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HARDWOOD HEROES: We honor the area's best boys, girls prep basketball players, page 13.

THE CLARKSDALE

Press Register

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MICHAEL BANKS / THE CLARKSDALE PRESS REGISTER

REVIVAL IN RIVERTON: James Ranson was busy Saturday morning tending his grill in preparation for the 13th annual Riverton Day community celebration held at the parking lot of the Coahoma County Expo Center in Clarksdale. Ranson, who grew up in the Riverton community, has worked for the city of Clarksdale for 33 years as a 'jack of all trades.' As for his cooking skills, Ranson said ribs were his specialty and exclaimed, 'You don't need no teeth to eat my meat.' Riverton Day is 'a great thing' he said of the folks who return each year for the event. For more from Saturday's gathering, turn to **Page 11**.

40 jobs coming to Clarksdale

MAP of Easton will expand manufacturing facility here

Josh Troy
The Press Register

MAP of Easton Inc. announced a plant expansion on Wednesday, March 28, that will lead to 24 to 40 new jobs coming to Clarksdale and represent an increase of at least \$1 million to the city payroll.

The late John D'Amico Sr. founded the company in 1972 and the main offices are in Pennsylvania. There are also plants in Indiana and Michigan.

MAP of Easton Inc. came to Clarksdale in 2000, leases its building on Highway 322 from the city and has 60 employees. There were 51

Need to know

MAP of Easton Inc.
New jobs: 24 to 40
Number of employees in Clarksdale: 60
Number of employees at MAP of Easton Inc.: 675
CDBG and loan for plant improvements: \$650,000
MAP additional equipment: \$500,000
City applying for additional federal grant: \$250,000

employees at the beginning of the calendar year. The expansion is expected to give the company close to 100 employees.

See **JOBS** on **Page 2**

Fired schools chief fighting dismissal

Larry Liddell
The Press Register

Former Coahoma County School Superintendent Xandra Brooks-Keys has hired an attorney in an effort to seek reinstatement as superintendent.

Samuel L. Begley, who heads the Begley Law Firm in Jackson, has been retained as her counsel.

Brooks-Keys was terminated from her \$120,000 a year position by the Coahoma County Board of Trustees on March 27.

"I am requesting a public hearing be held concerning Ms. Keys' suspension and termination," Begley said Tuesday. "There's not even been a hearing on the matter and she is enti-

tled to a hearing and I want it to be public."

The Coahoma County School Board has not responded to requests from this newspaper for comment.

In a letter dated Jan. 11, 2018, Coahoma County School Board President Patrick Campbell notified Brooks-Keys that she was being suspended for five days without pay for the following reasons: failure to effectively communicate with parents concerning issues with disciplinary actions



Brooks-Keys

and other incidents concerning their children; a failure to properly supervise and maintain accountability for her staff; failure to effectively communicate with the Board of Trustees concerning when she would be absent; and a failure to set up an alternative school as required by the state and requested by the board.

According to a letter from Coahoma County School Attorney Nathaniel Armistad, Brooks-Keys was advised that her suspension hearing was set for Feb. 9, 2018 and JoAnne Shepherd would serve as the hearing officer. Begley requested a public hearing be held, but he has not received a response to his request.

One dead in Easter shooting



JOSH TROY / THE CLARKSDALE PRESS REGISTER

Clarksdale Police Department investigators Capt. Norman Starks, third from right, and Adam Dunavant, third from left, search a vehicle in front of the Nosef Apartments where the body of a 19-year-old Clarksdale man was found Sunday. See the story on **Page 6**.

LOCAL NEWS

Who is Corey Moore and why is his name attached to ambitious city project?

See page 5



BUSINESS

New Urgent and Primary Care office unveiled Saturday.

See page 12



Jobs

Continued from Page 1

The new employees are expected to be local.

"We, obviously, like Clarksdale," said John D'Amico, president of MAP of Easton. "We want to stay in Clarksdale and we want to use the Clarksdale people as much as possible. Our biggest issue with Clarksdale is not the workers. It's more the skilled workers to hiring mechanics and hiring management type of people."

Jobs will include production, quality control, maintenance and management positions. D'Amico said there will be training opportunities for unskilled employees. Hiring is expected to begin in the next three weeks.

According to D'Amico Jr., the company currently has 675 employees.

MAP of Easton Inc. manufactures products including automotive, architectural and acoustics-art.

About 20 years ago, one of MAP's main customers was in Tupelo.

"We looked at a few other places, but eventually Clarksdale won out strictly because of the people and the proximity to the customer," he said. "Today, we are still growing in Clarksdale and we are still looking to grow in Clarksdale."

