

## Mississippi Urban Forest Council Honors Campus Landscapers with Statewide Award

Contributed by Kathleen Williams, Mitchell Diggs  
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OXFORD, Miss. - Scores of journalists from around the world began their reports on last week's presidential debate by mentioning the natural beauty of the University of Mississippi campus.

That beauty has been officially lauded. The Mississippi Urban Forest Council has honored Ole Miss with its annual Scenic Communities of Mississippi award, which recognizes the university's commitment to a range of activities to protect the environment, as well as planting and maintaining trees on its 1,000-acre campus.

Donna Yowell, executive director of the Mississippi Urban Forest Council, presented the award Wednesday morning to UM Landscape Services Director Jeff McManus and Chancellor Robert Khayat in a ceremony on the Quad near Paris-Yates Chapel. The ceremony was followed by a reception for dozens of landscape services employees.

"I think it is a great honor for the Ole Miss family and landscaping team," McManus said. "It is great recognition for the campus, and it shows our commitment to the continued enhancement of our facilities and grounds."

The Oxford campus is home to some of the state's largest and oldest trees, including a Northern catalpa with a circumference of nearly 21 feet, and Mississippi's largest Osage orange tree.

"This past year alone, another 754 trees were planted, pushing the university's inventory to well over 6,000 trees," McManus said.

"Ole Miss works hard to maintain their tree growth, and they have a great track record of maintenance of trees as well as the planting of new trees," Yowell said. One thing that distinguished the university from other applicants for the award is the care given to the towering oaks and other trees in the Grove, she said.

The shade provided by trees is a major part of the campus' atmosphere, she said. "Can you imagine walking around this campus without the

shade?"

Other factors that were considered include efforts to combat litter on campus, protect water quality and control storm runoff, Yowell said.

The award has been more than a decade in the making, Khayat said, noting that maintaining the campus' beauty has been a priority under his leadership since 1995.

"This is a huge compliment to the people here on our landscape team and to Jeff McManus and his leadership team," Khayat said. "The first thing people see when they come here is a manicured, loved, embraced landscape."

The Landscape Services Department has received other awards in recent years, including the 2002 Grand Award from the Professional Grounds Management Society for having the nation's best-maintained campus.

Many hours are spent mowing, weeding, planting, distributing pine straw and spraying to keep the campus looking healthy and polished.

"No matter where you drive up on a college campus, you only get one shot at a first impression," McManus said. "We want our campus to make a statement: 'You are at Ole Miss.'"

For more information on the Landscaping Services Department, go <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/landscape/>.

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