

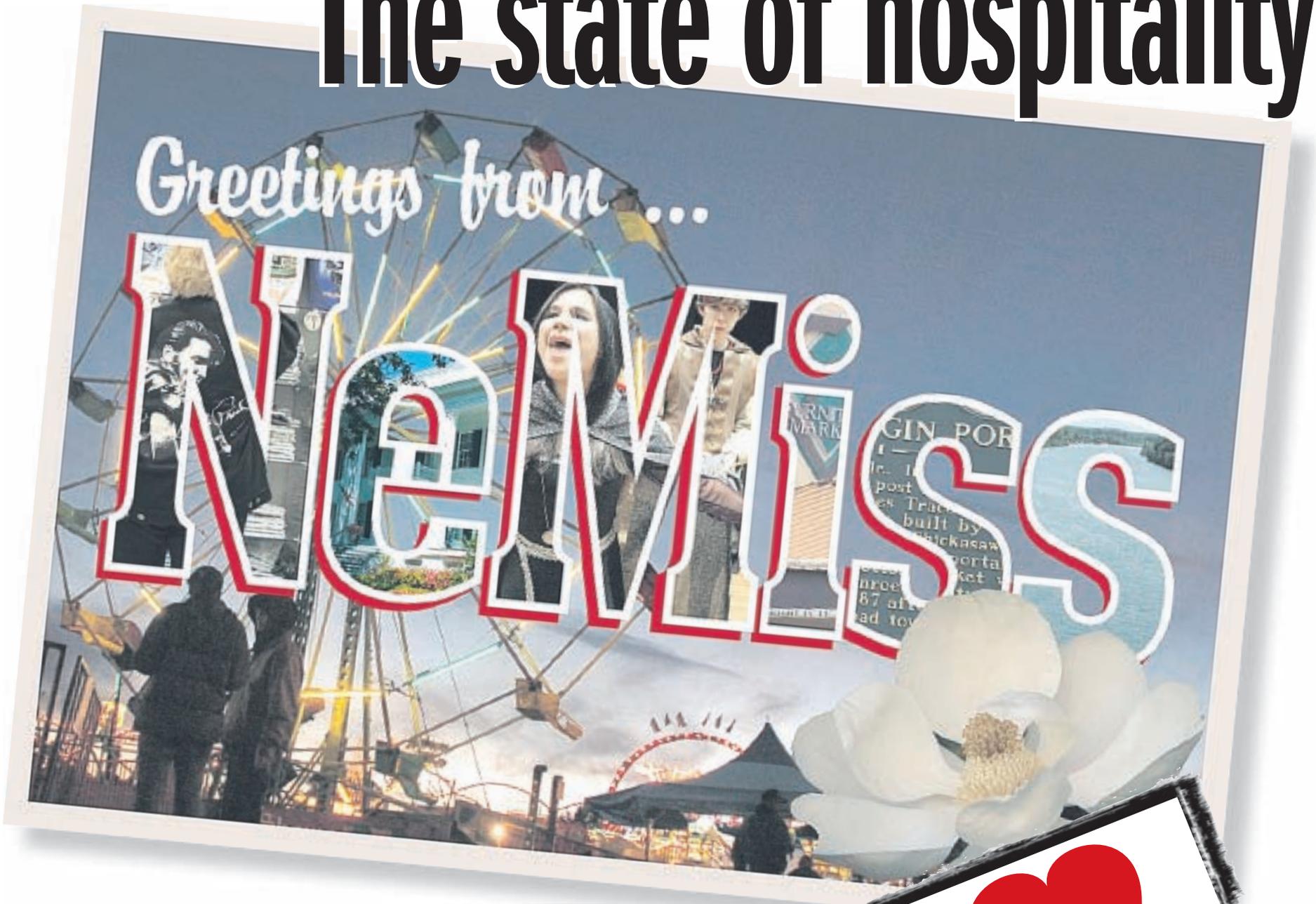
THE NORTHEAST MISSISSIPPI

Business Journal

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF JOURNAL PUBLISHING AND THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

March 2008

The state of hospitality



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Conventions mean big business in NeMiss

However, competition is intense, leaving local players vying with neighboring organizations

BY CARLIE KOLLATH
BUSINESS JOURNAL

Once upon a time, the majority of state conventions were held on the Coast, in Jackson or in Tupelo. But over the years, other players have stepped into the field with hopes of grabbing some of the lucrative business.

With the increased competition, sales directors have to have a few tricks up their sleeves, and in Tupelo it's all about Elvis.

Elvis hand fans and snow globes are doled out, along with stuffed animals that sing and dance to The King's songs. Mississippi-made pottery is another popular gift, as well as keychains.

And the old standard – win-

ing and dining your client – still remains a popular choice.

"We use Oxford as the main attraction, with the Square and the ambiance and charm," said Hugh Stump III, executive director of the Oxford Convention and Visitors Bureau, which includes the Oxford Conference Center. "If we can show them the beauty and fun of the town, it's going to be hard to compete with us."

