

Three days after his assassination in Dallas, Texas, John F. Kennedy is laid to rest with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.



WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2020

Sandy Ray is Moving MS Politics

Drive plus determination equals success for this Cleveland native

BY JACK CRISS
The Bolivar Bullet

As Chief Executive Officer of her firm, Southern Consulting Associates, Inc., Cleveland-native Sandy Ray brings nearly 25 years of experience in both state government and politics in Mississippi and throughout the southeast.

As a well-known, registered lobbyist, Ray assists clients in legislative lobbying in a variety of sectors including insurance, economic development, state bond acquisition, state agency management and regulatory issues. In addition to lobbying and regulatory

affairs, Ray specializes in human resource management, non-profit organization, campaign management, grass roots organization and fundraising.

And, although in some quarters, lobbying is considered a political “dirty word”, Ray defends her work as not only necessary for the issues and the voters they affect, but also for the type of dedication and knowledge that is required to succeed in the field.

“Lobbying is not dependent on drinks and golf outings contrary to popular, but untrue, stereotypes,” says Ray. “Today’s lobbyist must have a firm grasp of their client’s industry and objectives and be

able to identify and then find legislative allies to reach a win/win solution. It’s not just about cozying up to legislators and buddying around with them. To be effective you have got to be educated on the issues and maintain the trust of an elected official when they come to you about an issue.”

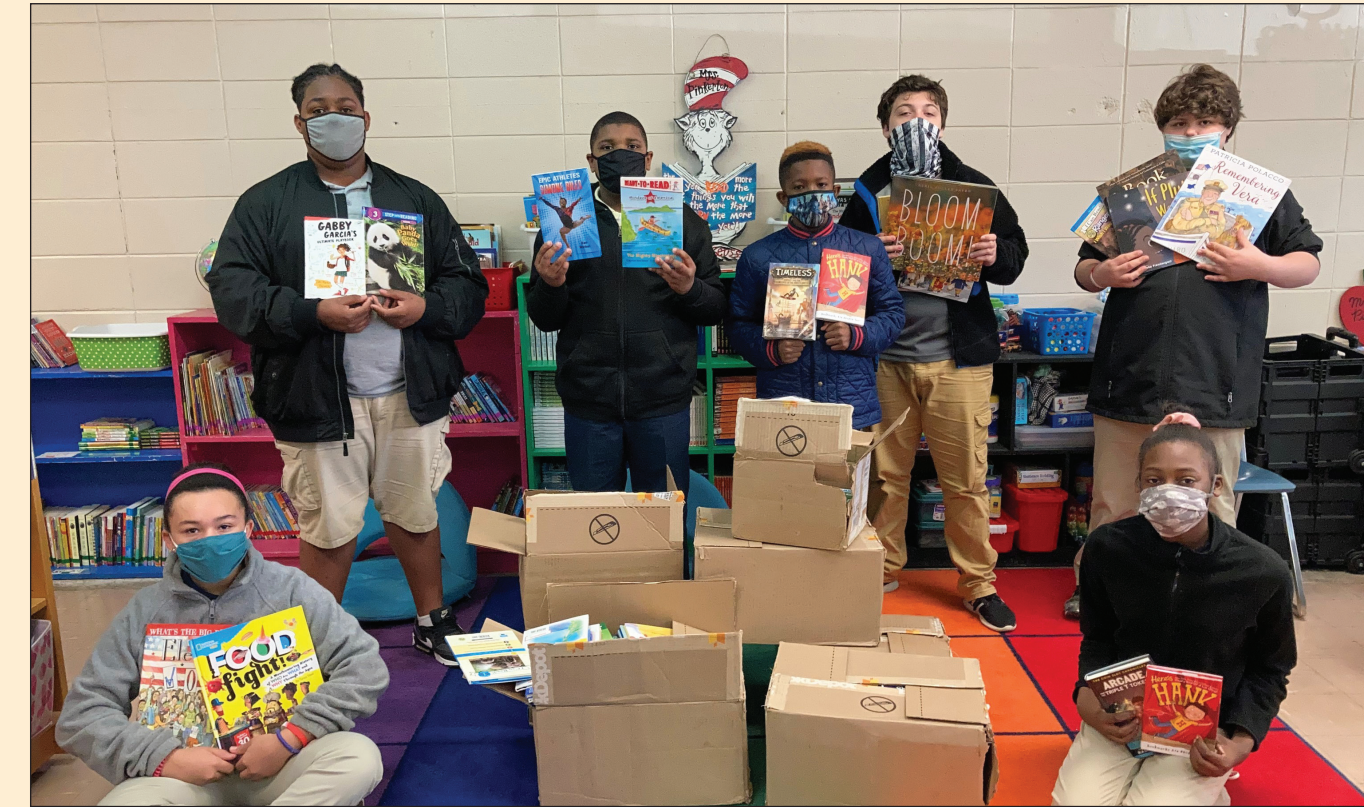
Growing up in Cleveland, Ray says her recently-retired father (a jewelry repairman and store owner) and her mother (a nursing home administrator) provided Ray and her siblings with a middle-class environment that pushed

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Book Donation to Parks

Courtesy of the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation



DEVASTATION OVERCOME: Due to a generous donation from the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, Parks Elementary received 300 new books for its Library. This past spring, the school suffered extensive damage due to a tornado.

