

## The STAR Program

The Mississippi Economic Council's Student-Teacher Achievement Recognition Program has saluted the academic achievements of the state's outstanding high school students and teachers for 60 years. This year's class joins more than 20,000 top scholars and leading teachers who have qualified for recognition in the STAR program, the most prestigious educational recognition program in the state. STAR Students are seniors with the highest ACT scores (minimum 25) and scholastic averages (minimum 93) in their high schools. They are chosen from more than 300 public, private, and parochial schools. STAR scholarships are provided by the Kelly Gene Cook, Sr. Charitable Foundation. This year, the top ALL-STAR Scholar will receive a four-year \$24,000 scholarship awarded at \$6,000 per year. The first runner-up will receive a four-year \$20,000 scholarship; the second runner-up scholar will receive a four-year \$16,000 scholarship. The STAR Teachers of these top students each will receive a \$1,000 award. Each of the remaining ALL-STAR Scholars will receive a \$1,000 scholarship, with his or her STAR Teacher receiving a \$500 award. The Kelly Gene Cook, Sr. Charitable Foundation gives unselfishly to support the educational endeavors of the Student Teacher Achievement Recognition program. It has been an honor to have received over 20 years of incredible support.

### 2025 ALL-STAR STUDENTS & ALL-STAR TEACHERS



*Biloxi High School*  
Thomas H. Mueller



Terri C. Strickland



Jeffrey H. Anderson



Leigh A. Smith



Clinton Christian Academy  
Wilson G. Yi



Eric B. Michaelson



### STAR SCHOLARSHIP SPONSOR

KELLY GENE COOK, SR. CHARITABLE FOUNDATION, INC.

Kelly Gene Cook, Sr., was born in 1930 in French Camp, Mississippi. He graduated from Mississippi State University with a degree in Civil Engineering. Mr. Cook was a pipeliner for more than three decades. He joined Houston Contracting Company in 1956 and became vice president and general manager for domestic and foreign operations in 1971. In this capacity, he dealt with pipelines throughout the Middle East, Brazil, Trinidad, Ecuador, and Nigeria. In 1976, he and a partner formed Gregory & Cook, Inc., a pipeline contracting firm in Houston, Texas. Mr. Cook was active in the industry associations, serving on the boards of the International Pipeline Contractors Association and the American Pipeline Contractors Association. In 1986, Mr. Cook and his wife, Peggy, formed the Kelly Gene Cook, Sr. Charitable Foundation, Inc. The Foundation primarily provides funds to support religious, charitable, scientific, and educational organizations in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. Mr. Cook died on November 27, 1989. Since 1997 the Cook Foundation has provided more than two million dollars in STAR scholarships and awards.



Jackson Preparatory School  
William R. Morgan



Marsha M. Hobbs



Lewisburg High School  
Anh T. Ha



Maggie S. Dennis



Madison Central High School  
Thomas E. Waters



Chuck Reynolds



Clinton High School  
Owen T. McCleese



Joshua G. McAdams



Jaxon K. Long



Mary K. Ruff



Gulfport High School  
Jackson A. Pearce



Dorshandrell Pitts



Ocean Springs High School  
Julia A. Philippoff



Brittany K. Neal



Saint Andrew's Episcopal School  
Verena C. Bhagat



Sallie R. Moseley



Richard H. Burrow



James C. Foley



Jackson Preparatory School  
Henry R. Jordan



Hunter Upchurch



Jackson Preparatory School  
Allie L. Landry



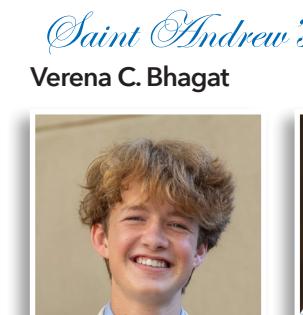
Richard N. Devine



Saint Andrew's Episcopal School  
Celia E. Lane



Marks S. McWhorter



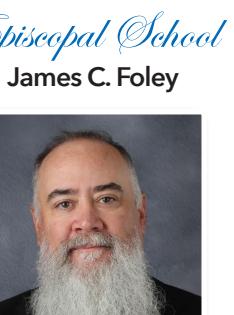
Saint Augustine School  
Eason M. Forster



