hold this picnic."

The 16th annual picnic is planned for Pelahatchie

Shore Park. Swales said the event's sponsors give out tickets for people to attend.

"This is a great tradition that we want to keep alive," he said.

The event includes free food and beverages, music and children's activities. Local band Dirt Road Addiction is playing the festival.

The picnic is not organized by any public agency, rather a group of residents who just want to see people come together.

Corporate and individual sponsors fund the event that draws 300-400 people each

year, organizer Sharon McBeth said.

Children's activities include a space jump and a water slide, McBeth said. The picnic will also have an egg toss.

Attendees are asked to bring lawn chairs.

In case of rain, the picnic will be held at St. Mark's United Methodist Church at the Reservoir.

For more information, call (601) 624-3603.

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To comment on this story, call Justin Fritscher at (601) 961-7266.

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GET OUT OF BED FOR:

Baptist Health Systems will host a seminar on cardiac arrhythmia at 11:45 a.m. today in the Baptist Madison Campus Community Room. Lunch provided. To register, (601) 948-6262.



BEFORE YOU TURN IN:

John Brandon signs *Citrus County* at 5 p.m. at Lemuria Books. A reading follows at 5:30 p.m. today. Details, (601) 366-7619 or www.lemuria-books.com.

Page One

Thousands of acres of wetlands restored

Most people know ducks and geese need water and wetland habitats to survive.



Murray Fulton
Guest columnist

That need was well illustrated in the 1980s, when a prolonged drought in the prairie pothole region cut duck populations by half.

Fewer people think about the undisturbed grassland habitats ducks and geese need for nesting.

Nevertheless, those upland grasslands in close proximity to wetlands are critical for waterfowl as well.

Much of the wetland habitat was destroyed in the last century with the draining of most of America's wetlands.

In the past 15 years, though, with assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other programs, landowners have restored thousands of acres of wetlands and waterfowl populations have responded. Individual species have specific food

DID YOU KNOW?

Migrating ducks normally fly at high altitudes; some have been spotted at 20,000 feet. Most fly at night, at speeds of 40 to 60 miles an hour. Most people think of migration as a north-south phenomenon, but there is nearly as much east-west movement.

and cover preferences, but included here is some general guidance on their habitat needs.

Ducks, geese, swans and other waterfowl eat plants — mostly aquatic — and seeds and insects. Crop fields can draw thousands of waterfowl in the fall, to eat corn, soybeans, wheat rice, barley and other cereal grains.

A wide variety of aquatic plants and seeds eaten includes pondweed, smartweed, sedges, bulrushes, and wild millet.

Ducks can be grouped into two feeding types: dabbling and diving ducks. Dabbling ducks, including mallards, wood ducks and blue-winged teal, usually feed in shallow water by tipping up on the surface.

Divers, including redheads and canvasbacks, feed by diving to the bottom of ponds and lakes to get submerged plants.

In early spring, hens eat insects for protein needed to produce eggs; their young also eat mostly insects and other small animal in their first three weeks of life.

Wetland types include prairie potholes, tundra wetlands, river backwaters, bays in large lakes, coastal wetlands, mountain wetlands and forest wetlands.

Wetlands with about half their surface area covered by wetland plants are ideal for waterfowl broods. Idle grasslands, deferred pastures and haylands not mowed until after nesting, in July, are the upland habitat many waterfowl use to nest.

Many species migrate southward, but some stay in winter if food and open water are available.

For more information, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov

Murray Fulton is the Rankin County district conservationist for the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Residents would like own overlay district

By **JUSTIN FRITSCHER**
jfritscher@jackson.gannett.com

Many northwest Rankin County residents who live in a city-like environment don't actually live in a city.

They don't have a mayor or special zoning.

And because this urban area, wedged between Flowood and the Ross Barnett Reservoir, is the fastest growing in Rankin County, residents like Jim McDowell say they would like for special zoning rules to apply.

"I'm hopeful the county will do it," McDowell said of the idea of an overlay district that has been tossed around.

The county is redoing its zoning maps and comprehensive plan. Drafts are expected to be ready next month.

"I want to make sure they get it right," McDowell said.

What is good for one area of the county might not be

appropriate for another, McDowell said.

Roy Edwards, director of Rankin's community development office, said the county is at a stage where it can look at several options.

