Leading up to this year’s county elections, The Dispatch sent questionnaires to all candidates in contested races. Candidates were asked to provide basic information such as age, political experience and contact information. They were also asked to answer between 1-3 questions, limiting their responses to 150 words.

The answers provided to us are printed in this guide. We only edited the answers for length; we didn’t make any grammatical corrections.

Questionnaires were sent to all candidates, and our staff followed up with multiple phone calls and emails in an effort to get responses from every candidate.

This version of the Voter’s Guide has been updated to reflect only general election candidates.

Oktibbeha County Voter’s Guide

A GUIDE TO THE NOVEMBER 7 GENERAL ELECTION

Precinct Polling Places

West Starkville
Oktibbeha County Storm Shelter, 985 Lynn Lane, Starkville

North Longview
Longview Fire Station, 1105 Highway 12 W., Starkville

South Adaton
Adaton Baptist Church, 2872 Highway 82 W., Starkville

Double Spring
Double Spring Baptist Church, 10284 Sturgis Maben Road, Maben

Hickory Grove
East Oktibbeha Fire Station, 15012 Old Highway 82 E., Starkville

North Starkville II
Mt. Pelier Church, 814 N. Jackson St., Starkville

Osborn
16th Section Baptist Life Center, 5436 Old West Point Road, Starkville

Bell School House
Bell School House Fire Station, 7407 Highway 389, Starkville

North Adaton
Adaton Fire Station, 16 W. Reed Road, Starkville

East Starkville
St. Joseph Catholic Church, 607 University Dr., Starkville

Maben
Maben City Hall, 711 Second Ave., Maben

North Starkville III
Trinity Presbyterian Church, 607 Hospital Road, Starkville

South Starkville
Starkville Sportsplex, 405 Lynn Lane, Starkville

South Longview
Longview Fire Station, 1105 Highway 12 W., Starkville

Craig Springs
Craig Springs Fire Station, 1040 Craig Springs Road, Sturgis

Shurgis
Sturgis Fire Station, 117 Montgomery St., Sturgis

Central Starkville
Circuit Court Annex, 108 W. Main St., Starkville

Neshnab
Newlife, 6 & Hunter Lane, Starkville

Okhtoc
Otico Fire Station, 2004 Otico Road, Starkville

Sessums
Blackjack M.B. Church, 4607 Blackjack Road, Starkville

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Coroner ..............................
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County Prosecutor .................
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Sheriff ............................... 2

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Tax Assessor ........................ 2

The Starkville Dispatch
Primary crime issues are individuals struggling with drugs, juveniles, and drugs. Solving these issues will take hard work and change in the culture, change in culture with the help of the community, leaders, groups like the Starkville Police Department (community policing), and education.

Despite the challenging circumstances faced by many departments in maintaining full staffing levels, our sheriff’s office has done an excellent job in retaining and recruiting all personnel. I would like to expand our department and believe that expanding our narcotics and investigation units would be a valuable step forward. By doing this, I aim to create more job opportunities within our department. Our department would offer comprehensive training programs to ensure that officers and deputies are well-prepared to handle the challenges of our criminal justice system. I also feel like having competitive pay will play a crucial role in attracting, retaining, and rewarding our personnel within the department. I believe that these factors will help protect the citizens of this county and help our department grow even more.

During my time working under Sheriff Gladney, I have learned a great deal about effective leadership, policing and building strong relationships with our citizens. Our county has changed a lot over the past 9 years and I think that Sheriff Gladney has done a great job of keeping our department up to date. I hope to keep promoting teamwork and making sure everyone feels included in our department. I plan on using lessons I have learned from Sheriff Gladney to keep the good changes going while also adapting to what our community needs as it changes. Our county is growing every day and my goal is to keep Oktibbeha County a safe place to live with your family.

Shank Phelps

Republican

I believe that the primary crime problems in Oktibbeha County and Starkville City are a combination of juvenile crime and drug-related offenses. Juvenile crime is a big concern to me because it affects the future of the young individuals involved. I would like work closely with our youth court system to hold the juveniles accountable for their actions, and teaching them there are consequences for their actions, while also providing them with support and resources they need to get their lives turned around. Additionally, drug-related offenses contribute to the rise of criminal activity and pose a threat to public safety. I think that expanding our narcotics team will be of crucial importance in resolving these issues in our county. By increasing the resources and manpower of our narcotics unit, we can enhance their ability to investigate, apprehend, and disrupt drug trafficking activities, ultimately making our community safer.

