

# Mississippi Pay It Forward Program

2015 Annual Report



# Program overview

Mississippi, our nation, and the world need a new generation of leaders to solve our most pressing problems.

The Mississippi Pay It Forward program partners with the national non-profit organization Students Today Leaders Forever (STLF) to reveal leadership through service, relationships, and action.

STLF hosts Pay It Forward Tours, trips for 30-40 students each that combine community service, leadership development, teambuilding, college visits, tourism, and reflection—all while traveling to four cities in five days, led by college student mentors.

The trip is designed to connect students with service opportunities, strengthen student leadership capacity, and build a cohesive team of supporters so that students return to their home communities ready to creating lasting change in their own hometowns!

## THE PAY IT FORWARD TOUR IN MISSISSIPPI

Students in Mississippi who have participated in the Pay It Forward Tour join a national movement of servant-leaders. To date, over 25,000 students have participated in over 600 total STLF Pay It Forward Tours.

Students typically pay hundreds of dollars to participate on the Pay It Forward Tour. This sort of fee makes the Tour inaccessible to many students of Mississippi, so the Mississippi Pay It Forward Tour program relies on the generosity of donors to make the program possible. Because of our generous donors, students of the Mississippi Pay It Forward Tour program do not pay a single cent to participate.

Leland High School was the first school in the state of Mississippi to host a Pay It Forward Tour. Each year since 2010, 10-20% of Leland High School students participate in the Pay It Forward Tour. Having just completed the ninth Pay It Forward Tour in six years (seven of which at Leland), the Mississippi program has become an enduring institution that students look forward to annually.

## Expanding opportunities

This year, in addition to the Leland High School Pay It Forward Tour, the Mississippi Pay It Forward Program hosted a second bus. This bus was a pilot program of the Pay It Forward Tour in the Jackson, Mississippi area, and featured students from both public and private schools on the same bus. Returning students from the Leland program were able to provide students leadership on the Jackson-area bus. Each bus traveled its own independent route for the first three cities, then met up in Houston for a “Celebration City” including one large group community service project with students from both buses. After the enormous success of the pilot this year, we aim to solidify the program annually.

# 2015 Trip Highlights

71 students. 7 cities. 5 days.

1 transformational experience.

## Service projects

### Leland Tour

#### **BREC**

Baton Rouge, LA

*Painting fences at community equestrian center*

#### **Love In Action Outreach**

New Orleans, LA

*Working in food warehouse and cleaning around building*

#### **USS ORLECK Naval Museum**

Lake Charles, LA

*Provided welcoming committee to museum visitors*

### Jackson Tour

#### **Lake View**

Shreveport, LA 71112

*Cleaning up playground at local church*

#### **Dallas Parks & Rec**

Dallas, TX

*Cleaned out and inventoried two large equipment trailers*

#### **Marbridge Foundation**

Manchaca, TX

*Provided social service program to residents with developmental disabilities*

### Joint project

#### **Houston Food Bank**

Houston, TX

*Separated and boxed up various types of food*

## Teambuilding and leadership development

In the evening, at rest stops, even while on the bus, a team of trained facilitators led students in a series of carefully sequenced activities – everything from lighthearted icebreakers to in-depth discussions on equity and justice. Some activities were done as a full group, and others were done in small cohorts led by a college leader mentor.

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## College visit

On this year's Tour, students from the Leland Tour had the opportunity to visit and tour Louisiana State University, and students from the Jackson Tour had the opportunity to visit and tour University Texas – Austin.



# Impact

## in their own words

As part of the student application process, perspective students are asked to complete an essay explaining why they believe they will be good fits for the Tour. The following is one student's essay.

The Pay It Forward Tour is a great experience to get high school students out of the house to do something helpful. It keeps a lot of kids out of trouble, as well as lets them visit different cities they have never been to. You get to perform community service acts that are very helpful. You wonderful how I know all these things, well that's because I've already been on the tour. I think I'll be a good fit for the Pay It Forward Tour again because I'm dedicated to all the hard work and tasks required. I like meeting new people, performing generous acts of kindness, and I'm an honor student in high school.

The first reason why I think I'll be a good fit for the Pay It Forward Tour is because I'm dedicated to all the hard work and tasks required. Some people like to sit around and take the easy route, but that's not met at all. I'm not scared to get dirty and will do whatever it takes to get the job done. Besides, I'm not a girly girl anyway.

The second reason why I think I'll be a good fit for the Pay It Forward Tour is because I like meeting new people. I am a people's person. The tour is all about meeting new people and helping them around their community in different cities. Meeting new people gives me the advantage to see how they do things differently from where I'm from and to get to know each other.

