

# MISSISSIPPI THEATRE ASSOCIATION

*Notes & News*



MAY 2010

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John Davenport (Oxford High) and Denise Halbach (Actor's Playhouse) display First Place Awards at SETC 2010.

## MTA Festival 2010 - Success!

Budgets may be tight but theatre is still going strong in Mississippi! In January over 550 people attended the 2010 MTA Festival in Tupelo, MS. Hosted by Tupelo Community Theatre and Tupelo High School, the 3-day weekend was a huge success! With 9 community theatre productions, 8 high school productions, 4 theatre for youth productions, 10-Minute plays and over 15 workshops, theatre enthusiasts from all over the state had plenty of opportunities to see some excellent productions. While the number of high schools attending the festival was down the number of community theatres participating in the festival was up. This year marked the largest number of community theatres participating in the festival, something that other states in the southeastern region envy.

Thirty high school students auditioned for colleges and universities from around the State in hopes of obtaining a scholarship to attend one of the participating institutions. This also provides these students with the real world experience of auditioning, something they will have to become accustomed to if they plan to continue in this profession. The colleges/universities involved in the audition process find this as an excellent means of seeing a large number of students at one time. Tim Matheny, Director of Theatre, William Carey College, who participated in the auditions said, "This is an excellent opportunity for me to meet students from all over the state, to learn about their interests and to encourage them to attend William Carey College." The college/university auditions are open to all junior/senior high school students as well as community college students interested in transferring to a university.

The 10-Minute Play Festival brought together students from all over the state to work toward a common goal of producing a play they wrote, directed, acted and performed onsite within 24 hours. Students don't typically get the opportunity to write their own scripts or direct a production. The 10-Minute Play Festival provided them with this unique opportunity to try their hand at different aspects of theatre. The Festival

## Mississippi Theatres Take Home First Place at SETC!

After having won the Best Production awards at the state festival held in January in Tupelo, two Mississippi theatres advanced to the Southeastern Theater Conference and won the regional festival's Best Production awards. Oxford High School of Oxford, MS and Actor's Playhouse of Pearl, MS took home the top honors at the SETC.

Oxford High School's performance of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber brought down the house at the regional festival and provided Oxford a slot to attend the state festival and eventually to win the Southeastern Theatre Conference's annual festival. Adjudicators at the state festival held in Tupelo in January thought the production was uniquely staged and exquisitely performed by the young cast. The director, John Davenport, won the best director award at both the state festival and the SETC conference. According to Davenport, "This was an incredible experience that I know my students and I will remember for a lifetime." Davenport was very proud of his students for working hard and giving such wonderful performances. Elijah Williams from Oxford High School and Landon Skipper from Pearl River Central High School were named to the All Star Cast at SETC. Pearl River Central High School also competed at the SETC and received very positive feedback for their performance.

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## From The President



"Now is the only time there is. Make your now wow, your minutes miracles, and your days pay. Your life will have been magnificently lived and invested, and when you die you will have made a difference."

- Mark Victor Hansen

So many people live in the future. Their thoughts always focused on what will come next, and they never take a moment to take in the sunshine, to smell the roses, and to truly live in the moment. We have so many great things going on with theatre in the state, that a lot of times we are living from show to show. We are always thinking of the next audition, the next rehearsal, the next opening night, the next cast party, and only after time has flown by we may have a moment to reflect on the past and to the times gone by.

Time flies by and you don't think about it until it is gone. Becoming President of the Mississippi Theatre Association was a long term goal of mine, and already one term is gone. When reflecting over the past year, I am proud of what we have accomplished, excited about the upcoming year, and saddened, just like the opening of a show, that as exciting as it is to begin you are also saddened that the term is almost at an end, and that this curtain will too close.

Of course the highlight over the last year was MTA 2010. The festival was an incredible success. Tupelo Community Theatre, Tupelo High School, and The City of Tupelo were incredible hosts for our flurry of activity. We had some incredible productions on the main stage, great side festivals, and workshops that were informative and fun! We also had an amazing experience at SETC in Lexington, Kentucky,

where we swept the top awards! Oxford High School won the secondary division "Best Play," with Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, and Actor's Playhouse won the community theatre division "Best Play" with Rabbit Hole. We were well represented Pearl River Central High School and Starkville Community Theatre as well, racking up All Star and Best Supporting Actress Awards. We also had a productive state meeting, which was well attended.

