



Foundation’s School Garden Model Offers Edible Education

Mannsdale Upper Elementary School Provides Healthy Hands-on Learning Experiences



Pictured above: Coach Rolando Roman (left) and Mannsdale Elementary Upper Elementary School students harvest and prepare fresh fruits and vegetables to sell at the Livingston Farmers’ Market in Madison County.

The **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation** is partnering with K-12 schools across the state to provide school gardens for healthy hands-on learning experiences. The Foundation’s school garden program uses the schoolyard as a classroom to teach students the importance of healthy nutrition that integrate with subjects such as math, science, reading and art.

Foundation staff participated in a ribbon cutting at Mannsdale Upper Elementary School (MUES) in Madison County for the school’s greenhouse. The greenhouse is part of the school’s unique gardening education program where students in grades 3-5 participate in every level of crop production, including sowing seeds, growing, harvesting and marketing fresh produce at student-run farmers’ markets. In addition to the greenhouse, the MUES school garden includes 39 raised beds, five hydroponic gardens and a compost bin.

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Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation

Vision

A Healthy Mississippi

Mission

Provide targeted grants to fund programs and initiatives to improve the health and well-being of Mississippians

Strategic Focus

- Communities
- Schools

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Pictured above left: Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation President Sheila Grogan (second row far left) celebrates with Foundation staff, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Master Gardeners, Mannsdale school leadership and students as Coach Ro cuts the ribbon to officially open the greenhouse. Pictured above right: Students tend to plants in the school garden.

“We are excited to transform the greenhouse and garden into a year-round learning lab,” said Rolando Roman, Mannsdale Upper Elementary School physical education teacher, known as “Coach Ro” by his students. “Our goal is to support health and well-being and encourage students to choose delicious healthy foods.”

Coach Ro plans to use the greenhouse to propagate seedlings to use as a support mechanism for other schools through “Seeds for Schools,” a program he and MUES created to help other schools start garden programs. Coach Ro also implemented the “Junior Master Gardener Program” at MUES, a program developed by Texas A&M University and affiliated with Mississippi State University Extension Service incorporating cross-curriculum learning of care and cultivation of crops with academic studies.

In 2021, the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation funded 13 school gardens in 10 Mississippi counties. Since 2015, the Foundation has funded a total of 70 school gardens in 38 counties. For public and private K-12 schools interested in starting or enhancing a school garden program with Foundation grant support, please send an email to Foundation@bcbsms.com.

Healthy SCHOOL Awards



A Subsidiary of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi.



Bell Academy (Cleveland School District) and **Northeast Elementary School** (Lauderdale County School District) were both honored with a **2021 Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation Healthy School Award** at the Mississippi Association of School Superintendents Summer Conference held in Biloxi on July 16. The schools earned the title “Healthy School” in recognition of exemplary school health and wellness achievements. Each winning school received a **\$50,000 grant award** from the Foundation to assist in efforts to create and sustain healthy learning environments.

“The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation has a successful history of supporting schools and acknowledging health and wellness as integral parts of excellence in education and life-long success,” said Foundation President Sheila Grogan. “The Foundation is proud that Bell Academy and Northeast Elementary School are ensuring school personnel, students and their families learn to value their own health and the importance of making healthy choices.”

Visit the Foundation’s website at www.healthiermississippi.org to learn more about the Healthy School Awards Program or to download the 2022 Healthy School Awards application.

Healthy Foods Accessible at Walnut Grove’s “Downtown Market”

Walnut Grove residents and surrounding community members now have access to fresh local fruits, vegetables, honey, eggs and other healthy foods thanks to **The Downtown Market**. The **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation** awarded a grant to the city to expand the farmers’ market from a temporary location in the fire station to a permanent location on Main Street. In mid-August, the Downtown Farmers’ Market received the **Mississippi Certified Farmers’ Market** designation from the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce. This designation identifies the farmers’ market as a place to purchase fresh local produce apart from markets that are flea markets or rummage sales.

“It’s a dream come true for our residents as the nearest grocery store is thirteen miles away,” said Walnut Grove Mayor Brian Gomillion. “There are all kinds of homegrown foods available from vendors using raised garden beds for growing tomatoes and peppers to farmers with large field crops of corn and beans.”

Mayor Gomillion is pleased to call the Downtown Farmers’ Market a “tremendous success” with 100-150 customers visiting the 10-13 vendors each market day (Thursdays 3:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.).



Pictured above and right: The Walnut Grove Downtown Farmers’ Market includes a covered pavilion and a children’s play area focused on healthy nutrition. (Images courtesy of Walnut Grove.)

