

MISSISSIPPI

OFFICIAL & STATISTICAL REGISTER

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Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE

*This book was paid for by the taxpayers of the State of Mississippi
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SECRETARY OF STATE

Dear Mississippi,

Welcome to the Mississippi Official and Statistical Register for 2024-2028—also known as the Blue Book.

This publication has been updated and produced every four years since 1904 to provide information specific to a four-year period regarding elected officials, state agencies, historical data, and other information about Mississippi.

In this Blue Book, you will also find profiles of five successful Mississippians who each have unique and interesting life stories. As you will see, they have common threads about the values learned growing up in Mississippi, and how they have relied on those principles to achieve their goals. They also all share a spirit of optimism for Mississippi's future because of the incredible people and potential our state has to offer.

The Blue Book also reminds us to always be mindful of what kind of state we build for our children and grandchildren. Like so many other families across Mississippi, my wife, Lauren, and I are raising our children with the future in mind.

The decisions made by elected officials at the local, state, and federal levels impact all of us—which is why it's important we encourage everyone to engage in our electoral process by voting. Having informed and active participants in our elections is a key element to ensuring Mississippi grows stronger in the future.

As our elected leaders work on policies to shape education, energy, economic development, public safety, health care, technology, transportation, and infrastructure—and other topics affecting the lives of all Mississippians, we should be thankful we live in a state and country which places a high priority on the freedom of citizens to practice their faith and raise their families. We must always be grateful to the men and women in our military who have served—and continue to serve—to protect our country from threats at home and abroad.

Thank you for giving me the honor of serving as your Secretary of State. I hope this Blue Book will be a valuable resource to you when needed, and I hope you will take a few minutes to learn something new about our mighty Mississippi.

Sincerely,

Michael Watson
Secretary of State



Be Very Focused and Enjoy the Journey

A Profile of Bill Cook

The thread of Bill Cook's life weaves through a variety of places and ventures, but it has always remained strong because of a consistency of principles fostered during his childhood growing up in Bruce, Mississippi.

"We spent a lot of time outside—from playing sports and Boy Scout events to working on the farm to family gatherings, we enjoyed what nature had to offer," Cook said about his earliest memories being raised here.

"My paternal grandparents were educators and they encouraged me to always apply myself and learn," Cook continued. "A 'hard work' ethic was encouraged by my parents, Boy Scout leaders, coaches, teachers, and elders throughout the community. I'm forever grateful for their constant encouragement to stay focused and always do my best."

He also credits a local crop duster, David Tedford, as his childhood hero who taught him lessons that served Cook well later in life—lessons about how to take calculated risks and apply that into growing a business. Additionally, Cook learned that "no matter what you choose in life as a career, you must be very focused and enjoy the journey."

It's been quite a journey for Bill Cook since his childhood days in Bruce. After graduation from the University of Mississippi, Cook began his career in telecommunications and spent nearly 20 years traveling the United States as part of his work.

The core beliefs he learned of "hard work, patience, respect, compassion, discipline, and truth" are the values Cook has always remembered. In 2008, Cook returned to Mississippi for several reasons, including the desire for his children to "grow up in a community where these values remained paramount." Cook cites two of the most important keys to his success as "treating others with respect and never compromising when it comes to integrity."

Currently, Bill Cook is the Executive Chairman of Xenith IG, a venture partner at Columbia Capital, a digital infrastructure entrepreneur and President of Cook Consulting, LLC. He is the founder and former CEO of Summit IG, the Executive Chairman of Bandwidth IG, and a member of the Board of Directors for the Mississippi Department of Information Technology Services (ITS).

"I firmly believe it's our duty as citizens to make our communities better than we found them," Cook stated. "In recent years, I've begun to get involved, promoting Mississippi and what it has to offer, sharing much of what I've learned through my experiences, and making introductions to people who want to invest in our state and its communities."

According to Cook, improving technology in Mississippi is a big factor for our state's future success. "I've been pleased to see Mississippians embrace new technologies in recent years," Cook stated. "We still have some work to do getting our homes and businesses fully connected, but our leaders understand the challenge and have worked to ensure plans are being executed toward empowering our communities. If we get this right, we will be able to unlock seemingly endless economic opportunities for Mississippians."

