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## **FIVE COMMUNITIES DESIGNATED TO DEVELOP CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Jackson, Mississippi (February 18, 2009) – Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) Tourism Director D. Craig Ray announced that Pontotoc, Rolling Fork, Aberdeen, Port Gibson and Bay St. Louis are designated as this year's additions to the Certified Cultural Corners program, grants designated to towns with a population of less than 20,000 to preserve and promote their cultural heritage significance.

The MDA Tourism Bureau of Film and Culture established a Certified Cultural Corners Program in 2008 that identifies communities in Mississippi that have cultural heritage assets of national significance in at least two of the following areas: American Indian heritage, art and architecture, Civil War history, Civil Rights history, culinary culture, literary heritage, and musical heritage.

For 2009, the following communities, their region, and their areas of cultural heritage are Pontotoc - The Hills: Art and Architecture, Civil War; Rolling Fork - The Delta: American Indian, Art and Architecture, Civil War, Music, and the Teddy Roosevelt story; Aberdeen - The Pines: Art and Architecture, Civil War, Port Gibson - The Capital/River Region: Art and Architecture, Civil War, Civil Rights; Bay St. Louis - Art and Architecture, Culinary.

"Historic and cultural assets that are preserved are beneficial for both tourists and locals to enjoy," Ray said. "When you consider all the factors, two major revelations appear. One, the main benefit of tourism is for a destination's residents, and, two, that it's the front door for economic development."

The five pilot communities, named in 2008 are located in five different regions of the State. The new designees join Cleveland- Delta Region; Holly Springs-Hills Region; Ocean Springs-Coast Region; Philadelphia-Pines Region; and Woodville-Capital/River Region .

The purpose of the program is to assist communities in identifying their cultural heritage assets, developing a tourism infrastructure, improving the community's aesthetics, and the marketing of these assets for cultural and heritage tourism.

The next step is to conduct meetings where community leaders will participate in their initial cultural heritage assessment and begin making plans to enhance their areas of cultural heritage significance. The Certified Cultural Corners program will add more communities next year and continue to ensure that these assets are preserved and promoted for the enjoyment of Mississippians and visitors alike.

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