Chasing the same business

Stump said he took a group out from the Mississippi Department of Employment Security as it was deciding between Orlando and Oxford as the host city for its annual meeting. He took the group to eat on the balcony of the



STUMP



ELLIFF

Downtown Grill, which overlooks the Square.

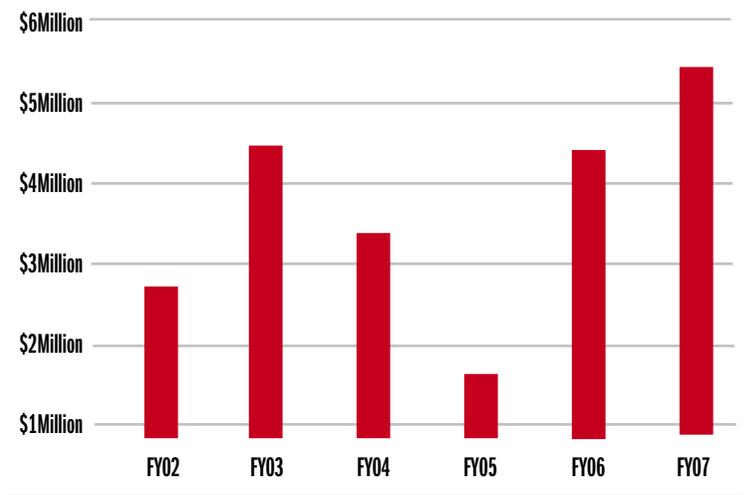
"They bought it right there at that table," he said.

And now with the Bancorp-South Conference Center, sometimes Oxford and Tupelo wind up chasing the same business, along with other cities such as Vicksburg and Natchez.

"If it's just a meeting, there's no difference," Stump said. "But if you are looking for something different, there is a change in the towns."

Linda Elliff, director of sales at the Tupelo CVB, said that meeting planners and representatives from potential conventions come to town, she

Economic impact of conventions/conferences/seminars in Tupelo



likes to "give them an idea of what they can enjoy if they come here."

They tour the facilities, eat at the restaurants, shop at the stores and see the attractions.

"We can compete with the best of them," Elliff said. "We want them to know that the business is wanted and appreciated. I think that is one of Tu-

pelo's strongest suits – we do appreciate their business and we want them to come back."

Indeed, Shari Long Neely, sales director at the Hilton Garden Inn, said she has been able to snare her fair share of business, but she still has to find the unique plugs that help make her facility stand out.

Turn to **CONVENTIONS** on Page 21



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Tourism means jobs and money to state, region

Mississippi is a treasure-trove of places to see, things to do and people to meet.

Tourism thus is an important part of economic development – and it's no wonder that the Mississippi Development Authority has a Tourism Division under its wing.

Last year, the state had some 22 million visitors, about 1.2 million more than a year earlier. Those visitors spent about \$5.7 billion, buying food, staying in hotels and B&Bs and snapping up souvenirs. More than 85,000 Mississippians are directly employed in tourism, plus another 37,000 are indirectly employed.

Those kind of numbers translates into tourism being the sixth-largest industry in the state.

However, those numbers are down from 2005 – during pre-Katrina days – when the state raked in more than \$6.3 billion and drew nearly 31 million visitors.

Still, the MDA, plus state and local tourism groups, are working harder than ever to bring people to the Hospitality State.

For a cash-poor state, every dollar

helps. A few more numbers:

■ Tourism's proportion of the General Fund in fiscal 2007 was \$380.4 million of \$4.7 billion, or 8.1 percent (about \$1 for every \$12).

■ Tourism's proportion of the Gross State Product (the value of all goods and services produced in the state) was \$4.2 billion in FY2007, or 5 percent. A year earlier it was \$3.2 billion, or 4 percent of the GSP.

■ City/County tax revenues last year grew 10 percent to \$143 million.

■ Estimated tourism state taxes collected increased 10.5 percent to \$417.1 million.

■ The portion of state sales tax (18.5 percent of the 7 percent tax) returned to cities was \$37.7 million, a 4.8 percent increase.

NeMiss impact

Cities in Northeast Mississippi also



Dennis SEID

Tourism in Mississippi

YEAR	DIRECT JOBS	TOURISM EXPENDITURES	STATE TAX REVENUES	CITY/COUNTY TAX REVENUES
FY2007	85,300	\$5.7 billion	\$417.1 million	\$143 million
FY2006	75,200	\$5.2 billion	\$377.5 million	\$130 million
FY2005	91,700	\$6.35 billion	\$479 million	\$155 million
FY2004	92,400	\$6.1 billion	\$471 million	\$152 million

Fiscal year is July 1 to June 30

Source: Mississippi Development Authority/Tourism Division

benefited from tourists and visitors. While room taxes and restaurant taxes vary, area communities enjoyed financial boosts during FY2007. According to MDA, total tax revenues pumped millions of dollars into the region.