Special to The Bolivar Bullet

Following recent devastation caused by a tornado that hit Mississippi earlier this year, Parks Elementary School in Cleveland has received a generous donation of 300 brand-new books to its library. The donation comes from the Los Angeles-based Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, an education partner of GRAMMY Museum Mississippi.

“The tornado that hit our community earlier this year brought so much devastation to so many families, homes and buildings, including the library at

Parks Elementary School,” said Emily Havens, Executive Director of GRAMMY Museum Mississippi. “We were thrilled to be able to connect the school with our partners at the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation to help refill the shelves in their library, and their meaningful donation will go a long way to continue the learning opportunities for the students of Parks.

“We are so grateful to the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation for the very generous donation of books for our library,” said Lisa Pinkerton, a librarian at Parks Elementary. “We are especially thankful to Em-

BOOKS continued, PAGE A6

Chaves Joins Delta Council

Named Development Director on November 1

Special to The Bolivar Bullet

Jerry Chaves has become the new Delta Council Development Director.

Chaves comes to the Delta from Plymouth, Indiana, where he served as President and CEO of the Marshall County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC) since 2014. Prior to that, Chaves spent over twenty years working in economic development in North Dakota, Montana, and in his home state of Arizona.



Laura and Jerry Chaves

“Jerry exhibits great strength and character as a leader in economic development,” said Wade Litton of Greenwood who is the Delta Council Development Chairman. “We feel very confident in his ability to lead the Development Department and Delta Strong, especially as it relates to recruiting and retaining industry, as well as improving workforce opportunities. He has an extensive background working in rural communities, and he has demonstrated effective strategies for producing results in all of them.”

During his tenure at MCEDC, Chaves successfully developed and implemented the first strategic plan supporting business attraction, business retention and

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Commissioner Willie Simmons

One year in and many accomplishments already achieved

BY JACK CRISS
The Bolivar Bullet

After nine months in his new job, Transportation Commissioner for the Central District, Willie Simmons, has already made a major mark and further added to his legacy of public service.

“I have thoroughly enjoyed it and am so very grateful to those who placed their confidence in my abilities,” said Simmons. “It was not all totally new to me given my 26 years in the Senate with ten of those spent as the Chairperson of the Transportation Subcommittee for Appropriations and the past eight years as Chairperson of Policy, so transportation was not a foreign subject. Of course, my work now is hands-on: assessing the needs of transportation and infrastructure in the Central district, working with budgets and then planning and implementing those plans. This year, the legislature



Simmons

gave me and the other two highway commissioners \$1.2 billion to work with and, of course, you must allocate wisely. I get many requests from individual citizens, the business community and municipalities, cities and counties and I try to be as responsive as I can—the work is very broad. All modes of transportation are dealt with in my office for our district. Public transit, which is crucial to our rural areas, four ports, three major airports and the smaller ones, plus the rail system. We are heavily involved in all aspects of transportation within the district with one mode standing out.

Highways and bridges are probably the biggest concerns for the area, and for the state according to Simmons.

“I’ve been working on some important recent improvement projects that I’m very proud of having participated in,” said Simmons. “The goal of some of my predecessors in the Senate back in the 1980s was to have a four-lane highway within at least 50 miles of every citizen in this state. They were successful in achieving that goal but no maintenance dollars came along with that achievement so there’s been a challenge keeping our highways safe and properly maintained. Our transportation system is very holistic and interconnected here in Mississippi and it’s critical that it’s kept up properly. It’s a challenge, no doubt, but very rewarding. When the lottery was passed, I became somewhat of the ‘face’ of the whole process that got it off the ground due to the fact that I handled that bill on the Senate floor and brought it out of committee.”

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the value of hard work. “I had almost every job imaginable, from working at Sonic to Jay’s Department Store downtown, to pay my own way into Delta State,” says Ray. One of Ray’s brothers is an industrial engineer, and her two other brothers took the respective paths of business owner and highway patrolman. Ray tragically lost her twin sister, Cindy, last September, “which still seems unreal,” she says.

