Speaker Biographies

Steve Rosenthal
Steve Rosenthal, Mayor of Indianola, is a third generation Indianolian - his grandfather opened a small tailor shop on Front Street downtown Indianola in 1913. Mayor Rosenthal has continued the community involvement that was begun by his grandfather and father many years ago. Mayor Rosenthal operated the family department store “Ben Fried’s” for 28 years, growing it into the center for downtown shopping. He has managed and owned commercial & residential real-estate in Indianola for the last 25 years and has worked to improve housing for moderate to low income households. He was instrumental in bringing a number of national chains to Indianola such as Cato’s, Hibbett Sports, Cellular South, Movie Gallery, Shoe Show and O’Reilly Auto Parts.

In 1980 Mayor Rosenthal, along with three other Indianola businessmen, worked to hold the first “B. B. King Homecoming Festival” and continued that festival themselves for the next three years. They passed the control in 1983 to the Chamber of Commerce which continues the annual event still today.

Mayor Rosenthal has served as President of the Indianola Chamber of Commerce, Sunflower County Crime Stoppers, Indianola Kiwanis Club and the Indianola Merchants Committee. He has also served on the Board of Directors of Sunflower-Humphreys County Progress, Hebrew Union Temple, and the Indianola Bi-Racial Committee.

He has worked tirelessly to bring new opportunities for employment, education and a better way of life for all of the citizens of Indianola.

Eligah Johnson
Eligah Johnson is the director of Delta Promise Community through Delta Health Alliance in Stoneville. As a Registered Respiratory Therapist, he brings more than 30 years of experience in health care and management to his post as director of Delta Promise Community. Prior to assuming his current responsibilities at Delta Health Alliance, Mr. Johnson served as the director of the Sleep Center and the Respiratory Therapy and Neurology Departments at Delta Regional Medical Center in Greenville, Mississippi. He joined Delta Health Alliance in August 2009 after working at The King’s Daughters Hospital and Delta Regional Medical Center. He received his bachelors of Health Science degree from Baptist College in Memphis and masters of Public Health degree from Jackson State University in Jackson.

Mr. Johnson has served his community by participating in Leadership Greenville and as a board member for Greenville Area Chamber of Commerce. He also served on the Respiratory Advisory Board at Coahoma Community College and on the Education Committee for the Mississippi Society for Respiratory Care. Currently, he serves as a member on the Project Success Steering Committee in Indianola.

Mr. Johnson is a native of Greenville, Mississippi and currently resides there with his wife and son.
**Shannon Griffin**

Shannon Griffin is an Extension Associate for the Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSU-ES). She is a native of Jackson, Mississippi and a graduate of Mississippi College where she received both a Bachelor of Science in Communication and a Master of Education in Business Education. Through the Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Ms. Griffin serves as the Business Advisor for the Mississippi Delta Early Learning Initiative. In this capacity she works to improve the financial viability of child care centers in Indianola, Mississippi. This is accomplished by providing one-on-one financial management counseling to center directors.

Prior to joining the Extension Service in January 2011, Shannon served in counseling roles at Mississippi Delta Community College and Hinds Community College. In addition to being a licensed educator, she has taught countless financial literacy courses to adult populations and counseled numerous clients in personal finance strategies. Her experience as a paid tax return preparer has allowed her to help child care center directors/owners understand their business’ federal tax obligations. She is an Internal Revenue Service Certified VITA/ECE (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance/Tax Counseling for the Elderly) Volunteer.

**Betty Burkes**

Betty Burkes is a life-long educator and peace activist. She founded and directed the Montessori Paradise pre-school on Cape Cod for 12 years offering young children an environment in which peace-making and social justice mingled with the affirmation of childhood. Her activism and grassroots organizing have been internationally/nationally with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) where she was President of the U.S. Section for three years. She served on the WILPF National Board from 1989-2002, conducting workshops on disarmament, racial, economic and gender justice, non-violence and social change. From 2001-2005, she coordinated a joint project of the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs and The Hague Appeal for Peace which supported local initiatives for peace education projects in Cambodia, Albania, Peru and Niger. She also chaired the Cambridge Peace Commission, a city department designed to think globally and act locally to address the roots of violence. Currently she coordinates curriculum with “Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools”, a transformational leadership and empowerment project for middle school students in New Orleans.

Ms. Burkes believes in “relational activism,” building the world which is possible through affirmation, connections across communities, and a deep-seated faith in the human spirit. She lives with her beloved in Cambridge and treasures every minute with her 4-year old grandson.

**Barbara Washington**

Barbara Washington serves as the Program Coordinator for Asset Builders, a program of the Southern Good Faith Fund (SGFF). SGFF is a 501c3 nonprofit affiliate of Southern Bancorp. Its affiliation with Southern allows SGFF to be part of a comprehensive effort of community and economic development in South and East Arkansas and the Mississippi Delta. As Program Coordinator for Asset Builders, Ms. Washington works with a variety of innovative programs focusing on the long-term benefits of building assets to lift families and communities out of poverty. These programs include financial education, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and counseling services to provide people with an opportunity to learn new skills and receive qualified advice and support. Ms. Washington graduated from Belhaven College with a Bachelor of Science in Management.
Frank Howell
Frank Howell was named the Director of the Delta Council Development Department in April, 2002. Delta Council is an area economic development organization representing the eighteen Delta and part-Delta counties of Northwest Mississippi. Started in 1935 by a group of farsighted citizens to provide a medium through which the agricultural, business, and professional leadership of the area could work together, Delta Council now pioneers the effort to solve common problems and promote the development of the economy in the area.

Mr. Howell previously served for seven years as Director of Public Affairs and Communications for the regional economic and agricultural development organization based in Stoneville. He is a native of Clarksdale and graduated from The McCallie School and Rhodes College with a B.A. in Political Science. He currently resides in Leland, where he attends St. John’s Episcopal Church and serves as Senior Warden.