The latest expansion will occur thanks to a Community Development Block Grant and a Cap loan to make the plant improvements adding up to \$650,000. Map of Easton Inc. will pay back the Cap loan.

The city is also applying for an additional federal grant of \$250,000. MAP will add additional equipment valued at an estimated \$500,000.

"What we were looking to do was to invest money into the building itself," D'Amico said. "The bathrooms, the ceiling and the air conditioning all need to be



JOSH TROY / THE CLARKSDALE PRESS REGISTER

From left, Clarksdale Mayor Chuck Espy, Mississippi Development Authority official Mickey Milligan, MAP of Easton Inc. president John D. Amico Jr., Clarksdale/Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce executive director Jon Levingston and Clarksdale MAP of Easton Inc. plant manager Dianne Pimpton tour the plant on Highway 322 after the announcement of 24 to 40 new jobs on March 28.

updated to become more of a state-of-the-art facility."

D'Amico said the lighting will be better suited for manufacturing. Some of the first improvements will be to the outside of the building since it is the first thing everyone sees.

Jon Levingston, execu-

tive director of the Clarksdale/Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce, said efforts to expand the plant began in November 2017.

"During a lunch together, he (D'Amico) mentioned how much he liked our labor force in Clarksdale. I told him we could supply as

much as he wanted. He said he would have to make some improvements to the building and add some equipment to accomplish that. I asked him to send me a 'wish list' of what he wanted. He sent the list, and we assembled a team to find ways to meet his needs."

Those who joined in the effort to help the expansion become a reality were James Curcio, executive director of the North Delta Planning District; Tracey Giles and Caleb Ross of the Mississippi Development Authority; Mike Philpot of Delta Council; Clarksdale Mayor Chuck Espy and the Board of Commissioners; and the Coahoma County Board of Supervisors.

"One of the most satisfying aspects of this project, aside from the creation of the 40 new well-paying jobs for our community, was the fact that so many different people and entities worked so well together to bring this project to fruition," Levingston said.

"Economic development is a team effort and I am pleased that our city government and our county government worked so well together to bring real economic opportunity to Clarksdale and Coahoma County. We can all be proud of that."

Jonestown police dispute may end up in court room

Josh Troy

The Press Register

JONESTOWN — Issues surrounding the Jonestown police department could be determined in a court of law.

Following an executive session during Monday's city council meeting, Mayor Kenny Lester said police chief Rico Smith would be suing him regarding a dispute of the hours Smith is permitted to work.

Lester only allows Smith to work 20 hours per week and he is currently the only officer in the police department.

Lester has suspended Smith on multiple occasions for insubordination. In some of those instances, the council has overruled the suspension and brought Smith back to work.

Lester laid off officers Stephen James and Byron Vaughn, making Smith the only officer in the department. He has said during meetings that finances caused the layoffs. However, he has confirmed outside of the meetings he does not want officers working under Smith's direction.

The mayor also reported during the meeting Roderick Moore from Tennessee heard about Jonestown's sit-

uation and offered to help police Jonestown for no pay, but a decision was not made.

While no officers were hired, Azki Shah was unanimously appointed municipal court judge. The position was vacant after Darnell Felton resigned.

Alderman Gregory Neely Sr. recommended bringing officers back first.

"We have a lot of money that's out that we need to collect," Lester replied. "If we don't collect the money we already have, then we're still going to have the same problem."