Later, while working for Delta State, Ray was brought on to serve as the Executive Director for the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Mississippi Delta. It was there she had her first encounter with the political world that she would eventually enter—a meeting with former Attorney General, Mike Moore.

“General Moore was heavily involved with the Boys & Girls Clubs and wanted to see more activity in the Delta,” recalls Ray. “While working with him as Children’s Division Liaison for the Office of the Attorney General, I frequently came to the Jackson, went to the

legislature for meetings and saw the whole political process up close and personal. That’s when I first became passionate about it.”

As General Mike Moore neared the end of his tenure as Attorney General, Ray decided to open Southern Consulting Associates. “This was about a year before Hurricane Katrina, which left a profound effect on me, both as a learning experience about the power of natural disasters and the tragedies they often cause, and as an eye opener to the resilience of the human spirit. I was lobbying for the Boys & Girls Clubs at the time, and figuring out how to help the coastal clubs was a challenge. We would unload 18-wheelers of supplies at my house to be picked up and driven to locations on the Coast during the relief effort,” recalls Ray.

In 2007, as part of her business, Ray assisted with Mike Chaney’s campaign for Mississippi’s Insurance Commissioner and was asked to come aboard the administration after a successful election. Shortly thereafter, she was named Chief of Staff for State Insurance

Commissioner Chaney. Ray, her husband Jody, a high-school teacher, and their son Caleb then decided to make the move to Madison to be closer to the Capitol. It would be a role she would occupy until 2018 before she decided to again devote her full attention to her personal business, Southern Consulting Associates, Inc.

“Working with Mike was a great experience,” said Ray. “Insurance is a fascinating field that, really, touches every aspect of our lives. And, I loved my job as Chief of Staff for Commissioner Chaney. It was hard work, but incredibly rewarding at the same time.” Just recently, Chaney was quoted as saying of his former co-worker, “(Sandy) is a very intelligent, highly motivated, respected, charismatic rainmaker.”

And, while Ray did love the work she did with Commissioner Chaney, and obviously made a strong impression on him, she made the decision to turn her full attention back to the company she started.

“I had always kept a few clients on, but not too many and none that

would conflict with the Insurance Commission. But, I found that I began to miss doing my own work full time. I wanted my freedom and I like to pick my own challenges. So, that’s what I did,” she said of her decision to leave the agency and go back to Southern Consulting Associates.

The decision was obviously a good one.

“I’ve tripled my clientele since 2018, when I left Commissioner Chaney’s office,” said Ray. “I love solving problems that are presented to me and, of course, the political work. I pick the person I want to work with—the party they might belong to is of no consequence as far as client preference for me. For example, I not only worked for Mike Chaney and Lynn Fitch, I also recently supported longtime friend from Cleveland, Willie Simmons—a prominent Democrat—in his campaign for Highway Commissioner. I’ve always believed in him and respected all of the work he had done for Cleveland, and the Delta, when he was in the Senate,” she said. “Rather than focusing on partisanship, I focus on being loyal to the

people and principles that will make Mississippi a better place. I always look out for people that have looked out for me.”

Ray is extremely enthusiastic about a current project for a certain client she’s working hard on: the Marty Stuart Congress of Country Music Museum slated to open in Philadelphia.

“Marty Stuart is currently my most exciting client,” she enthuses. “The work I have done and am doing for the ‘Congress of Country Music’ is going great and momentum is high. Working with a country music artist, who has now been named to the Country Music Hall of Fame, and the folks from the Philadelphia community has been a true pleasure. In February of this year, I was told that \$2.5 million had to be raised to get things moving in order for the State to get involved. We had two weeks to raise the money and then, if successful, I also had to lobby for state bond funds. This was just before the outbreak of the pandemic. All parties were nervous, to say the least, but we were able to do it,” said Ray. Working with the locals and the

Mississippi legislature, the organization will finish Phase I of the project and when the Museum is open it will house the largest collection of country music memorabilia in the world.”

When summarizing her life and career so far, Ray explains, “The many years I spent learning the people all across Mississippi state government will prove valuable for the rest of my life. It takes time to build relationships and to gain respect. I love to help people and I enjoy fixing problems. I think that, throughout my life, all of my work experiences and even hardships have made me better at what I do. I provide a wide array of services that few, if any, other company offers and I am selective about who I work for and with. I want to enjoy my work and be proud of who I represent. When I get handed a problem or issue, of course it’s because a fix is needed. That’s when I take the ball and run with it and find a solution for the client. I’ve never been afraid of hard work—I thrive on it—and when I say I’m going to do something, I deliver,” said Ray.

DELTA COUNCIL

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expansion, workforce development and creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem. He was able to more than double MCEDC’s annual budget, captured \$147,000,000 in

capital investment and helped develop 7 of the 11 Marshall County Regional Cities Initiative projects.