Jessica McGehee



David G. Williams



Jeffrey L. Anderson



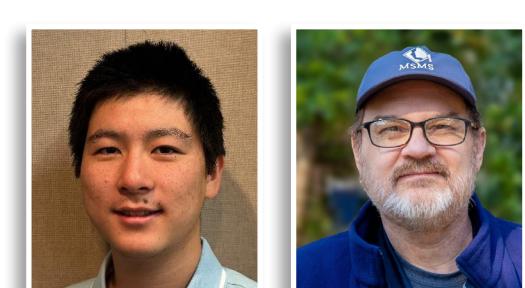
L-R: Scott Waller, MEC President and CEO & Lewis Whitfield

### BOB PITTMAN EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP AWARD

Lewis Whitfield is senior consultant of CREATE Foundation. He retired from a 32-year banking career in 2004, having served as president of four banks in Tupelo. He has served as chairman of the board for the MEC, Community Development Foundation, Good Samaritan Health Services, All Saints Episcopal Church, Yocona Area Council of Boy Scouts of America, CREATE Foundation, the Tupelo Symphony Orchestra, United Methodist Senior Services - Tupelo Area, Inc., North Mississippi Health Services, and Good Samaritan Free Clinic. He is a founder and past president of the Association of Excellence in Education and past president of Tupelo Rotary Club. Whitfield was named Tupelo's Outstanding Citizen in 2000 and the Jack Reed, Sr. Community Leadership Award in 2024. Whitfield received B.S. and M.B.A. degrees from Mississippi State. He is a graduate of the School of Banking of the South at L.S.U. He served as an army intelligence officer, a management consultant with KPMG, and a U.S. Senate aide. In addition, Whitfield has served as a member on the following boards: MSU Development Foundation, MSU Alumni Foundation, United Way of Northeast Mississippi, Community Federal Bancorp, Inc., First Bank Capital Corporation, MidSouth Corporation and Journal Publishing Company.



**Bob W. Pittman** served as President and CEO of MEC for 32 years. He was a leader who dedicated his life's work to strengthening the education system, improving county government, and developing legislation to create a robust business climate.



The Mississippi School for Mathematics & Science  
Andrew R. Keen



Jonathan C. Begnaud



### PEGGY HOWARD AWARD OF DISTINCTION

The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science had nine STAR Students and was awarded the Peggy Howard Award of Distinction for a record number of STAR Students in 2025.



### TOP THREE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

L-R: Mississippi's Top All-STAR 2025 and winner of a \$24,000 scholarship Verena C. Bhagat, and All-STAR Teacher Sallie R. Moseley from St. Andrew's Episcopal School; 1st Runner-Up STAR Student and winner of a \$20,000 scholarship Ryan Boyd Wu and STAR Teacher William Keith Funderburk from The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science; 2nd Runner-Up and winner of a \$16,000 scholarship Andrew Russell Keen and STAR Teacher Jonathan C. Begnaud from Tupelo High School.

### Education Celebration Pinnacle Sponsors



### 2025 STAR STUDENT & STAR TEACHER SPONSORS

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Cooperative ENERGY



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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES  
of Mississippi



e-entergy



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SHIPBUILDING  
A Division of



Mississippi  
Power



Trustmark



YATES

#### REGIONAL

Chevron Products Company

PASCAGOULA

Community Foundation  
FOR MISSISSIPPI CHARITABLE ENVIRONMENT FUND



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of Mississippi



Ergon  
Foundation



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FOUNDATION  
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College



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Understanding You.

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MINACT, Inc.

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Jackson State University

• Mississippi College

Mississippi State University

• Mississippi University for Women

The University of Southern Mississippi • University of Mississippi