

# EDITORIAL *Family & Consumer Sciences: Fostering Human and Community Development*



## **By Gary B. Jackson**

Director, School of Human Sciences  
Interim State Leader, Family and Consumer Sciences  
Division of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Sciences  
Mississippi State University

Perhaps the ideal community was described by the great educator-philosopher John Dewey more than 70 years ago. In his books, such as *The Public and Its Problems* and *How We Think*, Dewey describes the "Great Community." Dewey identifies the community as an organized group of people, directly and indirectly affected by good and evil. Guardians (leaders) who regulate the actions of individuals and groups care for a community's interest. However, current cultural indicators show that we have distanced ourselves from our neighbors. There is less participation in our communities and less involvement in civic associations. Many communities have become fragmented and disconnected where human relations are cold and competitive, sometimes violent. Bureaucracy has depersonalized even relationships in the work place. These things that affect our development and community makeup have a direct impact on the family, education, economy, etc.

According to Frances Lappe and Paul Dubois, we do not know how to come together to solve our problems. They indicate "we lack the capacities to address the issues or remove the obstacles that stand in the way of public deliberation. Too many Americans feel powerless." Yet, if you trace the lineage of the "community," you find that educational institutions, like Mississippi State University, came into existence because the community willed it. The MSU Extension Service's Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Program is a basic component of the Smith Lever Act of 1914, which established the Extension Service, as well as the recent Farm Bill, which provides funds through a cooperative agreement between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the state of Mississippi. FCS programs came into existence to provide citizens with practical research-based information on subjects related to human and community development through base programs in Leadership Development, Family Resource Management, Child and Family

Development, and Health, Nutrition and Food Safety. The research-based information continues to change, but the concept of educating and supporting human and community development remains the same.

FCS programs are available to all Mississippi citizens. Many methods are used to provide programs for clientele. As needs, issues and problems are identified, educational programs are developed and implemented to meet the situation. For example, FCS educational programs may focus on parenting education, family relationships, housing decisions, self-care skills for better health decisions, proper nutrition for a healthy lifestyle, managing family and individual resources, and building human capital through leadership development and volunteerism. Well-trained professional Extension FCS agents deliver these programs in all 82 counties. To support these programs, state and area subject-matter specialists scan the environment and access the latest research and technology in preparing meaningful curricula and other informational materials.

FCS agents provide a tremendous amount of leadership for the economic stability and security of individuals, families and communities through informal educational activities and related problem-solving assistance to Mississippians. Last year, FCS agents alone made approximately 2 million contacts through organized educational programs. They also were rewarded more than \$7 million in external funding to support human and community development programming and research in our state. More importantly, impact studies reveal that FCS programs are making a significant difference in the lives of individuals, families and communities. In addition, the studies prove that FCS agents already know the secret to having a "Great Community" by remaining connected to the people and everyday life and by using education to energize and mobilize individuals, families and communities for action.