Those with a tourism office or bureau of some kind in the region, and the tax revenue received:

- Aberdeen: \$70,504
- Baldwin: \$26,412 (began collecting restaurant taxes in April 2007)
- Corinth: \$922,165
- Holly Springs: \$211,896
- New Albany: \$457,505
- Oxford: \$1,727,159
- Pontotoc: \$191,854
- Starkville: \$1,297,083
- Tishomingo County: \$18,187 (has no restaurant tax)
- Tupelo: \$2,880,078

With Elvis, Faulkner, Ole Miss, Mississippi State, Pickwick, blues, literature and so much more in NeMiss, it's no wonder that area tourism and economic development officials are pushing to get the word out on their communities.

You'll read about some of their efforts in this edition of the Business Journal. Better yet, you can experience it yourself by just walking out your door.

Take a long look, a deep breath and be thankful for what you have. And tell other people about it so they can experience it.

That's what tourism and travel is all about.

Dennis Seid editor of the Business Journal. Reach him at 678-1578 or dennis.seid@journal.com

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Tupelo CVB building to expand, revamp image

■ The decision is partially geared by the desire to better blend into the Fairpark District.

BY CARLIE KOLLATH
BUSINESS JOURNAL

TUPELO – After more than a decade in the same office, the Tupelo Convention & Visitors Bureau is renovating its space to better accommodate the needs of the city's growing tourism industry.

"We had totally run out of room," said Linda Butler Johnson, the CVB's executive director. "Our fulfillment room was not large enough to handle the supplies we had. We had to build office space in the lobby. The lobby wasn't large enough to hold tour buses and school groups. We needed more bathroom facilities for the public."

At the CVB's board retreat in 2006, the members started discussing a building expansion. The board then hired Pryor & Morrow Architects in May 2007 to draw up some plans.

And in December 2007, the



board approved a \$1.44 million construction project that will double the size of the current CVB building and will house additional office space, restrooms, storage space, a welcome center and a revamped board room.

The building also has several eco-friendly features such as usage of natural light and insu-

lated windows, according to Pryor & Morrow.

Burton Builders of Belmont started construction in January, with completion scheduled for October.

Rud Robison Jr., a partner in Pryor & Morrow, is responsible for the design of the new 7,278-

Turn to **CVB** on Page 21

TOURISTS MIGHT GET TECHNOLOGY UPGRADE

■ Some ideas include mp3 docking stations, digital postcards and downloadable video presentations.

BY CARLIE KOLLATH
BUSINESS JOURNAL

TUPELO – The physical building isn't the only thing getting attention during the Tupelo Convention and Visitors Bureau remodeling. This time around, technology is high on the priority list.

"We're thinking about tomorrow and where we are in our technology and where we want to go," said Linda Butler Johnson, the CVB's executive director. "We're doing a lot of studying. We look ahead 10 years and imagine a whole different world out there ... The tourism industry all over is thinking about what's for tomorrow and what's out there."

Johnson said the CVB wants to have free wireless Internet in the welcome center, along with docking stations for iPods and mp3 players that will allow visitors to download driving tours and tourist information.

The CVB also is toying with the idea of having electronic postcard stations that will enable guests to send a digital Tupelo-themed postcard from the lobby.

Video presentations that can be downloaded

The consumers "go on the Internet and plan their vacations. They're asking for things that we haven't been able to provide for them and can't provide for them."

Linda Butler Johnson
Tupelo CVB

and would be geared toward tour bus groups is being explored, too.

And while it is investigating new technology, Johnson said the CVB will continue its effort to enhance its Web site, www.tupelo.net, and make it more user-friendly.

"Our consumer is going on there and they're so much more technological about their vacation, she said. "They go on the Internet and plan their vacations. They're asking for things that we haven't been able to provide for them and can't provide for them."

The planned changes are geared toward filling that hole, Johnson said. None of the initiatives are set in stone right now, but Johnson said the CVB should have a better grasp of what is possible – and what fits in the budget – later this fall.

Contact Carlie Kollath at 678-1598 or carlie.kollath@djjournal.com.

Tupelo
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TUPELO CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

The Tupelo Convention and Visitors Bureau has proudly served Tupelo for the past 23 years. Currently, our offices at 399 East Main Street are under renovation and we have temporarily moved to a new location at 209-C Commerce Street.

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Corinth cooking up chili contest

Crossroads Festival and Chili Cookoff

■ When: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, March 15
 ■ Where: Crossroads Arena - rear covered barn area, Corinth
 ■ Features: Chili cooking contest; chili tasting; exhibitors; vendors; temporary hair painting and tattooing for kids; laser tag; rock wall climbing; entertainment on stage all day.
 ■ Cost: \$5 per adult; \$10 per family; children age 13 and younger free. \$2 to sample People's Choice chilis.
 ■ For more information: Chili Cookoff, Steve Knight, (731) 607-3432; Corinth Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, (662) 287-8300 or www.corinth.net

Magnum Monster Mania Truck Show

■ When: Doors open 6 p.m. Friday and Saturday, March 14 and 15
 ■ Where: Crossroads Arena, Corinth
 ■ Cost: Tickets - Adults \$15 in advance, \$19 day of event; Kids ages 3-10 \$8 in advance, \$10 day of event
 ■ For more information and tickets: Crossroads Arena box office, (662) 287-7779 or toll-free (877) 987-8687; area Subway restaurants; Frankie Blackmon of Corinth

■ A monster truck show in the evening adds to list of family events.

