

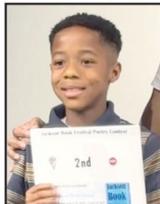
# ENTERTAINMENT



Samaya Johnson



Alicia Porter (left) and Meredith Coleman McGee



Mathis Harlee



Denver Winston (left) and Vickie Jenkins

## Community Library Mississippi hosts 8th Annual Jackson Book Festival

BY MEREDITH C. MCGEE  
JA Guest Writer

Community Library Mississippi presented the 8th Annual Jackson Book Festival, on Saturday, Mar. 29, 2025, at the Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center, located at 528 Bloom Street in downtown Jackson's Historic Farish Street District.

Among the local authors participating in this event were Dr. Ivory Phillips, Sharon Russell Robinson, and this writer. Other authors include Mary Hardy, Rosaline Landrews, Darrion Arrington, and Rev. Jo A. Baldwin from Greenville, McComb, Laurel, and Kosciusko, Mississippi.

There was a special appearance from famed Mississippi icon and author James Howard Meredith, now age 91. The icon's daughter Jessica Knight Taylor presented his book pitch, and she and her son James Meredith Knight handled book sales.

In 1966, with the release of "Three Years in Mississippi," Meredith became the first published author in his family. He released a volume of 26 books in the 1990s and two full length memoirs and several books since. This writer is his niece, the event organizer, and first person in this family to produce the books written by other authors through her publishing house called Meredith, Etc. To date, the works of 23 authors have been produced.

From 2018 to 2024, the Jackson Book Festival events were held at the Jackson Medical Mall on Woodrow Wilson Avenue.

The event also featured the 13th Jackson Book Festival Poetry Contest. This writer, who chairs Community Library Mississippi, launched the Jackson Book Festival Poetry Contest in 2018. Vickie Jenkins, the vice chair of Community Library Mississippi, has been holding this program together.

There were two categories of poetry contestants. The first is Elementary/Middle School age students. They were required to write one stanza with at least four lines. The second is High School and Adult. The three judges were Arlisha McGee Ross, Shrie Stanford, and Deborah Fox Young. Judging criteria were showmanship, sound quality, expression and appeal, poise, eye contact, mannerism, appearance and attire, and originality.

Denver Winston, of Hillcrest Christian School, won first place (\$50) in the Elementary School Contest. She wrote her poem "Painting Seeds of Generations," about her farming experience on her family farm. "She is the best tractor driver on the farm," bragged her grandfather, Ben Burkett, a farmer with Indian Springs Farming Cooperatives in Petal, MS. Her score card was 100, 100, and 96.

Mathis Harlee, Casey Elementary School, won 2nd place for his poem "I Love My Church." Mathis expressed his passion for Church and God. His score card was 100, 99, and 94. He is the youngest son of Mississippi House of Representative Zakiya Summers.

The cash prize (\$50) winner of the High School/Adult Poetry Contest was Khadiya Spaezi-Aziz. When asked why

she wrote her poem, Spaezi-Aziz declared, "I wrote my poem, "... about my experience of getting out of an abusive relationship." The judges were blown away by her powerful presentation. Her score card was 100, 100, and 97. The Jackson Book Festival Poetry Contest was Khadiya's first stage appearance and her first time presenting a poem publicly.

Forest Hill High School 11th grader Samaya Johnson won 2nd place. She presented "The Melody of a Black Girl." Her scores were 93, 90, and 88. Her win was celebrated by multiple family members and friends.

Alicia Porter presented "To Be of Nothing, Consuming Stars," won 3rd place. Her score average was 86. Porter is the curator at the Smith Robertson Museum. She is also an artist. Her piece "A Self Portrait: Dream" is currently

displayed as part of a travelling exhibit at the museum.

Theresa King, manager, Smith Robertson Museum, welcomed the audience and guests to the museum. Volunteers from the Women of Fire Ministries of Mississippi provided guided tours to guests.

The Jackson Book Festival was formed by this writer and six other local authors: Hazel Janell Meredith, age 86; Mary Haralson Coleman, age 92; Loretha Wallace; Loretta Wallace Ellis; William Trest Jr.; and Fran Camper.

The Jackson Book Festival, a stage for the intellectual, is a registered program of Community Library Mississippi. Intellect Matters! For more information, visit <https://meredithetc.com/jackson-book-festival/>, <https://www.facebook.com/jacksonbookfestival/>, or email [communitylibrary.ms@gmail.com](mailto:communitylibrary.ms@gmail.com).

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## April Is Fair Housing Month

April has been designated Fair Housing month. Housing Education and Economic Development, Inc. (HEED) is a HUD approved Fair Housing Enforcement Agency. HEED's 36th Annual Fair Housing - Fair Lending Conference commemorates National Fair Housing Month and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. This year's theme is 'Fair Housing and Fair Lending Equals Open Doors'.

The federal Fair Housing Act was passed on April 11, 1968, seven days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King and other civil rights leaders advocated for passage of the

law for years, but it was only after King's death and at the urging of President Lyndon B. Johnson that Congress enacted the law. The current version of the law provides that it is illegal to discriminate against people seeking housing.

This year's conference will be held at the Hilton Hotel and Conference Center, 1001 County Line Road, Jackson, MS, on April 24th -25th, 2025. The conference registration fee is \$175.00. For more information, call 601-981-1960.

