Foundation recognizes social work trailblazers during lunch
Loper, Swain will be honored in Ridgeland

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The Mary S. Nelums Foundation will honor two Mississippi trailblazers in social work during its annual scholarship luncheon on Aug. 3. Gwendolyn Loper and Margo Swain will be recognized for their contributions as pioneers in the field of social work for the state. The luncheon will take place from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Reservoir Pointe, located at 140 Madison Landing Circle in Ridgeland.

The scholarship luncheon is one of several components of the Mary S. Nelums Foundation whose mission is to provide financial scholarships to master level social work students in an effort to assist them in completing their graduate degree. These students go on to secure employment or become entrepreneurs, which allows them to assist in improving some of the social ills that plague families and communities. The foundation has awarded more than $7,000 in scholarships since its inception in 2007. Past scholarship recipients include Shamir C. Lee and Rita Andrews.

“Social workers help millions of people challenge their circumstances and change their lives and push institutions to value and support persons in need,” said foundation founder Mary S. Nelums, Ph.D, LCSW. “Continued support for social workers is critical to a person’s well-being and a community’s welfare.”

Contributions to social work from this year’s honorees span over five decades. Swain serves as historian of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and the Mississippi Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, from which she received the lifetime achievement award. She is a graduate of Starkville High School, Mississippi State College and the University of Oklahoma where she received her master’s degree in social work in 1957. After an extensive career with the Mississippi Department of Public Welfare, Swain went on to teach social work at Mississippi State University.

Loper was the first African-American to work as a social worker at the Veteran’s Administration Hospital in Jackson. This Leflore County native earned a degree in sociology from Tougaloo College in 1953 and went on to receive her master’s degree in social work from Howard University. She returned to Mississippi and spent the next few years with the Department of Public Welfare. Laws mandating segregation prevented her from attending the state welfare conferences, so the department sent her to the national social work conferences instead. Loper served several years on the Mississippi Board of Mental Health.

In recognition of her distinguished contributions, a building was named for her on the campus of Hudspeth Regional Center.

To reserve a seat for the Mary S. Nelums Foundation Annual Scholarship Luncheon for $40 or purchase a table for $320. All contributions are tax-deductible. For more information, visit www.msnfoundation.org or call (601) 750-4204.