BY LENA MITCHELL
 BUSINESS JOURNAL

CORINTH - A taste for the milder flavored green chilis or the hottest habaneros on the Scoville (chili) Heat Scale can be satisfied at the inaugural Crossroads Festival and Chili Cookoff in Corinth March 15.

Organizers of the festival and chili cookoff have teamed with promoters of the Magnum Monster Truck Show at the Crossroads Arena to provide two separate events with broad family appeal.

The festival and chili cookoff will be 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on March 15, in the covered barn area at the Crossroads Arena.

Attractions throughout the day include exhibitors of arts and crafts, food vendors, temporary hair painting and tattooing for kids, a rock climbing

wall, a laser tag game and a stage featuring continuous live entertainment.

"A great T-shirt a local artist did for us will be on sale," Mitchell said. "Vendors are still an open opportunity."

The monster truck shows are

Friday and Saturday, March 14 and 15, inside the Arena, with doors opening at 6 p.m. each evening.

"This is a Mississippi Regional Chili Cookoff, an International Chili Society sanctioned event," said Denise

Mitchell, event chairwoman. "Right now we have 22 sanctioned teams, and we'll probably limit registration to 25 teams, because more than that and the judging rules change." "Sanctioned" chili cooking teams are teams that have paid a \$42 fee for a one-year membership in the International Chili Society.

Amateurs, however, also have a chance to participate in the event in the People's Choice category.

Winners in all event categories have a shot at cash prizes:

■ Red Chili: first place, \$750; second place, \$300; third place \$100; plus trophies for each place winner.

■ Chili Verde (Green chili): first place, \$300, other winners receive trophies.

■ Salsa: first place, \$150, other winners receive trophies.

■ People's Choice: first place, \$300, other winners receive

Turn to **CHILI** on Page 8



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TRANSPORTATION

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ABUNDANT NATURAL RESOURCES

• 83,275 total acres of row crop and pasture land.
 • 96,096 acres of timber.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

• 4 Major Industrial Parks with available acreage • In excess of 1 billion in retail sales.
 • In excess of 57,780 persons employed • Home to Tupelo Furniture Market - with over 1.6 million square feet of exhibitor space and second largest in United States.
 • Lee County Agri-Center with 56,000 square feet of space and a seating capacity of 6,500 people. • Mississippi State Research & Extension Center • PUL Alliance Member

TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

• Birthplace of Elvis Presley • 4 Golf Courses • 3 Manmade lakes including Tombigbee State Park, Elvis Presley and Lake Lamar Bruce
 • Annual North Mississippi Regional Fair and Agri-Expo.



Front Row: Joe McKinney, District 5; Tommy Lee Ivy, District 4;
 Back Row: Phil Morgan, District 1; Darrell Rankin, District 3; Bobby Smith, District 2

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Gibens Creative Group Takes Home Best-of-Show in Print at Addy Awards

Gibens Creative Group, a newly-formed advertising agency in Tupelo, was recently recognized for their exceptional work in print and web categories, taking home ten ADDY® Awards and the Judge's Award for "Best-of-Show: Print."

The ADDY® Awards are the world's largest and most competitive annual advertising competition, attracting over 60,000 entries every year. A special panel in Memphis judged this year's Mississippi Delta Advertising Federation entries.

All work entered in the MS Delta Ad Fed ADDY® competition must have first appeared in the media between January 1 and December 31, 2007.

Gibens Creative Group won two Silver ADDY® Awards in the category of Collateral Ma-



terial Brochure for the Old Waverly Golf Club Brochure and in the category of Advertising Industry Self-Promotion Creative Service and Industry Suppliers for their own Gibens Creative Group website. Gibens Creative Group also took home a Bronze Addy Award for their Stationary Package in the same Self-Promotion category. Gibens Cre-

ative Group, with their two Silver ADDY® Awards, will advance to district competition.

Gibens Creative Group was awarded eight Bronze ADDY® Awards. Five of these awards were in the category of Interactive Media Websites, Consumer, HTML/Other, Gibens Creative Group for their work on Elvis Presley Birthplace Website, NauticStar Boats Website, Glenn McCullough, Jr. Website, The Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College Website, and BancorpSouth Conference Center Website. In the category of Advertising for the Arts & Sciences, a Bronze was given for their Link Centre: Jazz @ The Link Poster Series, and another Bronze in the category of Elements

of Advertising for their Lone Cypress Developments logo

design.

The real excitement of the night came when Gibens Creative Group were awarded a special Judges' Award for Best-of-Show: Print for the design and creation of the Old Waverly Golf Club Brochure.

"We were extremely pleased to have received the coveted Judges Award, for Best-of-Show: Print," said Eric Gibens, CEO / President. "It means a lot to us that our clients and entire team win such praise from our peers. We are fortunate to have such talented people on our staff."

