

the country, they were welcomed to McComb like family. When I was 9 he was transferred to Chicago where we remained until college, except for summers.

I would board the train and head to McComb to spend a month with my oldest friends and former back door neighbors. One step from the passenger car and the heat would hit me like a brick. But with the next step there stood a breath of fresh air in the form of John Mayer and his beautiful mother, Madge.

His first words were, "Hey Mork (he never said, "Mark"), are you still a rebel?"

"Hell, yes," I exclaimed. "You better be or I'll beat yo' head in," he retorted.

A similar ritual was repeated throughout my visit when meeting new folks. No one ever beat my head in. After an obligatory salute to Rebel-dom, I was accepted like family.

The Mayer home was a ranch style house by I.C. Lake that seemed to stretch on forever. With five children, four of whom were boys, it needed to be big. The older, Bill and Hank, shared a room that no one younger entered without fear of death. I stayed with John and Jimmie. Melinda was the youngest and she was and still is as pretty as her mother.

The Mayer home was a strict place. The few times I saw Dr. Mayer, he had a marine drill sergeant crew cut. There was no fooling around with him.

To me, summers in McComb were paradise. We donned cut off jeans and white T-shirts and ran barefoot. Doors were never locked. Windows were screened and left open at night.

for my entire life, but not too long ago I started receiving handwritten notes from him. I learned at his funeral that he was known for taking the time to do this.

Now, nearly 40 years after being shown scorched burlap, I stood again in McComb at the scene of this great man's funeral. His family again treated me as if I was one of them.

Why do people remember others? Why do they care? Why do hundreds of people file by another who took a lonesome and courageous stand?

Small-town Mississippians live lifetimes together. They serve each other. One sells the cars. Another makes sure the cars stay running. One had the movie theater. Another helped folks see the screen if their eyesight failed. This man had taken care of them in their homes at night when they were sick. They probably fought a little, but they also tied cans to the back of each others' honeymoon cars.

They built careers together, struggled to raise children together, and now, they face death together. I have the sensation that all the glitz and glamour of Hollywood would not take the place of this small town where people truly love each other.

This story is dedicated to Dr. W.T. Mayer, father, husband, doctor and courageous gentleman.

Mark Chinn is married to the former Cathy Hawkins, and is the father of four daughters. He is the principal of Chinn & Associates, PLLC, family law firm in Jackson. The Chinn family has a home on Lake Lorman in Madison County.

Miracle Fields shows her mother Debbie Fields of Canton her favorite stuffed toys in her bunkbed she received from MadCAAP. A bunkbed distribution program is part of the nonprofit's mission in Madison County. To help, e-mail MadCAAP@bellsouth.net.

Volunteers needed in local war on poverty

It was a clear autumn day, the kind that sparkles. Or maybe that was the sunlight hitting the shiny new buildings along Highland Colony Parkway.

I was driving over that way a week or so ago to attend a luncheon at Highland Presbyterian Church, and the drive was impressive. On a busy weekday at noon, there was plenty of traffic, yet no congestion. The buildings, centers of business and commerce, well in the range of new to brand-spanking-new were surrounded by well-planned green spaces. The churches that dot the corridor all spacious and beautiful. And coming in this area are more shops and restaurants, ably the most trendy and upscale of each group.

Yes, Highland Colony Parkway showcases the best of Madison County highlights the area's influence and success. When the out-of-town relatives visit what we show them.

What we don't show people about Madison County is the home in which a weaver was tied to the back of a shack weep it from hitting the ground. The bath floor, you see, had fallen in.

We don't show the cracked window or the ones in which the glass is mostly or the houses where the roof leaks and winds whip indoors in January.

Those homes aren't in the development space of south Madison County. Instead, they are in the northern parts of the county, where life is vastly different a few miles to the south.



Annie Oeth
In My Opinion

Poverty doesn't go away just because it's a few miles away, and ignoring it doesn't help.

Madison Countians have the means to help so many of our poor, who often are elderly or handicapped. We may not have the means to end poverty with a broad brush, but each of us can do something to make someone else's life a little better.

One way we can do this is through Madison Countians Allied Against Poverty, or MadCAAP.

Started in 1985, the nonprofit spends 92 percent of its funds directly on programs to help the needy.

Here are a few ways to help, gleaned from my luncheon meeting on MadCAAP:

Swing a hammer: Groups spend their spring or summer breaks assisting MadCAAP with housing repairs or new construction.

Play with kids: MadCAAP needs youth groups to assist with a children's program from 6-7:30 p.m. on Tuesdays. The children are in first through eighth grades and are meeting at Canton High while their mothers are in the New Attitudes classes that tackle different topics aimed at helping families out of poverty.

Be a weekend warrior: Church or civic groups are needed to assist in housing repairs

on the weekends.

Be a pro: Professional carpenters, plumbers and electricians are always needed.

Shift into drive: Hold a drive for blankets, clothing, coats, school supplies or food.

Go into PR: MadCAAP can always use help with newsletters, mailings and presentations.

Play Santa: During the holiday season, MadCAAP sponsors an adopt-a-family program to help provide food and holiday gifts for the poorest of families in Madison County. MadCAAP will also need help sorting and tagging donations.

Habla Espanol? Once a month, MadCAAP has Hispanic clients shopping in its Clothes Closet in Canton. The group needs those who speak Spanish to volunteer on the second Wednesday of the month.

Be a shopkeeper: MadCAAP needs volunteers to assist shoppers and straighten clothing at its clothes and household needs closet in Canton. The center is open for shopping from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. the first three Wednesdays a month. Volunteers are welcome any time within those hours.

Hit "Forward": Send an e-mail to MadCAAP@bellsouth.net and put Friends of MadCAAP in the subject line. You will get special notices about those in need. Maybe you can help, or you could forward the e-mail to friends, and one of them could help.

Annie Oeth can be reached at aoeth@mcherald.com.

Publisher Larry K. Whitaker	961-7201
Executive Editor Ronnie Agnew	961-7175
Communities Editor Leilani Salter	360-4642
Managing Editor Annie Oeth	853-8783
Reporter Lucy Weber	853-9820
Reporter Leah Square	853-7615
Photographer Will Smith	853-9184
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Copy Editor Sandi Beason	961-7322
Designer Robert Chapman	961-7353

The Herald

SERVING MADISON COUNTY SINCE 1845
View us online at www.mcherald.com

Delivery and subscription

The Madison County Herald is published every Tuesday and is delivered to every household in Madison County. The Herald is published on Thursday by Gaensett River States Pk., from offices at 670 U.S. 51, 5th MS 39157. Periodicals postage paid, MS, and additional mail 324-9007. Subscription rate for

The publisher reserves the right to change rates during the term of this 30 days notice. This notice is to the subscriber, by notice in this issue. Postmaster: Send address changes to Madison County Herald, 670 U.S. 51, MS 39157.

MS 39157.

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