When looking to the events of the upcoming year, we are excited about partnering with the Mississippi Arts Commission for Arts in the Capitol Day, the MAAE, and Mississippi Public Broadcasting for potential opportunities to air theatrical productions. We also plan to host a town hall meeting in the delta in June, and a town hall meeting in Central Mississippi in July. Look forward to these town hall meetings as it is a great time for all local area theatres to get together to discover how you can help each other and how we can help you. We are also planning to bring workshops to these areas in conjunction with these meetings. We are additionally planning an out of the world secondary / community theatre workshop in October. This two-day workshop will focus on specific issues for secondary programs, specific issues for community theatres, and speakers who will address items of common interest to both divisions. If you are interested in hosting one of these town hall meetings, please contact us!

The highlight of this year will happen in January at MTA 2011. We are in final negotiations for the festival site, but I have to tell you.... some exciting things are being discussed, and this will be a festival that you will not want to miss!

But for now, enjoy your accomplishments as they happen. Take a moment to enjoy your time in the spotlight, live each moment to the fullest, and when the time comes, reflect back on your life in the theatre. I hope that it may be a full life where you have worked, like MTA, to make a difference to others, and have strived to make a difference.

-- Stacy Howell

## Perform Unpublished Works @ Your Theatre

Are you looking for a new, unpublished script to perform at your theatre? Consider producing one of the scripts found on the MTA Playwriting Competition. These unpublished scripts from Mississippi playwrights offer wonderful opportunities for your theatre to explore new works and potentially work with the author on the script. This might provide a unique opportunity for your theatre to showcase a wonderful new work. For more information visit the MTA Playwright's Directory at <http://www.mta-online.org/playwriting-competition/playwrights-directory>.



## 2010 MTA Officers and Board of Directors

During the annual membership meeting held during the 2010 Festival held in Tupelo officers for the 2010 year were elected. As you'll see from the list of officers we continue to make a point of ensuring that we have representation from each of the divisions. The 2010 Officers are:

President.....Stacy Howell, Center Players  
Vice President.....Suzanne Allmon, Oak Grove High School  
Treasurer.....Thomas Hardy, Just Over the Rainbow Theatre  
Secretary.....William "Peppy" Bidy, Mississippi University for Women  
Past President.....Tom Booth, Tupelo Community Theatre  
Executive Directo.....Stephen Cunetto, Starkville Community Theatre

Since the festival, President Stacy Howell has been working on appointing her Board of Directors from the membership. The Board of Directors for 2010 include:

Community Theatre Chair.....Craig Helmuth, Tupelo Community Theatre  
Community Theatre Vice Chair.....Thomas La Foe, Starkville Community Theatre  
Secondary Division Chair.....Mandy Kinney, Starkville High School  
Secondary Division Vice Chair.....Sandra Camphor, Ocean Springs High School  
10-Minute Festival Chair.....Barbara Smith, Louisville High School  
10-Minute Festival Vice Chair.....Kelly Norris, Ocean Springs High School  
College/University Chair.....Dex Edwards, University of Mississippi  
College/University Vice Chair.....Tim Matheny, William Carey College  
Theatre for Youth Festival.....William Rester, Picayune Memorial High School  
Theatre for Youth Vice Chair.....Daisha Walker, MS Gulf Coast Community College  
SETC State Auditions Coordinator.....Allison Stafford, Hinds Community College  
SETC State Auditions Vice Coordinator....Rhona Justice-Malloy, University of Mississippi  
Playwriting Competition Chair.....Tonya Hays, WINGS  
Playwriting Competition Vice Chair.....Beth Kander, Fondren Theatre Workshop

Feel free to contact any of the above individuals if you have questions or ideas regarding your division.