"We're looking into it," Edwards said. "We're going to meet with some of the residents of the district."

The Central Mississippi Planning and Development District is helping the county craft its new maps and plan, which the county first adopted in 2004.

The county has implemented two moratoriums in the past year, one on multi-family residences and another on a group of businesses. Supervisors temporarily banned these land uses, saying they are awaiting the completion of their new maps and plan to ensure they are built in appropriate locations.

Supervisors extended their business moratorium

last week, which will prevent new check-cashing establishments, tattoo parlors and businesses purchasing gold or other precious metals from opening in unincorporated Rankin County.

"We hope to have it zoned for whatever needs an area has," Board President Wood Brown said. "Some areas should be zoned one way, and others should be zoned another."

McDowell, who favors the ban, said the Reservoir area is experiencing traffic woes.

He also said the area is running out of open space for development, and he wants to see high-end businesses open their doors nearby.

"I want to see the businesses contribute to the area," he said.

To comment on this story, call Justin Fritscher at (601) 961-7266.

Presidential Scholar

Jackson Prep senior Andrew Li (left) of Rankin County was named a Presidential Scholar. The Presidential Scholar Program recognizes the nation's most distinguished graduating high school seniors. Students are selected for exceptional performance on either the SAT or ACT. The White House Commission chooses one young man and one young woman from each state to receive Presidential Scholar honors. Li visited Washington, D.C., in June to accept his award. Pictured after Scholar Celebration Night at the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, are Li and Elizabeth Franklin, the Prep teacher he chose as his Presidential Teacher.



Farmers

Continued from page 1A

tion areas, a recycling center, a vegetable processing center and crops.

"We're trying to bring things to this community," Holden told Dallas Tonsager and Harris Sherman, USDA under secretaries.

USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service has provided grants and technical support to the co-op in the past, and Holden said the group is looking for more assistance.

Tonsager, head of USDA's Rural Development, said the agency aims to support

small- and medium-sized farms and involve youth.

Holden said he would like to see more youngsters in farming.

"These days, they are into computers and computer games," said Holden, who teaches at McLaurin High School in Florence. "We want them to come out here and get their hands dirty."

South Rankin Farmers also is interested in installing a high tunnel, a greenhouse that helps a farmer lengthen the growing season and potential profitability.

The conservation service

provides programs that help farmers purchase high tunnels, said Sherman, head of USDA's Natural Resources and Environment.

"We're working with small farmers across the country to make this happen," Sherman said. "We are looking to the future."

Sherman said the Obama administration is exploring non-traditional farming methods like the high tunnel. The co-op is a good fit for such methods, he said.

To comment on this story, call Justin Fritscher at (601) 961-7266.

RANKIN COUNTY NOTEBOOK

Paramedic recognized for 20 years of service

Russ Covert, a paramedic with American Medical Response's Offshore Division, was recently recognized for his 20 years of service to the profession.

The Board of Directors of the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians honored the Brandon resident with the distinction they said is held by few EMTs and paramedics.

To maintain his status as a Nationally Registered Paramedic, Covert completed, on a biennial basis, the most comprehensive recertification program for Emergency Medical Technicians in America.

He not only completed courses to refresh his fundamental knowledge and skills but also attended a minimum of two hours per month of additional continuing education courses to advance his knowledge on the newest modern and up-to-date lifesaving skills.

By maintaining his Nationally Registered status and completing regular continuing education courses, Covert is among the few elite paramedics with the most training in pre-hospital emergency medical care in the nation.

Resident tapped to lead Alzheimer's group

Brandon resident Patty Dunn is the new executive director of Alzheimer's Mississippi.



Dunn

Dunn officially took the post as the chapter opened its new Ridgeland office.

Patty served as the chapter's state operations director for the past five years. She earned a bachelor's in accounting from Texas Christian University and a master's in business administration from Millsaps College.

Workshop to focus on protecting homes from wildfires

The "How to Have a Firewise Home" workshop is scheduled for July 20 at the Mississippi State University Extension Service/911 Building on Marquette Road.

The half-day event for residents, business

leaders and officials will spotlight fire safe planning at the border of urban and undeveloped land, which is prone to wildfires.

Topics to be discussed include why homes burn, wildland fuel reduction techniques and assessing fire danger of a home.

Registration will begin at 9 a.m. The program will begin at 9:30 a.m.

