



A Starkville Bridges Out of Poverty instructor addresses volunteers at a facilitator training course. Facilitators assist in the programs Starkville Bridges provides for impoverished residents. **(Submitted photo)**

## Bridges Out of Poverty to host soiree at Hunter Henry Center

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Starkville Bridges Out of Poverty will invite friends and supporters to join it at a summer soiree on Thursday at the Hunter Henry Center at Mississippi State University.

Katie Lewis, a liaison for Starkville Bridges, explained the soiree is a fundraising event to help Bridges continue carrying on its mission.

"It's the annual fundraiser for

Bridges out of Poverty," she said. "We're just getting people from around the community to support Starkville Bridges. All the proceeds go to the 'Getting Ahead in a Just Getting By World' class."

The class, Lewis explained, is a 16-week course for individuals from the Starkville area. The class meets once a week from 5:30-8:30 p.m.

"It's very discussion-based," she said. "These different individuals that come from the community that may or may not know one an-

other — we try get a diverse group — we get them to come in and discuss their situation and where they want to be, not just income-wise, but their entire situation."

Starkville Bridges supports a program for local children as well as the adult Getting Ahead class. Building Bridges for Kids takes the Getting Ahead curriculum and builds it into something more suitable for children across a range of age groups.

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Lewis said the soiree itself will have a wine tasting, a five-course meal catered by Bridgett Harding of Harding Catering and a silent auction. She said City Clerk Taylor Adams would serve as sommelier for the wine tasting, and prizes would be awarded for the best wines.

Pre-ordered soiree tickets are \$100. The price at the door for a single ticket is \$125. A group of eight tickets or a sponsor recognition ticket can be purchased for \$1,000.

"They will teach you what wine goes with what through the meal, and let you taste it. It's going to be a very classy event," said Lynn Phillips-Gaines, president of the Starkville Bridges board. "The Sumic Trio will be playing strings while the events are ongoing. It's going to be a very elegant evening."

Gaines, who helped create Starkville Bridges and has been involved with it since its inception, said last year's inaugural soiree went quite well.

"The people that came last year said it was so nice to have something of that quality in Starkville," she said. "It's not your normal kind of event. It is a fundraiser — we have some fixed costs that go along with the event, so when people see the ticket prices are high, it's because we're giving them a first class event and then some of it goes back to Starkville Bridges."

Gaines reiterated that all funds raised through the soiree went toward supporting Starkville Bridges' training programs or the classes it provided. None would go toward any administrative costs, she said.

Lewis agreed on last year's soiree's success.

"Last year was definitely successful," she said. "We had a lot of support from the office of the president at the university. We also just had a lot of support in general from the community, and that's something Starkville Bridges has been working at in general — to get community support behind this effort."

Gaines said signups for Thursday's soiree were coming in at a slower clip

than last year. She said the issue was a likely one of timing — last year's soiree was held in early June, when there wasn't much going on in Starkville. This year's is coming on the heels of the end of the 2012-13 school year and all the events that come with it.

Still, Lewis and Gaines hope the soiree would see success again to support Starkville Bridges' continued efforts to help those in need.

So too does Ericka Gillespie, a graduate of the Getting Ahead class that continues to assist with Starkville Bridges alongside her work as a social worker.

Gillespie, who saw many of the needs in the community through her work, said she felt Starkville Bridges helped people get on their feet and fend for themselves, rather than having to rely on the government to stay afloat.

"Because I believe in this program so much, I'd like for everyone in the Starkville community to get involved in any way they can," she said. "I feel this is very beneficial for Starkville, and any help from anyone would be appreciated."