## Dates to Remember

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| May 7-8, 2010         | MAAE Arts Front and Center, Meridian – MSU Riley Center                 |
| June 5, 2010          | Town Hall Meeting, Greenville, MS.                                      |
| July 24, 2010         | Town Hall Meeting, Meridian, MS.  |
| September 10-13, 2010 | SETC Board Meeting  |
| October 1, 2010       | Deadline for the Adult / Youth Playwriting Competitions                 |
| October 1-2, 2010     | Community Theatre and Secondary Theatre Workshop                        |
| November 3-5, 2010    | Mississippi American College Theatre Festival                           |
| December 1, 2010      | MTA Festival Community Theatre Festival Registration Deadline           |
| December 3-4, 2010    | Regional High School Drama Festivals at MSU and USM                     |
| December 3-4, 2010    | MS SETC Professional Auditions, Hings Community College, Raymond Campus |
| December 15, 2010     | MTA Festival High School Festival Registration Deadline                 |
| January 13-16, 2011   | MTA Statewide Theatre Conference  |

## Call for Scripts: MTA Playwriting Competition 2010

Playwriting is a unique discipline. It gives a writer the hope of having his/her words realized by others - literally putting words into the hands of directors and the mouths of actors. It's a truly collaborative art form, and one we're proud to celebrate at the Mississippi Theatre Association festival.

Since 2007, MTA has been issuing a call for original scripts by Mississippi playwrights. Our competition has two divisions - a youth division, for students under the age of 18; and an adult division, for playwrights 18 and above. The winner of each of these two categories receives a staged reading at the annual MTA festival, including a response from an established playwright (the past two years, award-winning playwrights Mark Dunn and Gary Garrison each took a turn serving as the final judge and respondent); free MTA festival registration - and a cash prize!

All Mississippi playwrights are encouraged to submit their

one-act plays to this competition. We know you have stories to tell, and an important part in moving from page to stage is submitting your work.

Share your scripts, and start weaving your words into the fabric of Mississippi's rich literary tapestry! Submissions are accepted April 1-October 1, 2010; the winner will be announced in December 2010, with their work and award presented at the 2011 MTA festival in January 2011. To submit your entry or review the entire rules, visit [www.mta-online.org](http://www.mta-online.org) and click on "Playwriting Competition."

Questions about the adult playwriting competition?  
Contact Beth: [beth\\_kander@yahoo.com](mailto:beth_kander@yahoo.com)

Questions about the youth playwriting competition?  
Contact Tonya: [tshays777@aol.com](mailto:tshays777@aol.com)

## MSU Riley Center Site of 2011 Festival

Imagine acting on the same stage as some of the greats from theatre history such as Sarah Bernhardt. Imagine acting on a historic theatre that was built in the 1800s but is now a state-of-the-art facility. Well, that dream can now be a reality. MTA is very proud to announce that the 2011 Festival will be held in Meridian, MS with the main festival being held at the Mississippi State University Riley Center on January 13-16, 2011. The historic Grand Opera House and conference center will offer an exquisite location and facility for the secondary and community theatre festivals. Transformed into a state of the art theatre between 2003-2006, the Grand Opera House along with the adjacent conference center will set the stage for a fantastic weekend of theatre. In addition to the secondary and community theatre festival, the 10-Minute Play Festival, Playwriting Competitions, workshops and the college/university auditions will be held in the Riley Center.

We are anticipating another exciting festival in 2011 so make plans to attend the festival. Be sure to make plans now so that you can return your registration forms quickly. Forms will be available in the fall.



### Mississippi Theatres

Actor's Playhouse won the MTA state festival and the SETC regional festival with David Lindsay-Abaire's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Rabbit Hole* directed by veteran director Denise Halbach. The simple but powerful script tells the story about a family overcoming the death of their child. Best Actress and Best Supporting Actor went to Actor's Playhouse's Lavonne Bruckner and Dylan Lovett for their performances. Actor's Playhouse competed against 11 other theatres from the southeast including Starkville Community Theatre (SCT) and their production of *Eleemosynary* by Lee Blessing. Mary-Kay Belant won Best Supporting Actress at

SETC for her role in the SCT production.

Mississippi Theatre Association's President Stacy Howell attended the award ceremony in Lexington, KY in early March and said she "was completely surprised and elated that Mississippi won both the secondary and community theatre divisions." She added, "It was an amazing weekend and exciting to see two of our Mississippi theatres win the top awards." She also noted that five out of the last seven years a Mississippi theatre has either won first place or runner-up in the community theatre division and twice over the last four years a Mississippi high school has won the secondary division at SETC. This shows us the strong theatre programs and the amount of talent we have in Mississippi.