The program is free. For more information, call (601) 824-4601, Ext. 3.

Richland Exchange Club elects new president

The Exchange Club of Richland elected its new president, Jimmy Holmes.

As president, he will preside over the club's board of directors. His other responsibilities include working with other club and district Exchange leaders.

Other elected officers include President-elect Freddy Ahrend, Secretary Sandy Ashley and Treasurer Cathey Wynne.

The board of directors includes Mary Fonville, Randall Walters, Sharon Holmes, Marlon Ray Sowell, David Hawthorne and Mamie Ruth Sowell.

Robert Hancock will serve as immediate past president.

MC's Flowood campus holding program info sessions

Mississippi College has three information sessions planned regarding its accelerated degree program at its new Flowood campus.

The new campus is opening this month on Lakeland Drive, next to the Flowood Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center.

Programs offered at the campus include business administration, accounting, marketing, public relations and sociology.

The information sessions will be held at 5:30 p.m. July 22, Aug. 5 and Aug. 12. They will be held across the street from the campus at the River Room Conference Center.

Registration for the accelerated degree program is Aug. 19. Classes begin Aug. 23.

For more information, call (601) 925-3800.

To share tips and ideas, contact Reporter Justin Fritscher at (601) 961-7266 or e-mail jfritscher@jackson.gannett.com.



Wildlife photographer Joe Mac Hudspeth Jr. camouflages his kayak and camera lens before heading out to the Ross Barnett Reservoir for a photo shoot.

Melanie Thortis/Rankin Ledger

Hudspeth

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row for the stamp. His photos also have been selected the past 14 years for the Mississippi Sportsman Hunting License.

Framed prints hang along the stairwell of his Old Fannin Road-area home. The latest has not yet been hung.

"There's not many people that fool around with this stuff on the Ross Barnett," Hudspeth said.

Hudspeth is an ads sales rep by day and a wildlife photographer at dawn and dusk.

Capturing images that attract the attention of Wildlife and Fisheries takes dedication.

Hudspeth builds blinds in favorite duck holes, waiting for a wood duck or a blue-wing teal. He has mastered his turkey hunting skills, allowing him to get close to the skittish birds. And he paddles his poke boat, looking for wading birds like gallinules and alligators.

Either way, the 57-year-old can count on getting dirty on his forays into the wild.

To take great photos, he says, the photographer must be 20-40 feet from the subject. He is suited in camouflage and spend plenty of time sitting submerged waist deep in swamp water.

"It's not like you can stop while driving and take a picture from the road," he said.

Hudspeth's photos have been published 1,000 times in magazines, newspapers and books. Hudspeth published his first book in 2004, "In the Southern Wild," and he's editing his second book.

The second book tells his story: how a 30-year-old man finally got a top-notch camera and turned a passion into a part-time job.

When he was young, he remembers how he was able to sneak up to a screech owl and snap some photos of it with a humble Extralite 10. It's a moment he'll never forget — one that started a burning drive in his stomach to eventually become serious about wildlife photography.

He talks about his trials, and what he has learned from the outdoors classroom.

Hudspeth said he hopes to publish it this year.

It has photos taken from his native land of Lafayette County and ones as far away as Yellowstone National Park. It includes a picture of a tree frog (his first-ever published photo, which printed in 1986 in Mississippi Outdoors magazine) and many pictures of wood ducks (one of his favorite birds to photograph).

"Well, they're here at the

Reservoir, and they're here year-round," Hudspeth said of the swamp-dwelling fowl.

Photographing wood ducks around the Reservoir used to be common for Hudspeth, but invasive plants have nearly kept him out of his favorite spots.

"It's terrible," he said. "It's so thick."

Aquatic weeds like alligator grass and water hyacinth have choked the Reservoir. The Reservoir has been combating the plants with herbicides.

Pearl River Valley Water Supply District, the agency that governs the Reservoir, spends \$250,000-\$300,000 each year.

"It's a major expense, but if we don't control it, the lake won't be very desirable for recreation or fishing," Pearl River Valley executive director John Sigman said.

Despite the herbicides, a green carpet covers much of the water, making it hard to spot — much less reach — the wading birds and other Reservoir favorites.

But invasive plants or not, the photographer said he won't give up the trade. He loves it too much.

"I live for it."

To comment on this story, call Justin Fritscher at (601) 961-7266.