Farmers’ Markets: Connecting Mississippians to Healthy Foods

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation recognizes eating a healthful diet is fundamental to well-being, and when combined with physical activity, promotes overall good health. The Foundation also recognizes farmers’ markets as a staple in many Mississippi communities affording families the opportunity to access fresh, local produce.

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce provides criteria for farmers’ markets to receive the Mississippi Certified Farmers’ Market designation. This designation sets apart markets where

Mississippians can purchase fresh, locally grown foods from markets that are not flea markets, rummage sales or bazaars.

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation offers a grant program to expand farmers’ markets across the state. The Foundation is partnered with the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce to help each farmers’ market funded by the Foundation to achieve the Mississippi Certified Farmers’ Market designation. For Mississippi mayors interested in starting a new farmers’

market or expanding an existing farmers’ market with grant support from the Foundation, please send an email to



Building a Healthy Mississippi Near You!

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation has a vision for a healthy Mississippi. A healthy Mississippi is a place where being healthy is the cornerstone of our communities and schools. We are working to make this vision a reality each and every day through targeted grant funding to improve the health and well-being of all Mississippians.

Take a look around with **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation President Sheila Grogan** to see how the Foundation is building a healthy Mississippi from the Delta to the Gulf Coast and right here in our own backyard — the state's capital city!

All three opening this fall...

Indianola Community Wellness Center

Indianola



Above: Architect Rendering



Sheila Grogan (far left) tours the Indianola Community Wellness Center construction site with Katie Yates, Chief Financial Officer for South Sunflower County Hospital and Courtney Phillips, Chief Executive Officer for South Sunflower County Hospital and South Sunflower County Hospital Foundation.

Construction is now underway for the new Indianola Community Wellness Center being built at the corner of East Baker Street and Moody Avenue. With a generous grant provided to South Sunflower County Hospital Foundation by Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation, residents of Indianola, Sunflower County and surrounding counties can look forward to participating in engaging activities designed to help individuals and families lead healthy lifestyles.

The Indianola Community Wellness Center will feature a fully-equipped fitness center for exercise opportunities, a teaching kitchen where healthy nutrition and cooking classes will be taught, classrooms where participants can learn practical ways to lead healthy lifestyles and a community room for healthy living activities.

The Children's Center for Communication and Development Playground

Long Beach



Above: Architect Rendering



Sheila Grogan (far right) visits USM Gulf Park to see the progress of the playground construction at The Children's Center. Standing left to right: Dr. Shannon Campbell, USM Senior Associate VP for Coastal Operations; Nancy Perry, Corporate and Foundation Relations Officer; Dr. Lachel Story, Dean, USM College of Nursing and Health Professions; and Sarah Myers, Director, The Children's Center.

The Foundation awarded grant funds to The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) Foundation to fund a special needs playground at The Children's Center for Communication and Development, located on USM's Gulf Park Campus in Long Beach.

Once built, the 3,500 square foot playground will serve as an outdoor therapy space for children with complex intellectual and physical disabilities who receive cost-free services from The Children's Center. It will also be a play space for children in the Gulf Coast region, both with and without developmental disabilities.

LeFleur's Bluff State Park Playground

Jackson



Above: Architect Rendering



Sheila Grogan stands near the construction site of the LeFleur's Bluff State Park Playground.

The Foundation provided a generous grant to the Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries, & Parks Foundation for the LeFleur's Bluff State Park Education and Tourism Partnership between the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks' (MDWFP) Mississippi Museum of Natural Science and the Mississippi Children's Museum.

The 21st century playground will feature 80 play activities, with 73 of these features inclusive to children with accessibility needs. Separate play areas based on age will be available for children ages 6 months to 12 years old.

This grant also provides essential funds to create a state-of-the-art complex for physical and educational activities through a playground, outdoor classroom and pavilion, and museum walking trail.



Is your town a

Mississippi Healthy Hometown?

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation is pleased to partner with the Mississippi Municipal League to promote community health and wellness through the Healthy Hometown Awards.

At the 2022 Mississippi Municipal League Annual Conference, the Foundation may award a “Healthy Hometown” grant to one hometown, or award “Healthy Hometown” grants to multiple hometowns, each at \$50,000, regardless of municipality population. The application and criteria are available online at:

www.healthiermississippi.org.

2022 APPLICATIONS DUE:
MARCH 10, 2022

  **MISSISSIPPI** | Foundation
www.healthiermississippi.org