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Connie Whitt Named Small Business Development Center State Star

Director of two south Mississippi locations honored for 'service before self'

AUGUST 18, 2019 BY MICHELLE THOMPSON



Connie Whitt

OXFORD, Miss. – Connie Whitt, director of the **Mississippi Small Business Development Center** locations at the University of Southern Mississippi and on the Gulf Coast, has been named the 2019 Mississippi state star.

State stars are chosen annually, one per state from among the employees of the SBDC. A state star is an exemplary performer, must make a significant contribution to his or her state SBDC and shows a strong commitment to small business.

Whitt was nominated by fellow MSBDC staff members for outstanding leadership of both centers and for her "service before self" philosophy.

"She is a tireless creator, developer, advocate and encourager for our small business entrepreneurs and for our entire south Mississippi SBDC team, all without fanfare for self-acclaim," said Rita Mitchell, counselor for the USM center.

With more than three decades of entrepreneurial experience, Whitt began working part time at MSBDC in 2010 as a counselor at the Gulf Coast office in Biloxi, where she is director. Last February, she was asked to also lead the USM center in Hattiesburg.

Whitt has more than risen to the challenge, and both south Mississippi centers are thriving under her guidance and leadership, Mitchell said. She has a heart for the underserved populations of south Mississippi and has been instrumental in developing specialized workshops to address these communities.

She partnered with a local nonprofit, the Mississippi Coalition for the Vietnamese-American Fisherfolk and Families, to help the Vietnamese community rebuild after Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill. This population is frequently unbanked, causing problems when disaster relief agencies need financial records to provide relief funds.

Whitt designed a workshop that brought the fishermen together with local bankers, provided one-on-one counseling and, when needed, a translator to help them set their businesses up correctly.

A member of the Choctaw-Apache tribe of Ebarb, Louisiana, Whitt is also a role model to other minority women entrepreneurs.

"Many women, single moms especially, have opted to start their own businesses instead of working two or three jobs to make ends meet," she said.

Whitt has helped many women of color complete the extensive paperwork process required to be certified as a minority to be eligible for Mississippi Development Authority funding. She also helped them get business plans together with financial projections to complete the process.

"There's not much help for minority women who want to start a business in south Mississippi except for the MSBDC," Whitt said. "I was happy to help them anyway that I could, and sometimes that was just listening to their stories."

"We are so honored to announce Connie Whitt as our 2019 Mississippi Small Business Development Center state star," said Sharon Nichol, the center's state director. "Connie truly embodies our motto of 'transforming Mississippi, one small business at a time.' Her hard work and dedication to service is a lesson to us all on how to live well."

The MSBDC is an accredited member of America's Small Business Development Centers and is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the **U.S. Small Business Administration** through the

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OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates'

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University of Mississippi. The center's administrative office is on the Ole Miss campus.

For more information about the MSBDC, call Michelle Thompson, communications specialist for Mississippi SBDC, at 662-915-000 or amthomp1015@gmail.com.

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