While Bill Cook's business accomplishments continue to benefit the state, perhaps his most influential, positive impact has been on a personal level. "I've brought hundreds of visitors to Mississippi to visit my family, attend sporting events, to hunt and fish, visit museums, to hear amazing music, to eat fine Southern cuisine, and to participate in economic discussions," Cook explained. "Every one of them has always been complimentary of how friendly people are across our state. The people of Mississippi are humble and always willing to share their experiences that define our culture. The warmth and willingness of Mississippians is something you don't find anywhere else."

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Using Our Natural Resources to Benefit Our Economy and Human Health

A Profile of James L. Cummins, Jr.

Mississippians understand and appreciate the beauty and value of the great outdoors. Whether it's hunting, fishing, bird watching, or just exploring on foot, there's a wide variety of nature to experience across the state. James Cummins is a Mississippian who has focused his life's work on preserving and protecting the habitat of wildlife and fish in the state so current and future generations can enjoy these incredible resources.

Raised in Greenville in the Mississippi Delta, Cummins recalls his fondest childhood memories of fishing with his father on Lake Ferguson and Lake Washington. "I also thoroughly enjoyed spending part of my summers with my grandparents in Montgomery and Webster counties on their farms," Cummins said.

At a young age, Cummins became interested in wildlife conservation efforts. "I was also fortunate to spend time with my uncle, Jack Herring, who worked for the Mississippi

Department of Wildlife Conservation, which also greatly shaped my future," Cummins recalled. "I would spend part of my summers with him learning about what our state wildlife agency does and his job as a Fisheries Biologist."

"Clarke Reed had the greatest influence on me over the past 32 years of talking to him almost every day," Cummins stated. "He taught me how to work with people you don't necessarily agree with to get the outcome you want, how to raise funds, the importance of networking with people, and how to deal with both success and failure. My wife, Martha Dalrymple, has always had a huge impact on the way I think and how I work with people."

Today, James Cummins leads Wildlife Mississippi as its Executive Director with unwavering dedication to making the group's vision become a reality as its mission is—"conservation of Mississippi's lands, waters and natural heritage will secure the state's quality of life by making it a better place to live, work and raise a family."

Mississippians still have great values and a sense of place. When one considers this, combined with our great pro-business climate, we are destined to succeed.

Cummins is a wildlife biologist by training with a Bachelor of Science degree from Mississippi State University and a master's degree from Virginia Tech University. He has worked on legislation and policies affecting wildlife and conservation issues as a staffer for the late U.S. Senator Thad Cochran. In 2023, Cummins became the 36th President of the Boone and Crockett Club—the oldest wildlife conservation organization in North America, founded by Theodore Roosevelt in 1887.

"My father was a high school trigonometry and calculus teacher, and my mother was the manager of the Greenville Educational Federal Credit Union," said Cummins. "They taught me the values of hard work, the importance of saving, investing and managing money, and how to treat other people the way I wanted to be treated."

In his leadership role with Wildlife Mississippi, Cummins works on a diverse range of projects and priorities. "Mississippi has the highest percentage of its farmland in a conservation program compared to any other major agricultural state," Cummins explained. "We have the only national wildlife refuge in the nation named for an African-American (Holt Collier), a refuge named for the founder of our country's conservation movement (Theodore Roosevelt), and a natural area named for Mississippi's pioneering conservationist (Fannye Cook)."

In the future, James Cummins sees Mississippi as a place of growth and optimism. "I hope we will continue to use our natural resources to benefit our economy and human health, and as a source of outdoor recreation for our citizens and visitors," Cummins stated. "Mississippians still have great values and a sense of place. When one considers this, combined with our great pro-business climate, we are destined to succeed."



We Are One Big Family

A Profile of Delorise Nettles



“One of the first memorable lessons I was taught was to never ask someone to do something you are not willing to do yourself—and the second lesson is that quitting is NEVER an option.” That’s how Delorise Nettles, an entrepreneur and proprietor of Delo’s Heavenly Coffee House in Gautier, Mississippi, describes the life lessons she learned as a child that helped turn her Gulf Coast business into a success.

Regardless of the size of the company or number of employees, Nettles echoes the same spirit of hard work, commitment, and dedication that so many Mississippi businesswomen and men cite as keys to reaching their goals.