## Dispelling the Myths of Professional Theatre

Last year the question was raised at the MTA board meeting... "what makes New Stage a professional theatre, and how does that affect it in ways different from other producing theatres in the state." This raised a number of questions about the definition of "professional". Francine Reynolds, Artistic Director, New Stage Theatre; and Peppy Bidy, Chair, Music and Theatre, Mississippi University for Women, recalled this question over lunch during rehearsals for New Stage's recent production of Boeing-Boeing. An evaluation of the conversation leads me to a couple of conclusions: that the term "professional" can have a variety of meanings based on the person or entity using the word, the context, and whether the word is being used as a noun or an adjective (a person or an organization.)

New Stage, for instance is deemed a professional theatre by the Theatre Communication's Group.

Francine: New Stage is called a professional theatre because it has a year round paid staff and it meets the Theatre Communication's Group (TCG) definition of professional theatre, which has to do with the percentage

of rehearsal time. TCG's definition of a professional theatre involves a percentage of rehearsal time: how much you rehearse a show before it's performed and the percentage of people who are paid and the salary range. That is what TCG uses as their definition. It does not have to be year round operation. It just has to have the actors paid and a percentage of time for the rehearsal and I find that very interesting. And that the personnel is paid directly.

P: Do you think the general public confuses non-profit with non-professional? Most of the professional theatres in America are "not for profit." That's the sector where there is most employment.

F: Non profit means you have a 501C3. You apply for a 501C3 so your tax status is different. (for the theatre organization, not the employees.) This classification also means you can get foundation and government support.

P: The "non" part of it makes some people think it's not professional. I think there may be confusion because you can have a Professional Non-Profit theatre, and/or you can have a non-professional, non-profit theatre.

F: So what's semi professional ?

To me that means a theatre has a paid director, executive director, and all the actors are volunteers and the production personnel is volunteer. So what's a community theatre?

P: I think, by definition 'community' implies that it is representative of the community and the community itself is the entity that supports it and most of the time that would be through labor, on-stage and off.

F: It also implies that the selection of the materials has community input. And even though the professional theatre may ask for people's opinions, it's generally the selection of materials is driven by the choices of an artistic director

F: What do you say when someone says it's professional quality at a place that doesn't meet the other definitions of 'professional' that we've talked about?

P: This is where I think it's a matter of language. The word 'professional' becomes an adjective. If you say 'professional quality' it's almost implying that it is out of its league; a community theatre or a college production that has exceeded the expectation because it has a high quality, up to professional level.

## MTA Partners with Mississippi Public Broadcasting

Mississippi Theatre Association is embarking on a new endeavor to further promote quality theatre in Mississippi. Through a partnership with Mississippi Public Broadcasting, MTA will film a theatrical production "annually" that will air on MPB.

Theatres performing at the MTA State festival will be considered for an opportunity to have their production professionally filmed and later aired on MPB. To be eligible, theatres will need to indicate on their MTA Festival entry form that they are interested in participating in this project. First, consideration will be given to the top winners of the high school and community theatre awards at the MTA annual statewide theatre festival. Other consideration will also include content and appropriateness for airing on public television.

Understanding the copyright implications, MTA will ask theatres to assist with obtaining the video rights for the filming of the production. Knowing that this is often a difficult task, theatres interested in this opportunity should also consider finding unpublished works that do not have copyright restrictions. MPB will partner with MTA to determine the best production to be filmed and aired.

More information regarding this opportunity will be available soon on the MTA website this summer.

## Carr Steps Down as Festival Coordinator

For six years, Robin Carr, associate professor of voice and acting at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM), served as the festival coordinator for the South's regional High School Regional Drama Festival hosted by the USM. In 2009 Carr stepped down from the position to pursue other interests. During her tenure as festival coordinator she worked tirelessly with MTA officials, USM and teachers from across the southern region to ensure that the high school drama festivals provided a theatrical and a learning experience for all attendees. She gracefully emceed the festival each year and made attendees feel at home.

