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MC Leaders Support Mississippi Book Festival in Jackson

Mississippi College Law School Dean Patricia Bennett was delighted to introduce U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor to a large crowd of admirers.

Bennett's introduction was one of several ways that MC leaders, alumni and students played a role at the Mississippi Book Festival. The fifth annual event in Jackson Saturday attracted a record of more than 9,000 visitors along with 175 authors.

Appointed to the bench in 2009 by then-President Barack Obama, Sotomayor visited the Magnolia State to promote her books including "Turning Pages: My Life Story" published last year. Others include her autobiography "My Beloved World" penned in 2013.

The only Hispanic justice on the USA's high court inspired many during her speech delivered at Galloway United Methodist Church near the Capitol.

Associate MC Law Dean Jonathan Will enjoyed every minute. The 65-year-old associate justice kept the Mississippi audience engaged with her remarks. Sotomayor spoke of her coming from "humble beginnings" in the Bronx, New York, Will said. "She saw the potential of the possibilities."

Sotomayor is best known for writing opinions on civil rights, privacy rights and criminal justice. Her books have made her a millionaire and an in-demand speaker to audiences of all ages.



Mississippi College grads Andrea Jones-Davis and her sister, Brittany N. Jones flank MC university news coordinator Andy Kanengiser at the 2019 Mississippi Book Festival in Jackson. Both MC School of Education graduates, the sisters serve as instructional leaders at the Toot, Teach and Roll Mobile Learning Lab in Jackson at the Aug. 17 event. The lab is housed in a big bus that was parked near the Capitol, with activities attracting kids.

Her speech was a hit with MC Law Dean Emeritus Jim Rosenblatt. “The event with Associate Justice Sotomayor was the high point of the day for me,” he said. “What a captivating speaker she was – and so complimentary of Mississippi.”

The Mississippi Book Festival attracted about 30 MC Law student volunteers. The students attended her talk at the festival Saturday as well as Friday’s book signing event geared to children.

“We were happy to support it. It was great to get our students over there,” Will said.

Making the rounds greeting book lovers around the Capitol, Rosenblatt snagged photos and rekindled friendships. He asked questions of authors with recent books on World War II. He met with children’s books author Dav Pilkey. The 53-year-old Ohio native has written books with interesting titles like “Captain Underpants” and “The Adventures of Super Diaper Baby.”

The Mississippi Book Festival continues to soar in popularity. There were 7,000 guests attending a year ago. Mississippi College communication professor Phyllis Seawright returned to the August 17 event with friend Tami Hawes of Jackson to gain insights from some of the nation’s outstanding writers. One of her favorite sessions at the Capitol focused on Southern humor.

“I saw former students working at the festival and colleagues attending,” Seawright said. “Over and over again, the writers emphasized telling stories based on their truthful experiences, which doesn’t limit their imagination. These writers all look at the world around them, compelled to write in order to make sense of it all.”

MC alumnus Bill Dunlap, who’s one of the most celebrated painters in Southern art today, was among the Book Festival panelists. The works of the Mathiston, Mississippi native can be found in public and private collections nationwide, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The festival appealed to hundreds of young kids. MC School of Education graduates Andrea Jones-Davis and Brittany N. Jones stayed busy working during a sizzling summer day.

The sisters from Jackson serve as instructional leaders at the Toot, Teach and Roll Mobile Learning Lab. It’s a former school bus brightly decorated with the colors of the rainbow. Jones-Davis owns the roving metro Jackson business loaded with arts and crafts, comfortable chairs, and fun activities designed for children. Catering to parties and other special events, the learning lab houses plenty of books.