"Being this is Gibens Creative Group's first year competing in the ADDY®, we are thrilled at the recognition of our hard work," said Patrice Anderson, Creative Director.

The history of Gibens Cre-

ative Group began in 1999 as the web department of Redmagnet, Inc. In 2004 the web department expanded into Redmagnet's Creative Media Department, providing additional services such as logo and print production. Over the next three years, Redmagnet Creative Media continued to increase its staff bringing in additional talent and experience to the company. Responding to this growth and recognizing client needs, Gibens Creative Group was established in 2007 in order to offer complete Integrated Design Concepts including: identity and branding, graphic design, custom website development, e-commerce solutions, print production, photography, video production, media planning and placement.

Glissen Honored With Heidel Award

Angela Glisson, Existing Industry Coordinator of the Economic Development Division of the Community Development Foundation, is the recipient of the 2007 Mississippi Economic Development Council's Ray and Jimmy Heidel Economic Development Leadership Award. She will receive a scholarship for tuition for the first year of either the Economic Development Institute or the Community Development Institute.

This award was established in 1995 by MEDC and is presented annually to an MEDC member who is employed in the business development field within the State of Mississippi. The recipient must be a participant in the New South Economic Development course at the University of Southern Mississippi and must exhibit fully developed leadership skills or the potential for leadership skills.

The purpose of the award is to foster further development of promising economic development practitioner leadership skills.

Jimmy Heidel, MEDC Honorary Life Member and presenter of the award said, "Angela Glisson is an outstanding candidate for this award. My younger brother Ray would be very excited about Angela's opportunity to learn more about her chosen

profession."

Angela Glisson has been with CDF since June 2006, when she was hired to implement the e-Synchronist existing industry and retention program for Tupelo/Lee County. In the last year, Ms. Glisson has led a successful hospitality program for newly recruited business and industry, including Toyota Motor Manufacturing Mississippi, Auto Parts Manufacturing Mississippi, and National Electronics Warranty Company. She also serves on Community Development Foundation's Public Relations Committee, Industry Education Committee, and the Mississippi Scholars Committee.

The Mississippi Economic Development Council is an association of economic development and chamber of commerce professionals from across the state. MEDC works closely with state and local government officials to improve the state's competitiveness in the pursuit of new jobs. Programs are sponsored to educate community leaders regarding the mechanics of economic and industrial development. MEDC encourages professionalism among its members through carefully planned meetings and awards scholarships for courses in economic development. For further information on MEDC,



David Rumbarger, President/CEO, Community Development Foundation, and MEDC President-Elect, Angela Glisson, Jimmy and Joanna Heidel, George Freeland, Executive Director, Jackson County Economic Development Foundation and MEDC President.

go to www.medc.ms or call (601) 352-1909.

The recipient is selected during the week of the New South Economic Development Course by a committee of three determined by the course director. The Award is presented at the MEDC Winter Conference each year and is sponsored by MEDC and in cooperation with various friends of economic development in Mississippi.

"It is an honor to be recognized for my hard work during the New South Economic Development Course and to further my growing knowledge of economic development through the scholarship monies granted by this award," said Glissen.

RSVP VOLUNTEER GROUP



Members of the RSVP volunteer group made a visit to the Renasant Center for IDEAs. Pictured on the front row are: Jeanette Moore, Evelyn Matthews, Odessa Eades, Ethel Barnes, and Maggie Johnson. Pictured on the back row are: Louise Crump, Mary Conoway, Vera Green, Norma Gillespie, Mary Hellestine, and Martha Swindle, CDF.

Tishomingo County, Oxford nab tourism awards

■ The honors were announced during the recent Governor's Conference on Tourism.

BUSINESS JOURNAL REPORTS

JACKSON – Representatives from Tishomingo County and Oxford were honored at the Governor's Conference on Tourism in February.

The annual event was presented by the Mississippi Tourism Association and held Feb. 17-19 at the Jackson TelCom Center. Wanda Collier-Wilson, executive director of the Jackson Convention and Visitors Bureau and this year's MTA president, announced the awards.

Martha Segars won Community Volunteer of the Year on behalf of the work she has done for the Tishomingo County Tourism Council. The award is designed to recognize people who give freely of their personal time to help attract visitors to their city, according to MTA.

The volunteers are "willing to work on either an individual project or multiple projects tirelessly

with the desire of making their city better," MTA said in a press release.

Segars also was singled out in 2007 by the Tishomingo County Development Foundation, which named her Volunteer of the Year. In October 2007, she helped launch Trash and Treasures along the Tenn-Tom, which is promoted as the longest yard sale in Mississippi.

The Oxford Convention and Visitors Bureau's inaugural "Oxford's Town BBQ Throwdown" won the award for the Small Festival/Event of the Year. The award is given to a unique festival or event that is well attended, attracts a large variety of visitors and is well publicized, MTA said.

Four Outstanding Convention and Visitors Bureaus of the Year were awarded, broken down into four categories according to budget size. The award is given to CVBs that have outstanding efforts in promoting tourism in the area through events and activities that generate visitors.