“We hate to see Jerry go. He has transformed economic development in Marshall County, and through his vision, the economic development

program is well respected in the region for being cutting edge and very productive,” said Jim Condon, Chairman of the Board Marshall County EDC. “His thumbprint will be long lasting in North Central Indiana.”

“I feel honored and

blessed to be selected to lead the industrial development effort for the Delta,” said Chavez, who grew up on a cattle farm in North Arizona.

“The Delta presents a strong business case that matches well with expanding businesses

working to maximize their profitability through market reach, access to a workforce through recent ACT Work Ready Community programming in the Delta, and the many other business cost saving advantages available in the region. I

look forward to working with Delta leadership to chart a new course in industrial development for the benefit of the Delta Region and the State of Mississippi.”

SIMMONS

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Simmons said the Legislative decided that, based on revenue from the lottery, they were going to allocate \$80 million to the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) earmarked for infrastructure improvements.

“During FY20 after the lottery was implemented in October through June 30, the state collected \$70 million for transportation,”

said Simmons. “And, during the first quarter of FY21 the state has collected \$27 million, thus we’re on target to accomplish our goal.”

Simmons said that he and the other two commissioners decided those funds would be best used on repairing two lane highways which, he said, were the most in need of work. “Most of these highways have been neglected for 20 years or longer, so, as just some examples, Hwys. 444, 8,

448, 82 AND 61 will be repaired next year.”

A major accomplishment is the Highway 82 Greenville Bypass. Simmons kept a campaign promise and led the efforts that resulted in MDOT receiving a \$71 million grant from the federal government.

“I am so grateful to all who supported advancing this much-needed project, including our former governors, Senators Wicker and Hyde-Smith, Congressman

Thompson and all of our local leaders. It was a huge accomplishment that we’re very proud of because this project will provide ease of travel and safety to our many constituents—and truckers—who drive that area as well as economic development. The State was able to add another \$73 million to the project so, within four months of my swearing in, we got this critical job funded and moving after being on the shelf for 20 years,” said Simmons.

Other projects coming up in Sunflower County and around the Moorhead area and in Drew will enhance business development in those areas as well as providing increased safety for motorists.

Simmons admitted it was difficult entering his new role just around the same time the pandemic struck the nation.

“We lost a lot of revenue at the pump because people were staying at home and just not traveling—about \$30 million

in total. But, on a positive note, I realized and saw first hand how essential all of our Department of Transportation workers are to this state. They have to get out in all kinds of terrible conditions, at all hours of the day and night, and literally risk their lives to do their jobs in order to keep our roads and bridges operable which protects our citizens. It was inspiring to see them all step up to the plate,” said the Commissioner.

TABB

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In spite of everything, my response is yes!

I decided to do an informal survey of my friends asking what they would say they are thankful for at this time. Of course, we had the usual answers that recognized the many blessings we have in our lives centered around faith, friends, fellowship, food, and family. I am particularly thankful for these friends, and I decided to share some of their thoughts with you:

- The time 2020 has afforded us to reflect on so many blessings and spend extra time with family. Tracy, Signe
- The beauty of fall colors, beautiful weather and perfect weather to be outside. Cheryl, Bettye
- That I don’t live in a big city, but a small town with good leaders. I am thankful for toilet paper, wipes, instacart, Dr Fauchi and Netflix.

Cynthia

- Choices, the rare privilege to be able to study ones options and to have real choices. Having choices is the bedrock of freedom, and freedom is a treasure. I am thankful that I live in the United States where I am not persecuted or jailed for my choices. Nan, Ann
- Indoor running water and plenty of it. Ann
- Front and back porches where we can safely gather. Mary Jane
- Every day I get to wake up and have breath. I am at that age. Myrtis
- My husband’s tolerance and his continued promise that it will all work out even in the face of his wife’s losing her cool. Cynthia
- For having had time to reflect quietly on what is important, a refreshed perspective to see the beauty in little things, and deeper gratitude for music and the arts. Tricia

- I am thankful that I live in Cleveland, MS where there is a strong sense of community. Becky
- That 2020 is almost over! Everyone

Covid-19 is real so these thoughts in no way pretend to lessen the impact of this virus in our daily lives. People are suffering; however, one lesson we have learned is to celebrate the daily blessings. They are the most important. Even our struggles bring opportunities for which we can be grateful. I do hope we can find our own spirit of thanksgiving during what has been an extremely trying year. Happy Thanksgiving to all and let’s work to remember there are many ways we can be thankful.

Dr. Myrtis Tabb is a community volunteer, retired longtime educator, and former Associate Vice President of DSU.

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