In October, 2009, Carr received the of Region IV Teaching Artist award by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) and in January 2010 she was awarded the National Teaching Artist Grant from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. (KCACTF). In April, Carr traveled to Leibnitz, Austria to present her voice and movement research at the International University Global Theatre Experience (IUGTE). National Teaching Grant recipients will also be featured in a full-page article in the March edition of "American Theatre" magazine. As if that wasn't enough, in 2010 the Mississippi Alliance for Arts Education announced that Carr was the recipient of the Higher Education Award for exemplary teaching.

Carr will certainly be missed in her role as High School Drama Festival Coordinator for the regional festival but we know that she will continue to provide leadership and serve as an exemplary teacher in Mississippi. Stephen Cunetto, MTA Executive Director, said "I have had the distinct pleasure of working with Robin for several years. She is an fantastic mentor, leader and teacher. She will be missed but we truly appreciate all that she has done for secondary theatre in Mississippi."



## Southeastern Theatre Conference State Auditions



The Mississippi Southeastern Theatre Conference State Screening Auditions will be held on Sat. Dec. 4th (for Mississippi auditionees in the morning & the first part of the out-of-region auditionees in the afternoon) & Sun. Dec. 5th (for the rest of the out-of-region auditionees) in Brooks

Theatre on the main campus of Hinds Community College in Raymond, MS. The MS screening auditions are the LAST qualifying auditions for the Southeastern Theatre Conference to be held in Atlanta in March of 2011. So don't miss your chance to have your 60 or 90 seconds in the spotlight!

Here's something you may not know: just about ANYONE CAN APPLY TO AUDITION!!! You don't have to be a college student majoring in theatre or performance to participate! Anyone & everyone who is interested is STRONGLY encouraged to apply! The one restriction is that you must be at least 18 yrs. old to apply.

APPLYING IS VERY EASY TO DO! IT'S ALL DONE ONLINE--no tedious paper work to fill out & send through snail mail! The online application will open in late Aug./early Sept. When it opens, interested auditionees can go to the SETC website ([www.setc.org/auditions/screening.php](http://www.setc.org/auditions/screening.php) <<http://www.setc.org/auditions/screening.php>>) to download, save, & print the "SETC Auditionee Handbook & Instructions." At the bottom of the page applicants will see a map with the 10 SETC states highlighted. Click on the "MS" state on the

map to see more detailed information about the Mississippi screening auditions. From there, applicants will be able to access the Online Application by clicking on the "Apply Online" button.

Actors who audition in MS have the advantage of having longer than anyone else to submit their applications. So don't wait until the last minute to do so--you will have PLENTY OF TIME!!! The deadline for submitting all completed online applications will be Wed. Nov. 17th, 2010 11:59pm CST.

**\*\*\*PLEASE NOTE: Your application MUST be TOTALLY COMPLETE & submitted online to SETC by or before the deadline! This includes full payment of all fees & the online responses from your references. START YOUR APPLICATION PROCESS EARLY! DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE, OR YOUR APPLICATION MAY NOT BE ACCEPTED WHICH MEANS YOU WILL NOT GET TO AUDITION--ABSOLUTELY NO EXCEPTIONS!!!\*\*\***

Application fees are only \$25 for out-of-region applicants & \$35 for Mississippi applicants. Please contact Alison Stafford, State Auditions Coordinator & Director of Theatre at Hinds Community College ([AStafford@hindsc.edu](mailto:AStafford@hindsc.edu)) (601-857-3267) for further information. You can also visit the Mississippi Theatre Association's website (<http://www.mta-online.org/>) & click on the College/University Division link on the upper left side of the screen for more contact information.