The Holly Springs Tourism and Recreation Bureau won the Outstanding CVB of the Year with a budget of less than \$250,000.



COURTESY
Craig Ray, director of the tourism development division of the Mississippi Development Authority, presented the Community Volunteer of the Year award to Martha Segars for her work with the Tishomingo County Tourism Council.

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UNITED STORAGE CENTER



A ribbon cutting was held to celebrate the grand opening of United Storage Center at Crosstown. Pictured at the event are: Emily Addison, CDF; Mike Maynard, Weatherall's, Inc.; Marsha Williams, Williams Transfer & Storage; Beverly Bedford, City of Saltillo; Brandie Conlee, United Storage; Councilman Dick Hill; Les Perry, North Mississippi Medical Center; Duke Loden, Century Commercial Real Estate Services; Bill Frohn, Century Commercial Real Estate Services; Lorie Priest, Century Construction & Realty; Marietta Sturgeon, Century Construction & Realty; and Julia Gilfert, Century Construction & Realty. United Storage Center at Crosstown is located at 241 South Park Street in Tupelo and can be reached at 662.690.6696.

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For more information on making your business a part of *Images of Tupelo*, contact Andrea Joiner at (662) 842-4521, Toll-free at (800) 333-8842 or by e-mail at ajoiner@jnlcom.com.

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Tupelo Young Professionals



The February TYP meeting was held at the Bistro on Main, with over 60 young professionals in attendance. A service project was held in conjunction with the meeting, to benefit families affected by the February tornadoes. Over \$350 was given to the American Red Cross, as a result. Pictured networking at the event are Carey Snyder, WTVA/WLOV/WKDH, and Chanda Cossitt, Coldwell Banker, Tommy Morgan, Inc. Realtors. Also pictured are other TYP's. To join the TYP's, simply send an e-mail to tvp@cdfms.org with your name, business name, mailing address, and e-mail address.



OSHA Compliance Workshop for Construction Contractors Planned

The United States Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), in partnership with the Renasant Center for IDEAs and the Northeast Mississippi Contract Procurement Center, will host an OSHA Compliance workshop for construction contractors. The workshop will be conducted by Courtney W. Bohannon, compliance assistance specialist with OSHA, and will be held Thursday, March 20, from 6:00 p.m. until 7:30 p.m. in the CDF boardroom at 300 West Main Street in downtown Tupelo. To register for the free workshop, call the Renasant Center for IDEAs at 662.823.4332.

"It is vital that everyone recognizes that safety is an important part of business," said Bohannon. "OSHA is in business to make sure employees have a safe place to work."

The local office of OSHA is located in Jackson, MS, and offers many free services for business owners in Mississippi. They respond to requests for offsite safety and health assistance; answer questions regarding OSHA rules and regulations, injury/illness recordkeeping, and other interpretations; and are available to provide outreach and training on OSHA topics to small businesses, trade associations, and community and faith-based groups.

Please join us for the next meeting of the TUPELO YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Thursday, March 27, 2008

5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Staggs Interiors

Staggs Interiors

903 Varsity Drive

Tupelo, MS 38801

This is a come and go business-after-hours event

Refreshments will be served and door prizes will be awarded

Come network with your peers in the business community and bring a friend

Please RSVP to typ@cdfms.org

DID YOU KNOW

The Community Development Foundation has a website, www.cdfms.org, that includes the business directory of all of our members, giving them worldwide free exposure, as well as a wealth of community information. Any member who already has their own website can have it linked to the CDF listing for free. CDF averages 3,500 user sessions to its website monthly.



SAVE THE DATE



CDF Annual Membership Meeting

Thursday, May 1, 2008

6:30 p.m.

Mississippi Furniture Complex,

Hall B



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Cultural tourism gains momentum

■ **The Mississippi Hills Heritage Area Alliance has secured more than \$150,000 in funding and garnered support from the major communities in its region.**

BY CARLIE KOLLATH
BUSINESS JOURNAL

TUPELO – The team behind the Mississippi Hills Heritage Area Alliance has been busy.

MHHAA, a 30-county partnership in North Mississippi dedicated to building cultural and heritage tourism within the region, has been in the works for several years, but last year ramped up with a three-year strategic plan, a new Web site, a newly formed board and a new funding.

The Mississippi Hills area is bordered by the Tennessee and Alabama state lines to the north and east, Highway 14 to the south and Interstate 55 to the west.

In November 2007, MHHAA project coordinator Kent Bain and project manager Bobby King unveiled the organization's three-year strategic plan and a new Web site, www.mississippihills.org.

If the plan is implemented, MHHAA said it will add 10,000 new jobs and make tourism in North Mississippi grow to a \$1 billion industry.

The new Web site features pictures of the region, links to destinations, thematic itineraries (i.e. Civil War, arts, architecture) and itineraries for eight major communities and surrounding towns. The Web site also introduces itineraries for potential new heritage corridors or marketing subregions, such as "Faulkner Country" or the "Tri-Lakes Region."