Mr. Charles Harris is the Executive Director.

Housing, Education and Economic Development  
36<sup>th</sup> Annual Fair Housing - Fair Lending Conference

### "Fair Housing and Fair Lending Equals Open Doors"

#### AGENDA

Thursday, April 24, 2025

- 7:45a - 8:30a Registration - Continental Breakfast
- 8:25a - 8:30a Welcome
- 8:30a - 9:30a  
**Eviction and the Fair Housing Act**  
Moderator: Rene Gallor - Fair Housing Enforcer - HEED - Jackson, MS  
Presenter: Ashley Richardson, Esq. - MS Center for Justice - Biloxi, MS
- 9:30a - 10:45a  
**Barriers to Minority Homeownership**  
Moderator: Tina Jones-V.P. of Homeownership-MS Home Corp. - Jackson, MS  
Presenter: Lisa Davis - President - Central MS Realtors Asso. -Jackson, MS  
Presenter: George Broadstreet - Vice President - Renasant Bank, Clinton, MS  
Presenter: Tra Alford - Comm. Deve. Director- Citizen's Bank - Meridian, MS
- 10:45a - 10:55a **Break**
- 11:00a - 12:30p  
**The Impact of Redlining**  
Moderator: Sam Buchanan, Esq.-Executive Director- MS Center for Legal Svc.  
Presenter: Jason Richardson-Sr. Director of Research- NCRC-Washington, D.C.
- 12:30p - 2:30p  
**HEED LUNCHEON**  
Guest Speaker: Edward L. Jennings, Jr. - CEO/President/Founder  
The Jennings Group, Inc. - Gainesville, FL
- 2:30p - 3:45p  
**The New Generation of Appraisals**  
Moderator: Lisa Davis - President -Central MS Realtors Asso. -Jackson, MS  
Presenter: Melissa Bond-Certified Residential Appraiser- MS and LA  
Presenter: E.C. Neelly, IV-Exec. Director- MS Real Estate Appraisal Board
- 3:45p - 4:30p  
**What Realtors Should Know About Fair Housing**  
Moderator: Ursula Thompson-Eco. Dev. Compliance-MDA - Jackson, MS  
Presenter: Rene Gallor - Fair Housing Enforcer - HEED- Jackson, MS  
Presenter: Alexia Smokler -Fair Housing Program Policy Director-NAR

### 4:30p HEED Networking Reception

## 7 CEU's for Real Estate Professionals

Friday, April 25, 2025

- 7:45a - 8:45a Registration - Continental Breakfast
- 8:45a - 9:45a  
**Barriers, Budgets and Basics of Credit Related to Homeownership**  
Moderator: Sherry Rainey-V.P./Dir. Corp. Social Resp. Trustmark Bank-Jackson, MS  
Presenter: Billy Humble-Financial Wellness Coach-Operation HOPE, Jackson, MS
- 9:45a - 10:45a  
**Mississippi Home Corporation - Home 4 All**  
Moderator: David Hancock-V.P./Executive Division-Jackson, MS  
Panelist: Tina Jones-Vice President of Homeownership - Jackson, MS
- 10:45a-11:00a **Break**
- 11:00a -11:45a **Open Forum**
- 12:30p- until  
**HEED AWARDS LUNCHEON**  
Guest Speaker: Alexia Smokler -Fair Housing Program Policy Director  
National Association of Realtors  
Washington, D.C.

#### ALEXIA SMOKLER

Alexia Smokler is the Director of Fair Housing Policy and Programs at the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR). Based in Washington, DC, she advocates for homeownership opportunity and fair housing enforcement to Congress and federal agencies. Alexia also leads NAR's programs and initiatives to advance fair housing in the real estate industry, including fair housing self-testing for brokerages and innovative training like Fairhaven, A Fair Housing Simulation. Before joining NAR, Alexia worked in fair housing enforcement at HUD, on the staff of Congressman John Conyers, Jr., and with non-profit civil rights organizations.



#### EDWARD JENNINGS, JR.

Among the many accolades he has received, a portion of Edward Jennings, Jr.'s recent public service includes being a Presidential Appointee - SE Regional Administrator, US Department of Housing and Urban Development (2010-2016). The largest regional office with approximately 11-13 remote field offices, 60 direct reports, and total management of 950-1100 Federal Civil Service Staff Members. Geographically, this encompasses the states of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Tennessee and Puerto Rico/ Virgin Islands - or more than 70 million people.

He managed all Secretarial/White House Initiatives; manages relationships with 900-1000 Public Housing Authorities and over 250 entitlement communities; established and implanted Regional Operating Plan; oversaw the implementation of all Union issues as negotiated in the collective bargaining agreement (CBA); and was elected to the Florida House of Representatives, District 23 Gainesville/Ocala from 2000-2006. The Gainesville native is also the Founder/President/CEO of Jennings Development Group Inc., a real estate development firm that [1997-2010] became an economic vehicle for revitalizing east Gainesville.

He has received many awards and honors that include Friend of Public Education [Florida Education]; Florida Housing Award [Florida Housing Coalition]; Innovative Legislator Award [Florida Council of Technology Leader] and the Gwendolyn Sawyer Cherry Memorial Award [NAACP].

