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IT'S PILGRIMAGE TIME IN MISSISSIPPI

Jackson, Mississippi (March 16, 2009) – The red, pink, and white azaleas are in bloom, the boxwood hedges have been perfectly manicured, the crape myrtle trees are laden with color. It's spring in Mississippi, and that means it's time Pilgrimage season.

"Several of the most beautiful, charming, and architecturally important towns in Mississippi open their doors to visitors who love history and want to enjoy a glimpse into life in antebellum times," said Mississippi Development Authority Tourism Director D. Craig Ray. "Now is the time to start planning to delight in the authentic celebrations that Pilgrimages have to offer. You're invited to experience spring like you never have before—in Natchez, Columbus, Vicksburg, Aberdeen and Holly Springs."

Natchez, March 7-April 11

Twenty-five antebellum mansions, many of them private residences, open their doors to visitors during this five-week Pilgrimage every spring. The splendor of the gardens throughout this fantastic river city is something to behold, too. Brilliant musical productions, theater, Gospel music, and historic presentations take the stage each evening. There's plenty of entertainment, including "The Historic Natchez Pageant," a magnificent musical production of dancing, historic scenes and elaborate period costumes. "Songs of the South" presents the music of Stephen Foster, traditional spirituals, Gershwin and much more. "Southern Road to Freedom" is a stirring musical tribute to the African-American experience from the Colonial period to the present day. "Southern Exposure" is a hilarious spoof on the Natchez homes, homeowners and Pilgrimage tourists. For all the information about the schedule of home tours and evening events, go to www.natchezpilgrimage.com.

Columbus, March 30-April 11

The Columbus Spring Pilgrimage has earned the reputation as one of the best and most authentic historic home tours in the South. The antebellum mansions are impeccably maintained, and many feature recreated activities of the 1800s complete with period costumes, adding authenticity to this historical event. Driving and walking tour maps of Columbus are available at the charming Tennessee Williams Welcome Center, a Victorian building that was the first home of the renowned playwright who won a Pulitzer Prize for "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." Additional information and schedules may be obtained by visiting www.columbus-ms.org.

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Vicksburg, March 13-April 6

During the spectacular event, “Tapestry: A Living History of Vicksburg,” sixteen of Vicksburg’s most historic properties are open for tours and offer special interpretive presentations of the city’s rich history that brings to life the heritage and culture in a Mississippi River city. Presentations include collections of vintage 1800s fine china, silver and antiques, clothing, linens, Victorian jewelry, Civil War medical instruments and period tools. Demonstrations include stained glass making, jewelry making, quilting, tatting, Victorian flower arranging, and period foods and spirits. Also included are presentations about the Davis family of Warren County and the history of the Sisters of Mercy in Vicksburg. This special spring Pilgrimage also features evening musical presentations. For tickets and a complete schedule of events, click www.visitvicksburg.com.

Aberdeen, April 23-26

The 34th Annual Southern Heritage Pilgrimage in Aberdeen features eleven homes, representing several times from antebellum to pre-World War II. Visitors enjoy touring the homes, meeting the owners and learning about the history and the restoration efforts that have gone into preserving these great pieces of Southern architecture. There are many additional Pilgrimage events including “A Proper Afternoon Tea,” a Civil War campground re-enactment, a comedy presentation entitled “Life in a Small Southern Town,” and “Lies and Legends of Old Aberdeen Cemetery.” Two events, “A Taste of Mississippi” and “A Gospel Concert,” celebrate the rich history of the African-American experience in Aberdeen. Schedules and ticket information can be found at www.aberdeenms.org.

Holly Springs, April 17-19

The 71st Annual Holly Springs Pilgrimage, “A Festival of Art and Architecture,” features a full schedule of home tours and events to whet the appetite of every visitor. Begin with the tours of homes, museums, gardens and cemeteries. Costumed guides and storytellers highlight the colorful history of this most charming town and its more memorable citizens over the years. The weekend also features Pilcher organ recitals in antebellum churches, delightful Southern luncheons, rides in antique carriages pulled by Percheron draft horses, fabulous arts and crafts and, to top it all off, a traditional Southern supper in one of the city’s most spectacular mansions, Montrose. For complete information, go online and check out www.visithollysprings.org.

To get started planning your trip, go to www.VisitMississippi.org today. You’ll find details, more websites, events and phone numbers to plan your trip to experience everything Mississippi—and its spring Pilgrimages—have to offer.

About Mississippi Development Authority

Mississippi Development Authority is the State of Mississippi’s lead economic and community development agency. Nearly 300 employees are engaged in providing services to businesses, communities and workers in the state. While the agency is best known for its efforts to recruit new businesses to Mississippi, the Authority provides services to promote tourism, help communities improve their quality of place, help existing employers identify and meet opportunities and challenges and help workers improve their skills – all with the goal of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of Mississippians. For more information, visit MDA’s website at www.mississippi.org.

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