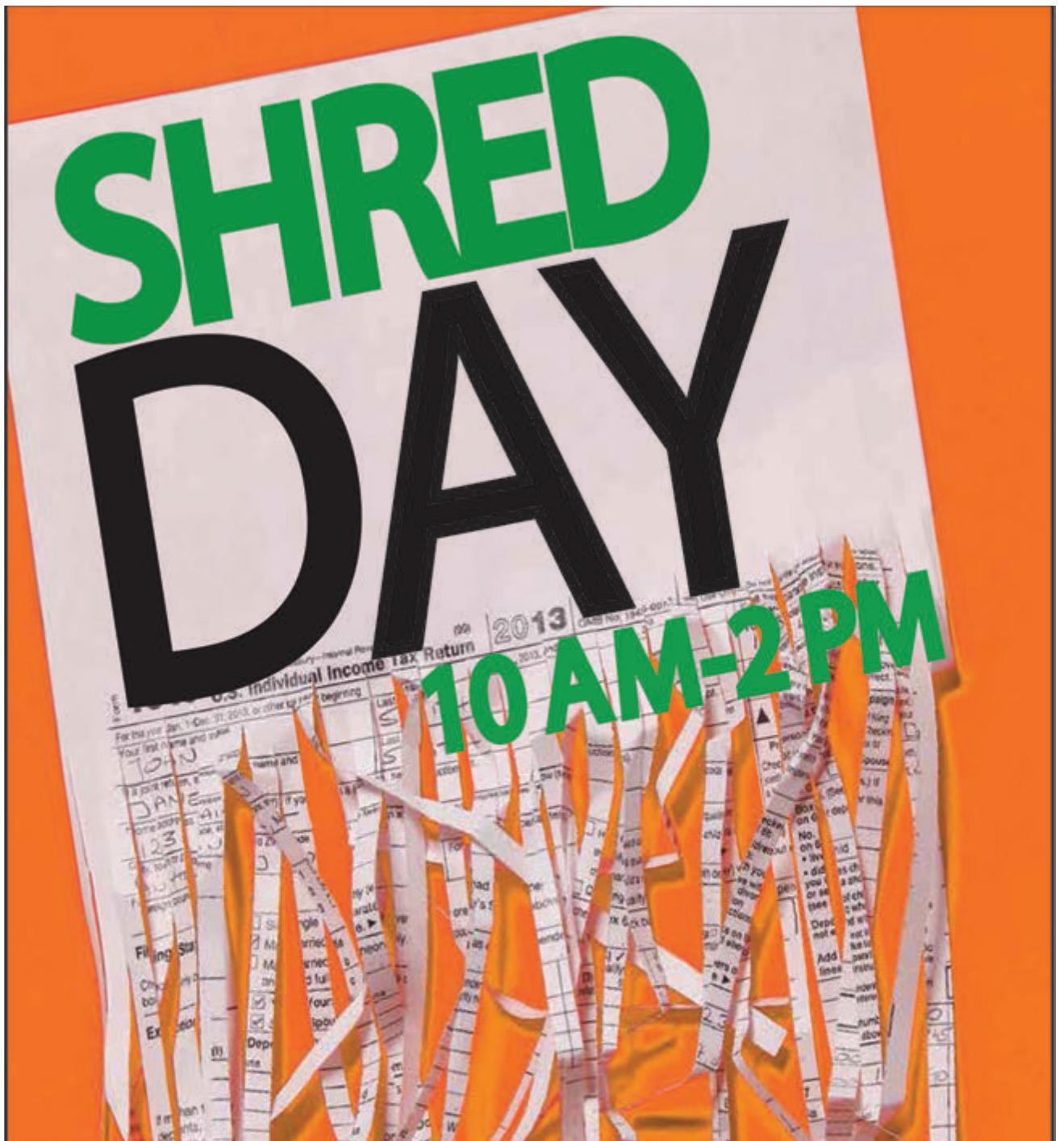
Alderman Unta Wiley agreed officers were needed to help with the night shift.

"We're writing new tickets on top of old tickets," Lester replied. "We aren't collecting any money. We still have the same problem. Just writing for nothing. They aren't paying them. Do you have any problems in Jonestown right now?"

Cheryl Ann Webster
Attorney at Law
Clarksdale, MS

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OPINION

Our View

Good things are happening here

MAP of Easton Inc. announced an expansion on Wednesday, March 28, that will lead to 24 to 40 new jobs coming to Clarksdale that will represent an increase of at least \$1 million to the community's payroll.

The city of Clarksdale received a Community Block Development Grant and a Cap loan to make plant improvements, which will be a \$650,000 investment.

The city is also applying for an additional federal grant of \$250,000. MAP will add additional equipment valued at an estimated \$500,000.

While 24 jobs must be added to qualify for the CDBG, the total will be closer to 40 due to increased contracts from auto companies.

The expansion and ability to secure necessary funding should be a reminder good things are happening right here in Clarksdale and Coahoma County.

These good things are not sudden either.

The announcement of the expansion was made at Clarksdale City Hall with many dignitaries and business leaders, including Mayor Chuck Espy and John D'Amico Jr., president of MAP of Easton Inc.

MAP of Easton Inc. first opened its plant in Clarksdale on Highway 322 in 2000.

During many of those years, the company's founder, the late John D'Amico Sr., worked with former Clarksdale Mayor Henry Espy.

Now, as the expansion occurs, D'Amico Sr.'s son, D'Amico Jr., is running the company and working with Chuck Espy, who is Henry Espy's son.

Another coincidence is the expansion announcement occurred on March 28, 2018. The ribbon cutting of MAP of Easton Inc., coming to Clarksdale was in the Press Register on March 28, 2000 — 18 years earlier to the day.