The current program that is used to maintain our database is falling to the wayside. Our county is growing in leaps and bounds, and I feel it is crucial that we continue to update our system with any and all exemptions, laws passed by legislation, maps and the land roll.

The current position I am in is not face-to-face. There are times we are required to be in front of the deputy, you will have legal issues to address it. However, when you are in front of the deputy, you have unlimited attention.

I have 24 years of experience being a deputy sheriff in a few different agencies. I’ve been in law enforcement for over 20 years, collecting money for tags and taxes. I try to understand the problems and concerns of others. I’ve been asked a lot of questions from the people, so I know that the world is getting established in general, if I have questions I need to ask. I will try to understand as much as possible.

I BELIEVE that the primary crime problems in Oktibbeha County and Starkville City are a combination of juvenile crime and drug-related offenses. Juvenile crime is a big concern to me because it affects the future of the young individuals involved. I would like work closely with our youth court system to hold the juveniles accountable for their actions, and teaching them there are consequences for their actions, while also providing them with support and resources they need to get their lives turned around. Additionally, drug-related offenses contribute to the rise of criminal activity and pose a threat to public safety. I think that expanding our narcotics team will be of crucial importance in resolving these issues in our county. By increasing the resources and manpower of our narcotics unit, we can enhance their ability to investigate, apprehend, and disrupt drug trafficking activities, ultimately making our community safer.

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Donald L. Grant

Republican

Sheriff

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District 1 Supervisor

Democrat

Erik Young
Age: 51
Education: Starkville High School (graduated 1999)
Community College c/o 2001 Data State Technology College c/o 2004 (Bachelor of Business Administration/Mississippi State University, 2008 (Masters of Public Policy and Administration)
Political party: Democrat
Political experience: None
Residence: Starkville
Family: Married, four children
Email: eyoung36700@gmail.com
Phone: (662) 414-0722

I would like to see the money dispersed countywide. Many areas are being omitted that need repairs and upgrades. With everyone paying their taxes, they do not want them being looked over. We would like them to feel included and to have access to the same services as other areas in the county while getting the upgrades needed.

The county can work more effectively with the City of Starkville. Meaning that the city allows the county to see what projects the city is completing a priority and the county allows the city to see what projects the county considers a priority. This collaboration will work for the common good of the people by allowing both teams to find common ground to move projects forward. The city and the county can then work to build a plan where the needs of the people are a priority while the needs of the city and county are being met.

Although I think the county is doing a fantastic job, there is always room for improvement. One needed improvement is seeing the trash cans. Our residents are paying for the trash cans. They should not have to pay to have destroyed or damaged trash cans replaced. The trash cans should be replaced once they reach a certain number of years of usage. In addition, I see low hanging limbs and debris on the county roads that can be deemed as a hazard. There is also a need to ensure that our county and city employees feel valued and appreciated within their positions.

Republican

Ben Carver
Age: 58
Education: Starkville High School (graduated 2003)
University 2008 (Masters of Public Policy and Administration)
Political party: Republican
Political experience: I am currently serving my fourth term as Ward 1 Alderman in the City of Starkville.
Residence: Starkville
Family: Married, two children
Email: b.carver@cityofstarkville.org
Phone: (662) 312-3558

Since 1986, each county (without exemption) operates under the countywide (jus) system. Oktibbeha County is one of the 44 counties that operate under the unit system. Regardless how I feel about it, we will continue to operate under the parameters of the law. The greatest asset I bring to the office is the ability to inspect and assess county road conditions, and coordinate with the Road Manager. My 14 years of experience as an Alderman will be extremely valuable in the capacity to pave as many road miles as possible each year. I have been ensuring that all of the most needed roads are paved in town and I look forward to seeing substantial progress in the near future for the County. Madison-Riggs Road will be getting paved around the time of this printing, and that project will serve as an example of future road projects.

As previously stated, Oktibbeha County must further improve road and bridge conditions countywide. Also, as elected, there will be significant job creation in the future. Oktibbeha County Residents routinely travel to other counties to work. And while that is admirable, we need more local manufacturing jobs. Oktibbeha County residents deserve more diversity of employment options. I believe with the addition of the Still aluminum plant, you will see an exploration of new industry opportunities in the near future. The next decade will be an exciting time to live in Oktibbeha County.