"Mississippihills.org embodies an initial interpretive strategy for the heritage area, tying together the common threads of the region's heritage, presenting compelling narratives that bring the region's rich and diverse history to life," Bain said.

Funding from partners

The organization also secured funding from its partners in the region. About \$100,000 came from city and county sponsorships. The Mississippi Development Authority donated \$40,000, Ole Miss donated \$15,000 and The CREATE Foundation donated \$12,500.

King said the money will be used in several ways, including being used to match grant dollars. In addition, money will be spent on program enhancements, the Web site and formulation of the committees.

Turn to **HILLS** on Page 26

About the Alliance

■ The Mississippi Hills Heritage Area Alliance is a 30-county partnership in North Mississippi dedicated to building cultural and heritage tourism within the region. Its key objectives are to increase jobs and visitation to the region and to develop and support projects and programs that sustain the heritage tourism industry in regional communities. To learn more, go to www.mississippihills.org.

The 2008 leadership of the Mississippi Hills Heritage Alliance

■ President: Hugh Stump, Oxford Convention & Visitors Bureau

■ Vice president: Linda Butler Johnson, Tupelo CVB

■ Secretary: Kim Terrell, DeSoto County Tourism Association

■ Treasurer: Stephanie Movre, Holly Springs Tourism & Recreation Bureau

■ Board members: Duane Bullard, Tippah County Development Foundation; Martha Jo Coleman, Pontotoc County Historical Society; Theresa Cutshall, Tishomingo County Tourism Council; Mary-Kathryn Millner, Oxford CVB; Richard Ramsey, Howlin' Wolf Blues Society, representing the West Point/Clay County Community Growth Alliance; George Rowland, North Central Mississippi Resource Conservation & Development Council; Arma Salazar, Starkville CVB/Greater Starkville Development Partnership; Jill Smith, Union County Heritage Museum; Deborah Stubblefield/Judy Smith, Aberdeen Visitors Bureau; Kristy White, Corinth CVB; James Tsismanakis, Columbus CVB; and Brian Wilson, Noxubee County Economic Development Office. Sarah McCullough, Mississippi Development Authority, is an ex-officio board member.

Fiscal 2008 sponsors

■ Tier 1 (\$10,000): Tupelo, Oxford, Corinth, DeSoto County, Columbus, Starkville, Grenada

■ Tier 2 (\$5,000): Holly Springs, New Albany, Monroe County (Aberdeen and Amory), West Point, Tishomingo County, Pontotoc

■ Tier 3 (\$1,000): Noxubee County

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BusinessNotes

Most American Furniture workers back at work

■ ECRU - Nearly all of the 1,100 employees of American Furniture Manufacturing who lost their jobs temporarily after a devastating fire at the plant last month are back on the job.

A Feb. 12 fire destroyed half the plant, including some \$12 million in finished products. But as of Monday, about 1,000 were back at work.

Since the fire, the company has worked to get its undamaged part of the plant in operation, opened its flexible manufacturing facility and found another former furniture plant to resume production.

All seven of its motion and recliner lines are working, and the equivalent of 18 stationary furniture lines are in operation.

Cleanup began on the destroyed portion of the plant on Monday, with crews from Eutaw Construction of Aberdeen moving tons of heat-deformed steel and aluminum.

After the fire American President Lyle Harris said the company hoped to be back in full production by March 31. That timetable is looking better every day.

"In fact, we've got an eighth line in motion and reclining that we should have up by March 12," he said.

"Having those 1,000 employees back at work is really good," Harris added. "We've been working two shifts, and it's been tough for some, but we're adjusting."

American is negotiating to buy or lease another

building for its stationary furniture production, which would allow it to resume its single-shift operations. Harris said a deal is imminent.

No cause has been determined for the fire.

Hancock Fabrics names chief financial officer

■ BALDWIN - Hancock Fabrics has hired Robert Driskell, 33, to serve as the company's senior vice president and chief financial officer. Driskell was hired Feb. 25, and Hancock made the information public in a filing with the SEC.

Driskell replaces Jeff Nerland, the interim CFO who resigned Monday. Nerland will continue with the company as an executive vice president.

Driskell has more than 10 years of financial management and leadership experience, most recently as chief financial officer of Reeves Williams, a large privately held construction firm based in Memphis.

Larry D. Fair, vice president of finance, remains the principal financial and an accounting officer.

West Main Church of Christ could become retail spot

■ TUPELO - West Main Church of Christ could begin moving as early as July to make room for an unnamed retailer, the church leadership confirmed last month.

The church, located at West Main and Thomas, has signed a sale contract with an unnamed Tennessee-based development company, says a letter from the church's seven elders. The development company, the letter says, has "begun confidential negotiations with various retail tenants" for the church's 5.9 acres.

There has been talk for months that the church has been in contact with Redd Realty of Franklin, Tenn., the developer that tried unsuccessfully to put a CVS pharmacy at Crosstown.