“I have so many wonderful memories growing up in the Three Rivers Community that was started by my great-grandfather, Quitman Wells,” Nettles recalled. “I grew up across the street from a historically black community school that created a sense of family in our small, loving community. My mother, Willie May Wells, and my great-uncle, Wally Wells, taught me the strength of family, faith and hard work. They did everything possible to make sure our family was provided for and that we looked out for each other.”

Cultivating successful youth is the first step in ensuring a successful future.



Nettles also remembers other members of her family who overcame obstacles and set an example for her. “My uncle, Leon Wells, taught me perseverance; he was blinded in a work accident, but he never let that stop him,” Nettles said. “He established the Moss Point chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization created to working for the full equality of African Americans in all aspects of American life.”

“I began my career in customer service and have never looked back,” Nettles remarked. “From McRae’s and Ingalls Credit Union to my coffee shop today, the foundation of great customer service is what has made me successful and such a memorable part of the Gulf Coast community. I strive to personify the idea of southern hospitality.”

When asked about other keys to her accomplishments, Nettles relies on her core beliefs. “The grace of God has kept me in business for close to 20 years,” she said. “Next, my

community is the key to my heart and to my success in Jackson County. We are one big family here on the Coast, and I love knowing the names of my regular customers as well as meeting a new face every day. Cultivating a strong, supportive community is one of the biggest factors to my success.”

For someone who has never visited Mississippi, they can get a taste of the state from some personal insight Nettles offers about this place and what makes it special. “Our strong sense of family, community, and a genuine desire to see our neighbors thrive are some of the things I brag about Mississippi daily,” she stated. “We help each other when we are in need, and we continue that circle of support.”

Nettles has seen a lot of changes during her lifetime, and she’s encouraged about the economic outlook for the state. “The most change I see is the increase in affordable and diverse programs at my local community college,” she stated. “Mississippi Gulf Coast



Community College has been establishing industry partnerships that have supported some wonderful programs to ensure our youth have the proper training and tools to become successful. Cultivating successful youth is the first step in ensuring a successful future.”

Delorise Nettles sees a bright—and growing—future for Mississippi. “I don’t see any ‘slowing down’ in my community,” she emphasized. “I feel like we are on the right track to improve every aspect of the Mississippi Gulf Coast and the entire state.”



Willing to Outwork Everyone Else

A Profile of Quintavius Burdette

“Nothing that I’ve done so far has been traditional,” says Quintavius Burdette about his life. Growing up in Senatobia, Mississippi, playing sports and appreciating the values of hard work and a spirit of self-determination, Burdette’s path has taken him from college sports and business success to becoming a notable figure on one of America’s most popular and longest-running reality television shows.

Throughout this non-traditional journey, Burdette relies on lessons learned at an early age that position him for even greater accomplishments in the future. “I had a bundle of friends and family always surrounding me, making fun with what we had,” Burdette recalls about his earliest childhood memories. “We would play basketball until it got dark, went to bed, got up and did it again the next day. That’s what it was like for me growing up in my small town.”

“We’re in a small state that sometimes doesn’t get the credit that we deserve,” Burdette says about Mississippi. “What I’ve learned just coming from this place is hard work.

Hard work defeats any odds that are against you if you’re willing to show up every single day and prove yourself. You can’t be the person that sits in the back, waiting for somebody to call on you. You have to be the voice for yourself.”

Burdette excelled as a student-athlete at the University of Mississippi as a four-year letterwinner for the football team, playing wide receiver and defensive back from 2012–2015. He was also a three-year letterwinner as a sprinter on the track and field team from 2013–2015.

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Today, Burdette is successful real estate broker with RE/MAX in North Mississippi. Named the #1 RE/MAX agent in Mississippi in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022, as well as the #2 RE/MAX agent in the entire United States in 2021, Burdette’s personal drive, commitment, and willpower is shining through in the business world.

Burdette views his sports and real estate successes as positive life examples for young people to follow. “If this kid can be the number two agent in the country, if I can get a scholarship to play football or run track in the SEC—so can the next kid,” Burdette said.