District 2 Supervisor

Republican

Les Lindley
Education: Starkville High School (graduated 1983)
Community College c/o 1988 (Agriculture)
Political party: Republican
Political experience: None
Residence: Starkville
Email: lesilindley@gmail.com
Phone: (662) 312-3958

I recommend that the board continue to maintain the present method of paving roads. The present method gives each citizen an opportunity to have roads paved no matter what side of the board they are elected. The present method allows for the most accountability, and not the whole board based on a 3-2 majority vote. The present method also gives each supervisor an opportunity to develop and complete a 4-year plus plan which is required by state law.

The county faces challenges of having enough funds to pave State Aid Roads. In Starkville, the very small dollars are presently used to pave State Aid Roads. As a supervisor, I would suggest to request that the state provide more funds for paving State Aid Roads, thereby maintaining county dollars to pave county roads.

The county faces a challenge with not having public wastewater sewage in the county. As a supervisor, I will continue to work for county and the County is to host quarterly meetings where we can meet people on the other side of the country.

District 3 Supervisor

Democratic

Joe Williams (I)
Education: College Graduate
Political party: Democrat
Political experience: 12 years of service as District 3 Supervisor
Residence: Starkville
Married
Fax: w.joe36700@gmail.com or jwilliams@gtpdd.com
Phone: (662) 768-7017

District 4 Supervisor

Republican

Tony Boykin (Democrat) - Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $47,000

District 5 Supervisor

Republican

Les Lindley
Education: Starkville High School (graduated 1983)
Community College c/o 1988 (Agriculture)
Political party: Republican
Political experience: None
Residence: Starkville
Email: lesilindley@gmail.com
Phone: (662) 312-3958

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The board of supervisors is presently working effectively with the city when it comes to road projects. The board has always agreed to assist the city with the road projects. The board presently has an agreement to assist with the improvement of Spring Street crossing of Hwy 12, and into Blackjack Road. Additionally, the board just shared in the cost of paving Hospital Road. The board has provided funds and entered into many interlocal agreements with the city. The above and just the past few months.

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The county faces challenges of having jobs that are appealing to county residents. There is also a need to ensure that our county and city employees feel valued and appreciated within their positions.

District 3 Supervisor

Orlando Trainer (Democrat) - Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $47,000

District 5 Supervisor (continued)

Democratic

Joe Williams (I)
Education: College Graduate
Political party: Democrat
Political experience: 12 years of service as District 3 Supervisor
Residence: Starkville
Married
Fax: w.joe36700@gmail.com or jwilliams@gtpdd.com
Phone: (662) 768-7017

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Justice Court Judge District 1

Tony Boykin (Democrat) - Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $47,000

Justice Court Judge District 2

Larnzy Carpenter (Democrat) - Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $47,000
Democrat
Marty Haug (I)

Age: 46
Education: Graduate of Starkville High School, Bachelor’s Degree from Mississippi State University, Juris Doctorate from Florida Coastal School of Law
Political party: Democrat
Political experience: Two prior terms as Justice Court Judge
Residence: Starkville
Family: Married, two children
Email: marty@martyhauglaw.com
Phone: (662) 617-9489

I am the only candidate that is a lawyer. I have been practicing law for 20 years and have trial experience in every trial court in two states. Further, I have experience presiding as a judge in both Sturgis Municipal Court for 5 years and in Oktibbeha County Justice Court for 8 years. I am from Oktibbeha County, and I want to do everything I can to make it a safe environment for all of our children to thrive.

It is an amazing oversight by the Legislature that no legal degree is required to be Justice Court Judge. Many courts suffer from having elected judges that have no legal training or experience. The main reason I ran for Justice Court Judge in the first place was to bring the law to a previously hit and miss court. The law is what makes a Court run fairly and consistently. Without knowledge of the law through actual legal training and experience, it is unlikely that Justice can be administered fairly and consistently. My legal training and experience contribute to Oktibbeha County Justice Court now being one of the best in the State.

Our Court’s biggest challenge is maintaining credibility in the minds of those who come to Court. Throughout the years, credibility in Justice Court has greatly diminished, and along with that comes lack of faith by the citizens of the County that their case will be heard fairly. Every day, I strive to use my knowledge of the law and integrity to ensure that everyone who comes before me in Court is treated fairly and honestly. If citizens believe they cannot have their issues heard fairly by a knowledgeable Judge, they then take matters into their own hands which has a heavy cost on our community.