For all the good things happening in Clarksdale, we cannot remain stagnant. We must keep our foot on the gas if the investment is going to be worthwhile. That means making sure the new jobs are local and the funding secured is used wisely.

We must also continue to add jobs in Clarksdale, whether it is at MAP of Easton Inc., other existing businesses or companies locating here.

We cannot be fully satisfied until everyone who wants a job in Coahoma County has one. It's a tall order, but there is always room for improvement.

Crime in Clarksdale has been a serious problem in recent years and we saw another senseless murder on Easter Sunday.

While job growth is not a cure-all, increasing employment and giving everyone something to feel good about and a source of income is a very important step.

MAP of Easton Inc. is a very strong contributor in our community.

Now it is up to each of us, individually, to do our part and build on the jobs they will bring us.



Plenty show a belief in Clarksdale

It was a wet, dismal, February afternoon when we first drove into Clarksdale.

It was the first visit for my wife and me to this town that could end up being our home for the next several years and more. We had flown into Memphis and then taken Highway 61 into the Delta. The trip was to be the final selling point in deciding whether we would locate here and make this our home.

Did we believe in Clarksdale?

First impressions were -- how can I say it kindly? -- less than impressive. The weather only compounded the fact as a slow drizzle fell on the slanted roofs, unpainted walls and rusting relics that populated many a yard. Empty shells of buildings and long-closed businesses fronted the street as we drove by.

But, we came to know more about Clarksdale and its people during that weekend. And that is what became the true selling point and convinced us that, yes, we did believe in Clarksdale.

A day full of assignments Saturday showed me that others are also believing in Clarksdale.

Take the story of Mary Williams. While a native of nearby Marks, she has worked in Clarksdale for many years and has spent the past 11 as a nurse practitioner at the Northwest Mississippi Medical Center.

She saw a need for readily available urgent and primary care here in Clarksdale and unveiled her new business during a ceremony Saturday afternoon. And during a moving speech, Williams encouraged all in

the audience to "write your own story" in all things you do in life.

And that's exactly what she's helping Clarksdale do: writing its own story.

"I have to carry out this vision," Williams said. "It's before me."



Michael Banks
Publisher

More of that same entrepreneurial spirit was unveiled during a visit to the Vision Center on the campus of Pleasant Valley Church at 1051 Walnut St. in Clarksdale.

Senior pastor John E. Givins started out with just four members in a small, cramped building down the road at 324 Washington St. Now, his congregation numbers 200-plus and they have since built an 11,907-square-foot Vision Center on a 5-acre lot that was formerly owned by the local Habitat for Humanity.

An IT major, Givins is a dreamer. The ordained minister just exudes excitement when he talks of all that he and his church have planned at their new location.

There are plans for a restaurant called 20-20 that will be open to the public. There are hopes to eventually build a recreational center and convalescent facility behind the Vision Center on the Walnut Street campus. He has plans to offer "a praying park" at the location for people battling cancer or who have lost loved ones to the disease.

"God called me to Clarksdale,"

Givins said of why he makes the drive each day from his home in Southhaven and ministers here.

"It is our mission to take care of the whole man," he said.

Givins told of a night two years ago when he was jumped and robbed as he left the church. Two weeks later, one of those assailants would be shot and lose his leg during a separate incident.

"That motivated me even more," Givins said. "There is a true need here. No matter how God blesses you, we are all equal."

And that love of Clarksdale and community could be found Saturday just down the street from the Vision Center at the annual Riverton Day celebration.

Two longtime friends, Sherman Robinson and Travis Haggan, organized the event 13 years ago as they had grown weary of their only get-togethers coming when a friend or family member had died. They wanted there to be fun and laughs when they gathered, a "block party" per se.

And that was fully on display Saturday afternoon as old-timers gathered to swap stories under the tantalizing smell of a hog and ribs on a nearby smoker. Friends, some who traveled far, shared recipes, stories and memories of times long ago.

These are people who love Clarksdale. These are people who believe in Clarksdale.

Michael Banks is publisher of The Clarksdale Press Register. He can be reached at 662-627-2201 or by email at mbanks@pressregister.com.

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Clarksdale, Miss. • (USPS 115-960) • Founded 1865

Publisher: Michael Banks, 662.627.2201
publisher@pressregister.com

Larry Liddell
Senior Writer
lliddell@pressregister.com

Josh Troy
Managing Editor
news@pressregister.com

Sandy Hite
Business Manager
sandyhite@pressregister.com

Troy Catchings
Photographer/Photo Editor
tcatchings@pressregister.com

Brenda Keller
Advertising Manager
bkeller@pressregister.com

Tracey Hankins Riley
Graphic Designer
thankins@pressregister.com

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