Burdette is grateful that sports taught him many valuable lessons about getting up early, staying up late, and being willing to put in long hours. But he’s quick to point out that there’s much more to life than sports. “So many kids think the only way to be successful, the only way to get rich, the only way to have a life that people cherish, is to go to the NFL, NBA or MLB. And that’s not the case. You can do it so many different ways. You can be an attorney, you can be a real estate agent, or you can be a mechanic. You can be whatever you want to be as long as you’re willing to outwork everyone else. That’s how you can be successful at the highest level in any career you choose.”

Continuing his life’s theme of not doing things the traditional way, in 2024, Burdette was selected as a cast member of the CBS hit reality television show “Survivor” for its 46th season.

Burdette loves his home state and is proud to tell potential visitors why they just might end up wanting to stay in Mississippi. “The second you step foot in this wonderful state—game over. People here are nice, genuine, and polite. They open doors, and they are laughing and smiling. You’ll feel at home, and you have endless opportunities. Most of all, we are a state that sticks together.”

We Have an Extraordinary Story to Tell

A Profile of Gerard Gibert

Mississippi is known around the world for famous authors—story tellers on paper—because the state is filled with remarkable stories to tell.

Gerard Gibert is a Mississippian with his own unique story winding through a path of business ventures, public policy advocacy, community involvement, and communication outreach that continues to have an impact.

“I grew up in a working-class neighborhood off Boling Street in West Jackson,” Gibert recalled. “The area was filled with great families who got along and enjoyed each other’s company. My family and I were parishioners of St. Mary’s Catholic Church. Growing up, we worshipped together and attended the adjoining K-8 St. Mary’s School. The parish dinners, scouting events and carnivals were a blast, but I especially enjoyed the Sunday afternoon football games in the local Catholic League.”

“An October staple, I looked forward to the annual Mississippi State Fair as a youngster,” said Gibert. “During the summers, I delivered papers and mowed lawns to raise money to ride the Scrambler (favorite ride) and play the Dragline (favorite game) on the sawdust covered fairgrounds. And there’s nothing better than a Pronto Pup with mustard while walking the midway on a cool, fall Mississippi night.”



Fast-forwarding a few years from Gibert’s nostalgic childhood, his life quickly moved from earning a bachelor’s degree in Accounting and a minor in Economics from the University of Mississippi to becoming enveloped in the business world. He worked as a senior consultant in the Management Information Consulting Division of Arthur Anderson & Company, the division that became Accenture. Later, Gibert became a founder and CEO of Venture Technologies, an IT Solutions Provider and Cloud Services Provider headquartered in Ridgeland, Mississippi.

“From inception, our business accomplishments were a total team effort,” Gibert explained. “From the outset, I was blessed with a trustworthy and hardworking co-founder and partner. Over our 33 years of operation, I’m proud to say we were first in introducing so many new technologies to Mississippi businesses. We didn’t make technology—we made it work.”

Established in 1986 as MicroAge, ultimately Venture Technologies’ reach included locations in 11 states with more than 300 staffers, delivering a variety of IT infrastructure,

One cannot help but be influenced by Mississippi’s culture of decency, hard work and concern for fellow Mississippians

cloud and business application solutions to thousands of private and public sector customers. Gibert sold the company in 2019 to ConvergeOne, and since then has become increasingly involved in public policy and other community improvement efforts.

“From my perspective as an entrepreneur, there is no better state than Mississippi in which to start, build and operate a business,” Gibert said. “We’re blessed with a favorable regulatory and tax environment, a skilled, hard-working workforce, and an overall quality of life that are conducive to business success.”

Since 2014, Gibert has served on the Board of Directors of Empower Mississippi—a leading public policy advocacy group in the state. He has been part of the Board of Directors of the Mississippi Lottery Corporation since its launch in 2018. In 2020, he became the host of a weekday statewide radio show called “MidDays with Gerard Gibert” on SuperTalk Mississippi FM networks.

Gibert credits his parents for providing the right guidance. “As I age, my love, admiration, and appreciation for them increases,” he said. “They instilled in me the value of respecting everyone, regardless of background and circumstances.”

Gerard Gibert believes Mississippi is on the rise. “One cannot help but be influenced by Mississippi’s culture of decency, hard work, and concern for fellow Mississippians,” he stated. “Mississippians are indeed the state’s most precious asset and our greatest tool to recruit business investment. We have an extraordinary story to tell, and the world is taking note.”