



TREES FALL ONTO HIGHWAY 49 STOPPING TRAFFIC - Traffic on Highway 49 South, just south of Richland Monday, around 2 p.m., was brought to a halt after two trees fell across the southbound lanes of Highway 49. Crews from

Florence quickly removed the trees and traffic resumed. Heavy rain and high winds came through the area knocking down trees and power lines.

Florence businessman invests in Florence apartments

By Marcus Bowers

Derek Puckett, owner of Fitness Plex in Florence, grew up between Florence and Brandon. He graduated from Brandon High School and attended church at Florence.

In November, Puckett said he closed the deal on the purchase of 22 apartments just south of the railroad tracks on Main Street in Florence. The apartments usually provided living space for college students attending Wesley College.

Puckett said he saw an opportunity when Wesley College announced it was closing. "I felt it would be a great business opportunity to own the apartment complex and make an investment in Florence," said Puckett.

He said after the purchase was completed, he began a complete renovation of the apartments. Puckett said all but three apartments have been renovated and have been leased. "I took out some of the walls and enlarged some of the rooms

and we fixed some of the apartments for washer and dryer hookups." He said the apartments range from 800 to 1,000 square feet in size.

Renovation included new cabinets, back splashes in the kitchens and new appliances.

"The apartments are great for young couples just starting out or for professionals who want a quiet place to live. We have several young professionals like teachers and professors living here now.



PUCKETT INVESTS IN FLORENCE - Florence businessman Derek Puckett purchased the 22 apartments next to the railroad on Main Street. Following renovations of the apart-

ments, he has leased all but three of the apartments. Pictured is Puckett standing in front of some of the apartments.

Flowood pondering smoking ban

By Charles Bailey

FLOWOOD- City leaders have scheduled an April hearing to gather citizen input on a proposed ordinance that would ban smoking in restaurants and other businesses.

The public hearing will be held during the April 4 meeting of the Flowood Board of Aldermen. Among Rankin County municipalities, Pearl and Brandon have recently enacted similar no-smoking ordinances.

"As other cities have banned smoking, we're looking at doing the same thing," Mayor Gary Rhoads said.

"With the surrounding cities already putting it in place, I don't expect much opposition at all."

Most of Flowood's restaurants already prohibit indoor smoking. In the few eateries where smoking is allowed, it is relegated to areas located away from the main dining sections of the buildings.

Flowood's proposed ordinance, if approved, would ban smoking inside all restaurants and require that hotels and motels designate at least 80 percent of their rooms as non-smoking rooms. Smoking would also be off-limits in "enclosed areas within

places of employment, without exception." Smoking areas could be designated outside of affected buildings, as long as those areas are at least 20 feet away from entrances, windows, or ventilation systems.

"On behalf of the Mississippi Tobacco-Free Coalition of Rankin, Scott, and Simpson Counties and statewide health advocates, we are very pleased that the Flowood aldermen and women have taken the initiative to protect the residents, employees, children and visitors that work, live and play in Flowood against the dangers of secondhand smoke," Program Director Tawni Basden said.

"Everyone deserves to breathe smoke-free air," she said. "There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Smoke-free workplace law is necessary for the health and well-being of all Mississippians."

Each year, 550 non-smoking residents of Mississippi die from exposure to secondhand smoke, Basden said.

"I personally don't enjoy eating food and smelling smoke," Mayor Rhoads said.

"I don't have a problem if people want to smoke," he said. "That's their choice, but they don't have to do it around kids, and have them inhaling it. If we're going to be a family-oriented place where you can take your family out to eat, we don't need to be subjecting our kids to that."

If approved, a first-offense violation of the ordinance could result in a \$50 fine. Owners or managers of businesses who fail to comply with the terms of the ordinance can be fined \$100 for a first offense, \$200 for a second violation, and up to \$500

New warning sirens up, running

By Charles Bailey

FLORENCE- Monday provided a good opportunity to test five new weather warning sirens recently installed in various locations around the county.

