



Keynote Speakers



Michele Connelly

Michele Connelly is the Executive Director for the United Way of West Central Mississippi. With sixteen years of experience in the education system as a counselor and principal, she has brought a burst of energy to the United Way. Michele, a native of Vicksburg, graduated from Mississippi State University with a bachelor's in psychology. She received her master's in counseling psychology at Mississippi College, where she also received her guidance counselor accreditation. She finished her education with a master's in Catholic school leadership at Marymount University. She currently is a member of the Rotary Club of Vicksburg. In addition, Michele serves on several committees and boards such as: the Live Healthy Action Team, BancorpSouth's Community Reinvestment Act Committee, the Long Term Recovery Committee, and the Emergency Food and Shelter Committee. She is also heavily involved with the Chamber of Commerce and Vicksburg Main Street Program. She volunteers at Vicksburg Catholic School and the Vicksburg Warren School District.

Furthermore, she is always available to the 19 partnering agencies of the United Way. She is married to Kory Connelly, of Vicksburg, MS. Michele has one daughter, Sara Elizabeth who is in nursing school at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. Kory has two daughters, Madison Ann and Skylar who are 7 and 12. She and her family attend Porters Chapel United Methodist Church, where she is a very active member.



Linda Fondren

Linda Fondren transformed her life from poverty and disempowerment to success. She came back to Vicksburg determined to make her hometown a healthier place after Mississippi was deemed the “unhealthiest state” in the nation for several consecutive years.

For her persistent efforts and the impact on her community, Linda was chosen as a Top Ten CNN Hero of the Year for 2010. She was also selected, among distinguished leaders such as First Lady Michelle Obama, as one of The Griot’s 100 History Makers in the Making. In 2011, she was presented with an award for Excellence in Wellness Promotion from the Mississippi State Medical Association. In 2017, she received a Certificate of Appreciation on behalf of the State of Mississippi and the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service. In 2018, she received national recognition from the Office of Public Health and was awarded the “Healthy Parks, Healthy People Pioneer Achievement Award.”

Linda is an author and published her first book to spread her message and tips to a wider audience. Shape Up Sisters is a get-healthy prescription for everyday women with jobs, families and real-life obstacles. She is a public speaker whose inspirational words continue to inspire health conferences, universities, corporations, schools and special interest groups. Linda is also a certified health coach, personal trainer, yoga instructor and owns an all-female gym called Shape Up Sisters. She is 63 years old, a mother, grandmother, married to her husband Jim for 33 years. They currently reside in Vicksburg and are active in Real Estate Development.