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3-27-2019

Greenhouse Brings New Learning Experiences to Willie Price

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Recommended Citation

Murphy, Kathleen, "Greenhouse Brings New Learning Experiences to Willie Price" (2019). *University of Mississippi News*. 2201.

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Greenhouse Brings New Learning Experiences to Willie Price

New facility will feed children, support UM Food Bank

MARCH 27, 2019 BY KATHLEEN MURPHY



UM graduate student Tess Johnson and children at Willie Price Lab School plant seeds at the new greenhouse. Photo by Megan Wolfe/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – A new greenhouse promises to promote healthy eating habits and offer hands-on learning opportunities to pre-K children at the **University of Mississippi's Willie Price Lab School**, as well as providing fresh vegetables for needy UM students through the Ole Miss Food Bank.

Tess Johnson, a UM graduate student in health promotion and mother of a **Willie Price** student, led an effort to build the greenhouse with an \$8,000 grant from the UM **Green Fund**. The facility was completed earlier this month.

A preschool operated by the UM **School of Education**, Willie Price serves the LOU community with pre-K education for 3- and 4-year-olds.

"My hope for the graduate students at Willie Price is that they will be able to see how they can implement a program that is big or small into their classroom and use more hands-on opportunities," Johnson said. "Teachers will be able to be as creative with the greenhouse as they want to be.

"As a new teacher, it can be overwhelming to bring your class outside for learning experiences. Hopefully, the greenhouse will make them comfortable and excited about curriculum outside of the classroom. "

With the greenhouse program, children will chart plant growth, analyze plant parts and life cycles, and incorporate creative activities, such as sketching and journaling plants, as part of the Willie Price curriculum.

"The Green Fund Committee felt that this was an important project to fund because it will provide experiential learning opportunities to pre-K students as well as UM students involved in Willie Price," said Lindsey Abernathy, chair of the UM Green Fund and associate director of the UM Office of Sustainability. "The food that we eat is directly connected to the health of our bodies, the environment and local economies.

"The greenhouse project will expand the good work already being done at Willie Price and help students learn firsthand where their food comes from and how whole foods grown with sustainable practices impact their health and well-being, which are important components of fostering sustainability in our community."

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Campus Briefs

Civil Engineering Professor Receives Most-Cited Paper Award

OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation's capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

In fall 2017, Johnson implemented a gardening program at Willie Price when the opportunity was presented with a few small plots of soil outside. Last fall, the school ordered a tower garden, which is a soilless, vertical aeroponic growing system with a faster turnaround than traditional growing, to place in the school's lobby so children could see the plants' growth day by day.



Tess Johnson, a UM graduate student in health promotion and mother of a Willie Price student, received \$8,000 from the UM Green Fund to build the greenhouse for Willie Price Lab School. Photo by Megan Wolfe/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

With the grant from the UM Green Fund, three new tower gardens will be added to the greenhouse.

"They have seen the process take place three times now since the fall," Johnson said. "I have noticed that the kids are more willing to try new foods and pick it off the plant and eat it because they are a part of the entire process.

"That's what I love about the gardening and towers and greenhouses because kids get to be involved from seed to harvest so they really start to connect with healthy food. We hope through this process that kids' perspectives of vegetables will change."

The children plant seeds and transfer the plants to the tower garden, watch them grow and then harvest the crops. When they harvested the first crops, some children were more willing to try vegetables that they had grown, prompting Johnson to write a grant to expand the gardening program.

"Watching my daughter's perception change about vegetables through the gardening program has been really interesting," said Ashley Crumby, parent of a child at Willie Price. "You would not expect a 4-year-old to like vegetables, but she requested that we eat salad the other night, which I know is a direct response to Tess's gardening program.

"As a young child, she understands the life cycle of a plant and what they need to grow from garden to plate, which has encouraged her to eat vegetables since she has been a part of that process."

Another goal of the greenhouse program is to use part of the harvests in the Willie Price cafeteria and to donate to the Ole Miss Food Bank. The lab school will be growing leafy greens, tomatoes, cucumbers and herbs, among other crops, in the greenhouse.



Tess Johnson, graduate student, plants seeds with children at the Willie Price Lab School greenhouse. A child plants seeds in the new Willie Price greenhouse, which promises to enhance the school's curriculum and support the UM Food Bank. Photo by Megan Wolfe/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

Teachers also will grow flowering plants for learning purposes. Instead of talking about plant parts or the life cycle of plants and what they need to grow inside, teachers can take their classes outside so the children will be able to see it in person in a hands-on environment.

Johnson's plan after graduation is to continue gardening programs on a larger scale in schools around the state, including the Oxford School District. She is working with Bramlett Elementary School and Della Davidson Elementary School in Oxford to expand their gardening programs with tower gardens.

Johnson said she thinks that if healthy eating is promoted at a young age, it will continue to build throughout children's lifetimes.

"The staff at Willie Price, including the two directors, have been so supportive of this program," she said. "They have been so open to these opportunities, so I'm so thankful for them to be able to see the learning opportunities that kids have from a growing program."

The UM Green Fund is administered by a committee of students, faculty and staff to support innovative sustainability projects on campus. It is funded by a baseline contribution of \$15,000 a year from the university, and also through donations.

All Ole Miss students and employees are eligible to request project funding from the Green Fund, which accepts applications each November.

The Willie Price Lab School is expanding for the 2019-20 school year, adding another classroom for both 3- and 4-year-olds. For more information, contact the school at 915-7444 or williepr@olemiss.edu.

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