Q&A

1. What makes you the best candidate for Justice Court Judge?
2. No legal degree is needed for this position. How will you ensure knowledge of the law when hearing cases?
3. What do you consider to be the biggest challenge in the Justice Court system?

Republican
Brian Michael Linder

Age: 46
Education:
Political party: Republican
Political experience: None
Residence: Starkville
Family: Married, two children
Email:
Phone:

Did not submit answers to the questionnaire by the deadline.

Democrat
William Ford

Age: 55
Education: High School Diploma
Political party: Democrat
Political experience: None
Residence: Maben
Family: Married, three children
Email: william@sheriff.oktibbeha.ms.us
Phone: (662) 425-1402

I have over 25 years of Law Enforcement Experience. I’ve been a Shift Supervisor for the past 20 years, whether it was working in the jail as a Jailer or on the road as a Deputy. I have years of experience with serving papers, which is primarily a Constable’s job. I am very dedicated to my job as a Deputy, I would be the exact same way if I’m elected as District 1 Constable for Oktibbeha County.

Republican
Kenneth Watkins

Age: 38
Education: Bachelor’s Degree (Mississippi State University)
Political party: Republican
Political experience: None
Residence: Starkville
Family: Married, two children
Email: kennywatkins@yahoo.com
Phone: (662) 312-9530

As a lifelong resident of Oktibbeha County I look forward to representing District 1 as its next Constable. I am a Starkville High School graduate (2003). I obtained my Bachelor from Mississippi State University. I have gained very valuable experience working with Starkville Police Department since 2009. I am currently a Patrol Lieutenant. Past experience includes: Patrol Officer, Patrol Sergeant, Narcotics Sergeant (Starkville PD and Metro Narcotics Task Force). With over 14 years of experience and training I feel that I have the tools to bring true professionalism to this position.

Q&A

1. What makes you the best candidate?

Democratic
Curtis Randle (Democrat) - Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $4,500 + $55/per paper served

Republican
Curtis Randle

Age: 31
Education: Bachelor’s Degree (Mississippi State University)
Political party: Republican
Political experience: None
Residence: Starkville
Family: Married, two children
Email: cnny@wells.com
Phone: (662) 245-1402

As a lifelong resident of Oktibbeha County I look forward to representing District 1 as its next Constable. I am a Starkville High School graduate (2003). I obtained my Bachelor from Mississippi State University. I have gained very valuable experience working with Starkville Police Department since 2009. I am currently a Patrol Lieutenant. Past experience includes: Patrol Officer, Patrol Sergeant, Narcotics Sergeant (Starkville PD and Metro Narcotics Task Force). With over 14 years of experience and training I feel that I have the tools to bring true professionalism to this position.

Q&A

1. What makes you the best candidate?
2. No legal degree is needed for this position. How will you ensure knowledge of the law when hearing cases?
3. What do you consider to be the biggest challenge in the Justice Court system?
1. What makes you the best candidate?

I have 14 years of Law Enforcement experience trained to uphold the laws of Mississippi. Experience from three different agencies right here in the great state of Mississippi.

2. What efforts can the district attorney’s office make or support over the next four years toward reducing recidivism?

The first problem with recidivism in Mississippi is our prison system does not have the resources to provide enough opportunity for rehabilitation. Too often what we have in places like that having to do everything in their power just to survive. Until MCCD is properly funded, the best way to reduce recidivism is to focus on young people.

3. How important of a role should victims’ advocacy play in the district attorney’s office, and in what ways would you promote that over the next four years?

The role of victims’ advocacy in the district attorney’s office is of paramount importance. Victims of crimes often experience significant aggravation and emotional trauma. The district attorney’s office has the legal responsibility to protect the rights of victims of violent crime. This is why I have prioritized the protection of victims over the previous four years. My office was the first in the state to offer grievance counseling for survivors of gun violence to help these survivors with each other to learn how to live with the loss of a loved one. We were also the first DA’s office in the State to offer tree planting ceremonies for victims of violence to symbolically help them deal with the long, arduous grieving process. Finally, my office has also prioritized protection of victims of police crime to help them recover the financial loss someone’s crime caused them.

I believe victims advocacy is vital in the criminal justice process. I believe that by involving people in the way that crimes are made so that people can be able to be brought into the community, particularly in our schools and youth courts, so that we might curbs of some of the crime on the front end. More of our kids need to know who the district attorney is, what he does, and the reality of punishment awaiting them if they break the law. Not only to scare them but to educate them on reality before they make a decision which could ruin their lives.

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