The last reason why I think I'll be a good fit for the tour is that I'm an honor student. Being an honor student can be challenging sometimes. You can't get in trouble, can't be late for school, and you have to keep your grades up to a certain average. Well, I'm maintaining all of that at once! I'm a Principal Scholar, a member of DECA, and the treasurer for the class of 2017. Students who do well in school deserve to be a part of the Pay It Forward Tour.

As you can see, these are the reasons why I would be a good fit for the Pay It Forward Tour. I really hope I can be a part of this great experience again. Being dedicated to all the hard work is what I am all about. When working for a cause or to help someone, you can always count me in.

# Thank you

to all our donors.

**\$7,000+** Ellen Mitchell Gallagher

**\$3,000+** Joseph Spallina ♥

**\$2,000+** City of Leland ♥  
Pay It Forward Gala

**\$1,000+** Kevin & Stephanie Parkinson ♥

**\$750+** Leland Presbyterian Church

**\$400+** Mick & Cindy Pompelia ♥  
Jared B. Spallina

**\$300+** The Leland Progress ♥  
Garry & Kathy Parkinson ♥

**\$200+** E.L. & Mary Boteler  
Kristin Bruno ♥  
Leland Dental Clinic  
Leland Rotary Club  
Benjamin Mackey ♥  
John Matthews ♥  
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Stop-N-Shop  
Vince's Restaurant  
Lori Wiseman  
World Class Athletic Services

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Brandon & Sara White

♥ indicates donor who has contributed to the Mississippi Pay It Forward program at least three years.

# Additional Acknowledgements

In addition to our amazing donors, there is a long list of people who have made this Tour possible. There is simply no way we can thank everyone, but we wish to offer this list in recognition of the countless hours, insight, trust, and support that our friends and family have contributed.

To the STLF national office, especially Ashley Yorks, Josh Hansen, and Josh Reimnitz: For your nonstop service, much-appreciated flexibility, and excellent problem solving.

The Superintendent, Board of Trustees, and all employees (teachers, administrators, and support staff) of our partnering districts and schools – Callaway High School, Jackson Academy, Leland High School, Murrah High School, and St. Andrew's: For leadership and dedication to this extracurricular endeavor.

The Mayor and Board of Aldermen of Leland, MS – Kenny Thomas, Lisa Bush, Mala Brooks, Nancy Jo King, Andy Petro, and Carl Williams: For your continued commitments and embrace.

The organizations we partnered with while on the Tour, including the community groups that organized our service projects, the housing partners that provided us free places to sleep, the universities who provided us tours, restaurants that provided us free or deeply discounted means, and more; namely: Airline Drive Church of Christ (especially Bill), BREC (especially Monica), His Hands2Go (especially Teresa Reiger), Holy Trinity Episcopal Church (especially Ally Perry), Houston Food Bank (especially Toni A. Oplt), Lake View (especially Gary Lash), Louisiana State University, Love In Action Outreach (Gail Womack-Murray), Manchaca United Methodist Church (especially Mark Hixon), Marbridge Foundation (especially Haley Koop), Pleasant Oaks Recreation Center (especially Amie Sudds), USS ORLECK Naval Museum (especially Eric Thibodeaux), Tyler Street UMC (especially Jane Nelson), University of Texas – Austin, and Zoar Baptist Church (especially Pastor Obbie Todd).

For Cline Tours (especially Jerry Craig and Mike Williams) – for going above and beyond, for being adaptable, and for safe transport.

The talented and inspirational group of college leaders who helped coordinate all the logistics and programming, and served as valued mentors: Bruno Hernandez (Elgin Community College); Nick Wages and Maddie Woiwode (Illinois State University); Mark Choulakone (Massachusetts Institute of Technology); Riley Egan and Nikki Wilson (University of Wisconsin – Madison); Kristin Boelter (Southern Illinois University); Jen Chounlakine, Johnna Goudschaal, and Aya Malave (Western Illinois University)

And, most importantly – the students who used their summer vacations to sleep on gym floors and serve others; and their guardians for their constant and continued support.

## In Memorandum: Jake Williams, Jr.

The Mississippi Pay It Forward Program wishes to express our deepest love in memory of Jake Williams, Jr., the captain of the Leland High School baseball team and a much beloved member of Students Today Leaders Forever. We are so grateful that Jake participated on the Pay It Forward Tour this year, approximately one month before he passed away. Jake embodied the spirit of the Pay It Forward Tour, and was a leader among his peers and younger students. Jake wholeheartedly dove into service projects – Students and adults alike could learn from Jake's leadership, positivity, and charisma.