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Ole Miss Builds Safety Net for Students

Emergency 'family fund' will help students in crisis

FEBRUARY 25, 2014 BY KATE MORRISON

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UM Student Body President Gregory Alston, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Brandi Hephner LaBanc and Chancellor Dan Jones are encouraged by initial support for the Ole Miss Family Fund, a new initiative of the Division of Student Affairs to support UM students facing family emergencies and hardships.

OXFORD, Miss. – Everyone can identify with a life-changing crisis of one kind or another: unexpected illness, death of a family member or loss of property due to natural disaster. These types of emergencies often put families on hard times, both financially and emotionally. For a University of Mississippi student, such an event could easily lead to a leave of absence or complete disenrollment.

Previously, if a costly emergency affected an Ole Miss student, no resources were available to the Division of Student Affairs to assist students with travel, temporary housing or other unexpected expenses. Brandi Hephner LaBanc,

vice chancellor for student affairs, first recognized this need in 2012 and began working to establish the Ole Miss Family Fund Endowment with the help of Ole Miss parents, the UM Foundation and others.

“We had incidents in my first semester that alerted me to this need,” Hephner LaBanc said. “Most universities, including ours, used to have a budget line that allowed for this type of discretionary spending, but over time they disappeared due to increasing expenses. Establishing an endowment to address the issue creates a reliable fund to support our students indefinitely. To name it the Ole Miss Family Fund made perfect sense; Ole Miss is known for being a family.

“However, there are times now when our support can only go so far. This endowment will allow us to extend our abilities one step further and help tangibly apply our mission and the true Ole Miss family spirit.”

The Ole Miss Family Fund, or OMFF, will help cover costs when the Division of Student Affairs identifies a student in need. The emergency fund may purchase textbooks, help with rent or assist with other costs to enable a student with an immediate crisis to stay enrolled and in good standing.

“Our professors or staff members often become aware of a student who is suffering a personal crisis and want to know the appropriate way to reach out and help,” Hephner LaBanc said. “Right now, we do our best, but having the Family Fund to draw upon would be a game-changer.”

Recent generous gifts totaling more than \$25,000 have endowed the OMFF. The first came from the Madison Charitable Foundation, an organization whose support of UM and the UM Medical Center’s Batson Hospital for Children fits well within the spirit of “family support.”

“The Madison Charitable Foundation has a tremendous passion for providing scholarship support for Ole Miss students who might not otherwise have been able to afford to attend college,” said Sarah Hollis, associate director of University Development. “Their gift to the OMFF will ensure funding is available to help students stay in school while they weather whatever storm they may be facing.”

Additionally, the UM Foundation chose to designate funds to the OMFF as its annual holiday gift.

“Each year the foundation designates funds toward one of the university’s goals as a holiday gift in honor of our board of directors and their dedication to our efforts,” said Wendell Weakley, president and CEO of the UM Foundation. “We could not have picked a more appropriate fund this year, as the Ole Miss Family Fund speaks directly to UM’s mission of accessibility to higher education and nurturing support from enrollment to graduation. We are pleased that Dr. Hephner LaBanc identified this need for Ole Miss and look forward to helping the Family Fund grow.”

Upon receiving the foundation’s holiday card, Louis and Lucia Brandt of Houston, Texas, sought more information on the OMFF. Hearing the fund’s mission, their gift immediately followed.

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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

"When I realized that this fund existed, I was very touched and wanted to be a part of the effort," Louis Brandt said. "Providing financial support for students in times of crisis is consistent with the caring culture of Ole Miss. I am blessed to be able to share my good fortune, which in large part is a result of having graduated from Ole Miss and the friendships I developed during that time. I hope that my support of the Ole Miss Family Fund will provide others with the same opportunity."

Ole Miss students' parents and family members have been among the most responsive during fundraising efforts.

"We speak often of the support of the 'Ole Miss family' for academics, athletics and especially for our students," said Brett Barefoot, director of development for Ole Miss Parents Leadership. "This fund will offer true reinforcement when a student finds him or herself in a bind. Our Ole Miss parents see this as an extension of our promise to support our students, and I hope more will join us as we build this fund."

Future fundraising efforts will bolster the endowment as well as provide resources to activate the fund.

"The big impact here is that we could change a student's mind about withdrawing from Ole Miss," Hephner LaBanc said. "Whether they are faced with a \$2,500 or a \$200 issue, the student will know that Ole Miss is not just a place they go to class, but truly a community that will support them and help them succeed. We want to help them graduate and get that dream job."

Individuals and organizations interested in supporting the Ole Miss Family Fund Endowment can mail a check with the fund noted in the memo line to the University of Mississippi Foundation, P.O. Box 249, University, MS 38677; contact Brett Barefoot, director of development for Parents Leadership at bmbarefo@olemiss.edu or 662-915-2711; or visit <http://www.umfoundation.com/makeagift>.

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