A strong line of storms moved through around 2:30 p.m., toppling trees in south Rankin County. Lanes of U.S. Highway 49 South in Florence were temporarily blocked by fallen trees, and power outages were reported in the area. Trees were also toppled along Miss. Highway 469.

After Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funding was pledged to allow for the purchase of 10 new sirens for Rankin County, the funding was later reduced to an amount that would only pay for five of the devices. County officials have applied for an additional round of funding, and are awaiting action on that request.

District One Supervisor Jared Morrison says his top priority is to get a siren located in the Clear Branch community, which was among the list of designated sites before funding was reduced.

The community of Star, which also lies within the district Morrison represents, re-

ceived one of the recently-installed sirens, along with the Patrick Farms area, the Robinhood community, Buckingham subdivision near the Reservoir, and Gulde-Shiloh Road near Brandon.

"We needed one in Star, don't get me wrong," Morrison said. "But the (original) plan was to have one in Star, Clear Branch, and Mountain Creek," he said. "There has always been a storm pattern through there, coming from the west moving northeast."

District Three Supervisor Greg Wilcox has a weather siren priority for his district as well—the rapidly-growing Greenfield Community where Live Oaks, Cedar Stone East, Woodbridge, and Cedar Ridge subdivisions are located.

"That area has grown exponentially over the past 10 years, and it will continue to grow," Wilcox said. "When (funding) was cut from 10 to five, I was not real happy because that was one of my priorities for getting a siren."

County Fire Coordinator Tommy Steen said there are currently 32 sirens located within unincorporated areas of Rankin County, and approximately 49 located inside municipalities. He said each device has a blast radius of

about one mile.

"The sirens certainly do have their place, but we still recommend that everyone have an alternate means of obtaining weather information," Steen said.

A NOAA weather radio can be tuned to alert listeners to weather bulletins relating to their particular location.



NEW SIRENS UP - Five new weather warning sirens have been installed in Rankin County, including the Patrick Farms area, the Robinhood and Star communities, Buckingham subdivision near the Reservoir, and along Gulde-Shiloh Road near Brandon. The county received FEMA funding for the purchase, and officials have applied for an additional round of funding.

Scucchi named Community Volunteer of the Year by JARC

The Junior Auxiliary of Rankin County (JARC) will honor Robby Scucchi as its Community Volunteer of the Year on March 26.

In a sense, the award will pay tribute to two people. Scucchi says it was his late mother, Brenda Scucchi, who taught him that "time and compassion are meant to be given away." Even when she was sick with cancer, she never stopped thinking of others.

"My mom was always out volunteering for something, not for the praise, but for the sheer kindness in her heart," said Scucchi, director of volunteer services at Methodist Specialty Care Center in Flowood. "She is my greatest inspiration."

The JARC will recognize Scucchi during its Sweet Charity Ball at the Castlewoods Country Club in Rankin County. And Charity Ball Chairwoman April Savell said Scucchi was speechless when she told him the news.

"It's not that often that a non-auxiliary member receives the award, so I'm truly honored," Scucchi said. "Volunteerism is a way of life with me, so I am very touched that people notice the good that other people do, whether it's within their own organization or for others."

It's not the first time Scucchi has been singled out for his service. The Greenville native was the 2003 Volunteer of the Year for the Greenville Area Chamber of Commerce. And in 2004, Gov. Haley Barbour recognized his outstanding volunteer efforts with Mississippi high school students.

Now a Hinds County resident, Scucchi caught the eye of the JARC through his role at Methodist Specialty Care Center. Soon after coming to the residential care facility in 2004, Scucchi began recruiting JARC members to help him enrich the lives of the center's severely disabled residents.

"We do one function a month, and Robby is key in planning what we do," said JARC member Brook Atkinson. "He is so creative, and he makes it so much fun that several of us do a lot more than our required 12-hour project. Many of us have even gotten our husbands and children involved. We've gotten to know the residents, and they have all become very special to us."