Redd Realty did not return calls seeking comment, and a CVS spokesman had no new announcements for the Tupelo market, noting that the company will confirm or comment on new store locations only if there is a signed agreement for a site.

In addition to the sale contract, the almost 50-year-old church has signed a purchase agreement for 11.5 acres along West Jackson Street near the corner of Coley Road and the Tupelo Furniture Market, opposite the Tupelo Regional Airport. The letter said West Main is considering the property for the new church location.

Duke Loden, a broker with Century Commercial and a deacon at West Main, is handling the sale of the property. The contract is signed but still pending, which Loden said still leaves the possibility of the deal falling through.

If the sale closes, he said the church will move out of the corner educational building in July to make room for an unnamed retailer.

West Main will then operate out of its auditorium and youth building until a new church is built. Then, the old buildings will be vacated for additional retail tenants to locate on the property, Loden said.

The complete move would be at the earliest in July or August 2009, according to the elders' letter.

Business Journal reports

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Commercial - 9.33 Acres on McCullough Blvd. next to Lane Furniture (\$160,000/Acre)

Commercial - 6.69 Acres on West Main Street - between Natchez Trace and new medical office. Would be great for medical, dental or pharmacy. (\$742,500)

Industrial - 13.35 Acres behind Lane Furniture with road frontage on Adams Farm Road and Old Belden Circle (\$75,000/Acre)

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Conventions

Continued from Page 2

She often uses Tupelo's smoke-free environment as a perk, compared to meeting venues in gaming facilities.

In addition, sales have been helped out tremendously by having the neighboring large-capacity BancorpSouth Arena and a hotel attached to the conference space, she said. Oxford doesn't have a similar situation, but Stump said he's working on the hotel part.

Looking out his window, he points to the piece of land where a 133-room Hilton Garden Inn will be built.

Construction also is going on at the Hilton Garden Inn in Tupelo. The hotel is adding a 48-room expansion set to open by the end of the year. Forty of the rooms are double queens, which Neely said is the most popular configuration for convention guests.

And the region has been gaining attention in the convention and meeting planner industry. In December, trade magazine Convention South profiled

Tupelo and the Golden Triangle.

Kristen McIntosh, Convention South's vice president and editor, said the region merited attention because there has been a lot of interest from meeting planners in second and third tier markets, and the magazine continues to see growth in Tupelo "which is a really really wonderful thing for state associations and corporate groups."

"It's the small town atmosphere with the amenities of a big town," she said. "A lot of event planners are drawn to these facilities because of the affordability and the drive-in factor."

McIntosh sees the area as having the key elements for a "really terrific convention business: first-class facilities, supporting hotel rooms and a commitment to wonderful service."

"We're pleased to be in touch with your region as a convention market," she said. "I think it's growing and it's got state-of-the-art facilities and people who are absolutely committed to making it grow. You guys are doing a great job."

Contact **Carlie Kollath** at 678-1598 or carlie.kollath@djournal.com.

CVB

Continued from Page 5

square-foot building, along with Charlie Watson, an intern architect at the company.

Along with the size, Robison said the two notable differences will be height and the design. The building at the corner of Elizabeth Street and East Main Street will stay one-story, but it will have the facade of a two-story building.

A downtown look

The bricked facade beckons to the new design of the building. When the CVB was originally designed, by Robison as it happens, he wanted it to fit in with the look of the BancorpSouth Arena. But now that the urban renewal project known as the Fairpark District is springing up around the CVB, Robison wanted the building to have "more of a downtown streetscape appearance."

"It's really changing the image of the CVB building to capture what's happening with Fairpark and the whole downtown area," he said. "It will have a very positive presence with things that are going on in the Fairpark area and the downtown revitalization."

And since the Fairpark area is look-

ing to become more of a destination for nightlife, Robison made sure the building will have a "visual presence" at night.

Lighting will be installed in the sidewalk and will shine up at night and illuminate the face of the building, he said.

"The Hilton Garden Inn and the restaurants are nicely lit and we wanted to make sure ours was nicely lit," he said. "We wanted to make sure that it didn't look unused at night."

On the inside, the biggest difference will be the 2,000-square-foot welcome center and gallery. The space will be used to receive visitors and to display information pertaining to Tupelo.

Johnson said the CVB is looking to add some technological advances in the welcome center, as well (see sidebar).

Robison said the gallery space has been designed in a way that allows it to be very flexible in how it is configured. It might be used as a welcome center one day, a location for a press conference the next day and a meeting area the next.

Large doors are planned for the west side of the gallery that will be big enough for a vehicle to drive through, which, Robison said, could work as a tie in with events at the Tupelo Automobile Museum.

Contact **Carlie Kollath** at 678-1598 or carlie.kollath@djournal.com.

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SOURCE: OXFORD CVB

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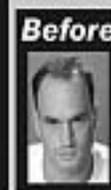
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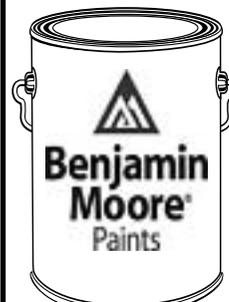
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