## Mississippians Continue Leadership

The State of Mississippi always seems to do really well in the community theatre and secondary festivals at the Southeastern Theatre Conference. In fact in Louisville in March we won both festivals. However this is not the only area where we shine. Mississippians make up a large percentage of the leadership of the organization. At the March meeting Lynn Nelson of Tupelo Community Theatre was elected Division Representative on the Executive Committee of SETC. Lynn already serves as community theatre chair for SETC. She is also serves as Region IV (southeast) representative for the American

Association of Community Theatres and is Vice Chair of communications for AACT. Lyle Tate from Starkville Community Theatre currently serves as the vice-chair for the community theatre festival and will serve as chair of the festival in 2012 & 2013. Robin Carr, professor of voice and acting at the University of Southern Mississippi, is Voice and Speech Committee Chair for SETC. Tom Booth of Tupelo Community Theatre serves on the SETC board as Mississippi State Representative, is on the finance committee, and has just been asked to serve on the Strategic Planning Task Force. Suz Almon of Oak Grove High School is

currently serving as SETC Secondary Division Vice Chair for two years. In this position she will help with communication between directors and SETC and assist the chair with the details of the Secondary Division. Stephen Cunetto serves as the State Representatives to the AACT. If we missed anyone who is serving in this article please let us know and we will feature you in a future newsletter. All of these groups need volunteers and leadership and if you would like to become more involved on the state, regional, or national level contact any of these organizations directly or MTA Executive Director Stephen Cunetto at [scunetto@gmail.com](mailto:scunetto@gmail.com).

## People In The News

Brook Hanemann, Adjunct Instructor, Mississippi University for Women (MUW), played Blanch in A Streetcar Named Desire as part of Columbus' tribute to Tennessee Williams. David Carter designed the set for, and Peppy Bidy, Director of Music and Theatre, MUW, played the role of Robert in New Stage's production of Boeing-Boeing. MUW Theatre students created a collaborative production of A Midsummer Night's Dream.

The University of Southern Mississippi is pleased to announce theatre students who have been named as national finalists during the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. Finalists include William Hatten, Directing; Brad McKenzie, Lighting Design and Technology; Thomas Sowers, Sound Design and Technology. These individuals will travel to Washington, D.C. in April National Finals. Regional Finalists include Elizabeth Newton, Scenic Design; Callie Stephens and Stephen Cefelu, Acting.

The Mississippi Alliance for Arts Education recently announced the winners of their awards. We are very pleased to announce and congratulate two of our own theatre faculty for their awards.

Suzanne Allmon, Oak Grove High School, Theatre Teacher of the Year.

Robin Carr, University of Southern Mississippi, Higher Education Award

Congratulations Suz and Robin!!!

# Hold the Date!

## October 1-2, 2010 Theatre Workshop

Don't miss this opportunity to learn more about theatre, network with other theatre enthusiasts and participate in a theatre workshop!

Look for more information on the MTA website!  
<http://www.mta-online.org/>



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## *MTA Festival*

establishes team building and leadership skills and strengthens the students understanding of producing a play on their own.

This year we were very fortunate to have Mississippi playwright George Calhoun talk to attendees about his work, *Tumblin' Down*, that was commissioned by the Mississippi Humanities Council. Calhoun talked about how he approached the difficult task of using oral histories to create a play about Mississippi. Along with Calhoun, playwright and New York University faculty member, Gary Garrison was our special guest who served as the MTA Playwriting Competition final adjudicator and workshop presenter. Garrison led a talkback following the staged readings of the 2010 playwriting competitions. Steven Mockler, youth winner, and Kevan Jenner Brown, adult winner, attended and participated in the talk back. This provided the actors, playwrights and attendees the unique opportunity to discuss these productions in a workshop format. Garrison facilitated the discussion and provided excellent feedback to the playwrights.

After the curtain fell following the last production, adjudicators had the difficult task of determining the theatres that

would advance to the next level and the people that would win awards. Thanks to decisions made by SETC, both the secondary and the community theatre divisions were allowed to send two (2) theatres from each division to the SETC held in March.

First place winner of the Dominic J. Cunetto Best Production in the secondary division was awarded to Oxford High School's production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and Pearl River Central High School's production of *The Winner* was selected as runner-up. John Davenport, Oxford High School, was selected as the Best Director from the high school division. Actor's Playhouse, Pearl, MS and Starkville Community Theatre were awarded the Warren McDaniel Best Production award for their productions of *Rabbit Hole* and *Eleemosynary*. Paula Mabry of Starkville Community Theatre received the Best Director in the Community Theatre Division. All four of these theatres advanced to the Southeastern Theatre Conference and represented Mississippi at the regional conference.

For a complete list of award winners visit the MTA website at <http://www.mta-online.org>.