Jan Robertson, Methodist Specialty Care Center



ROBBY SCUCCHI

administrator, said Scucchi was able to build the center's volunteer program from the ground up, and it is his passion. "Robby has a love for what he does, and you see that in his actions every day," she said.

Scucchi currently has 83 volunteers on the program's roster, and they help staff keep the center's 59 residents busy. "We are offered activities each month that allow us to enjoy a sense of community," said center resident Oscar Hicks. "We attend local baseball games, theatrical events, religious services and lots of fun activities inside the facility that assist in keeping us active and improve our quality of life."

Scucchi also has become a mentor for others involved in volunteerism. He conducts workshops for nonprofits, ranging from the Southeastern Directors of Volunteer Services in Healthcare Organizations (SDVSHO) to the Mississippi Center for Nonprofits. In 2004, he became the only director of volunteer services in Mississippi to be certified through SDVSHO, and he now serves on its board. In 2005, Scucchi was elected as the president of the Directors of Volunteers in Agencies. He spent three years in that position, increasing membership and programs by nearly 35 percent.

"Robby has an uncanny ability to network appropriate people, organizations and tasks together to mobilize volunteers and volunteer leaders in a manner that not only gets the job done, but inspires volunteers and orga-

nizations to serve their communities at the highest level possible," said Elizabeth Coleman, volunteer services administrator for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Outside of work, Scucchi contributes hours of volunteer time to a long list of community organizations. He has held board positions with The Mississippi Delta Advertising Federation, The Delta Symphony Association, The March of Dimes, The American Cancer Society, The United Way, The Mississippi Firefighters Memorial Burn Association, The American Heart Association, The Greenville Balloon Festival, the Greenville Area Chamber of Commerce's Special Events Committee and the Jackson State University Advisory Board, just to name a few.

In 2008, Scucchi was awarded the prestigious Camellia Award by the Alabama Society of Directors of Volunteer Services in Health Care Organizations for his outstanding contributions as a leader of volunteers in a health care organization. This honor has never been given outside of the state of Alabama. Scucchi also was commissioned a Kentucky Colonel in 2005, the highest honor award given by the Commonwealth of Kentucky by Gov. Ernie Fletcher.

But Scucchi says the best reward is knowing his mother would be proud of his service. "My mom instilled in me the value of giving to others," he said. "I feel both passionate and fortunate about what I do."

HEALTH FAIR

"Our Elder Services Committee put this together," said Mandi Arinder, Events Coordinator for the Chamber. "It's primarily geared toward seniors, but it's open to anybody who wants to come."

River Oaks Health Systems, Performance Rehab, and the Chamber are joining forces to sponsor and organize the event.

"We'll have cholesterol checks, blood sugar and blood pressure checks, hearing and vision exams, and vendors who will be available to discuss fitness for seniors, Parkinson's Disease, nursing homes, and hospice and home health services," Arinder said.

Officials from Belhaven College will attend the Health Fair to discuss educational opportunities for seniors, and assorted experts from the health care industry will also be on hand.

The theme for the event is Jazz Up Your Health in 2011, so in keeping with the spirit, coffee and beignets will be

served during the Fair.

"We're hoping to have 300 to 500 people come through," said Terri Wood, who coordinates Senior Events in the City of Richland.

"Senior programs are just soaring in Rankin County," she said. "With the new facility that has been built at Hinds, and with the number of hospitals that we have here, we thought this was something we could provide that would be beneficial for our senior citizens."

The Muse Center is located at the rear of the Hinds CC campus, near Interstate 20 and just east of Pearl High School.

"It's a brand new building, and this will be the second event they'll have there," Arinder said of the Muse Center. "The first is our Business Expo, which is the week before the Health Fair."

The Chamber's Business Expo will be held March 24. For more information on the Health Fair, contact the Chamber at 601-825-2268.