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TRAVEL SOUTH USA NAMES D. CRAIG RAY CHAIRMAN

Jackson, Mississippi (August 21, 2009) – Travel South USA, the official regional destination marketing organization for the 12 Southern state tourism offices, has announced Mississippi Development Authority, Tourism Division Director D. Craig Ray has been elected as Chairman for its Board of Directors.

“The Board is thrilled to have Craig Ray lead the regional organization during the next year,” said Liz Bittner, Executive Director Travel South USA. “Travel South USA has a legacy of tourism programs that demonstrate a direct return on investment. Craig has the right credentials to guide this organization to meet the needs of its members, while continuing to harness the collective power of the states. It is during these challenging economic times, that leveraging resources becomes crucial and the regional model continues to provide the necessary foundation for delivering tourist dollars to the region”

The new officers assumed their duties immediately. Craig Ray, Director, Mississippi Development Authority, Tourism Division, was elected Chairman. Lee Sentell, Director, Alabama Tourism will serve as Vice Chairman, Kevin Langston, Deputy Commissioner, Georgia Department of Economic Development, Tourism Division serving as Treasurer and Mike Cooper, Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Tourism as Secretary for fiscal year 2009-2010.

Ray has provided the leadership for the Tourism Division of Mississippi Development Authority since accepting the position in 2004. With an annual budget of \$9.5 million, the Tourism Development Division promotes Mississippi as a destination for business and leisure travel. It operates the state’s Welcome Centers, includes the Mississippi Film Office and manages the Mississippi Hometown Retirement Program. The 80-person staff markets the state to group and consumer travelers domestically and internationally by working with tour operators, travel planners, meeting planners; assisting communities with tourism development; helping consumers with requested information; conducting industry research; and promoting the state through worldwide media.

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Ray also serves as member of the U.S. Travel Industry Association, Mississippi Travel Association, Southeast Tourism Society, and he is the Vice Chairman of the Mississippi Blues Commission. Previously, Ray served as Senior Advisor and Deputy Executive Director of Inauguration Activities to the Governor Barbour campaign. He is not a newcomer to politics, however, as he worked for both Bush Administrations. From 2001–2003 Ray served as Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of Advance for Event Coordination, a capacity that engaged him to plan, organize, and oversee the success of all local and international official Presidential travel events. He served in this same capacity under President George H. Bush as Lead Advance Representative from 1990-1993, spanning a total of 10 years in Washington D.C.

Other members of the Travel South USA Board of Directors include:

Alisa Bailey, President and CEO, Virginia Tourism Corporation

Betty Carver, Commissioner, West Virginia Tourism

Jim Hutchinson, Assistant Secretary, Louisiana Office of Tourism

Lynn Minges, Assistant Secretary, Tourism, Marketing and Global Branding, North Carolina Department of Commerce

Chris Thompson, President and CEO, VISIT FLORIDA®

Joe David Rice, Director, Arkansas Division of Parks and Tourism

Susan Whitaker, Commission, Tennessee Tourist Development

Travel South USA is America's oldest and largest regional travel promotion organization, formed in 1965 by resolution presented at the Southern Governor's Conference as the Southern Travel Directors Council, Inc. As the Official Destination Regional Marketing Organization for the south, its mission is to promote, foster and encourage travel to and within the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. For more information, visit www.TravelSouthUSA.com for consumers and www.TravelSouthUSA.org for travel industry information.

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