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## **MISSISSIPPI BLUES TRAIL MARKER DEDICATION HONORS CLUB DESIRE IN CANTON**

Jackson, Mississippi (March 26, 2009) –The Mississippi Development Authority’s Tourism Division Heritage Trails Program, the Mississippi Blues Commission and the Canton Convention and Visitors Bureau will celebrate the historic significance of Club Desire, March 31, 2009, at 2:00 p.m. at 141 North Union Street in Canton.

The Club Desire was one of Mississippi's premier blues and rhythm & blues nightclubs from the late 1940s through the early 1960s. Owner Clarence Chinn presented the top national acts, including B. B. King, Bobby Blue Bland, Little Junior Parker, James Brown, Ivory Joe Hunter, Big Joe Turner, Hank Ballard & the Midnighters, and the Platters. In the '60s the club also served as an important meeting place for civil rights workers. During most of its tenure, it was known as the New Club Desire, so named after the original Club Desire burned and was replaced by a new structure.

The club also earned a place in blues recording history in January of 1952 when the Modern Record Company of California rented it to set up a portable tape machine to record several songs by legendary Canton singer-guitarist Elmore James (1918-1963). Ike Turner, who lived in Clarksdale, was Modern’s talent scout and also played piano on the session. Accounts of this session have been published in many books and magazines, but the British magazine that first published the story erroneously cited the name as the Club Bizarre, and that error has been perpetuated ever since. Elmore James became so closely associated with Canton that when an untitled 1954 instrumental was included on one of his albums some years after his death, the record company came up with the name “Canton Mississippi Breakdown,” even though the recording was made in Chicago.

Among the townsfolk of Canton and the many patrons who came to the club from as far away as Memphis and New Orleans, the Club Desire was known for presenting excellent performances in a celebratory but elegant atmosphere, with strict codes enforced for dress and behavior. The music was likewise of a more polished uptown nature than the raw blues heard in Canton’s juke joints in “the Hollow” and other parts of town. Traveling blues and soul bands with horn sections and professional talent revues were the norm, and ironically, despite Elmore James’ posthumous fame among blues fans, he and other local down-home bluesmen rarely played the Club Desire, although they did perform for Clarence Chinn’s brother C.O. at his café on Franklin Street. After

Clarence Chinn decided to focus his energy on real estate and housing, the club was operated by Leonard Garrett, George Raymond, and Eddie Newton. George Raymond and C.O. Chinn were leaders in civil rights activities in Canton in the 1960s.

The Mississippi Blues Trail markers are funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and by support from the Canton Convention and Visitors Bureau and Center for the Study of Southern Culture, the Mississippi Department of Transportation, Delta State University and the Mississippi Development Authority. To submit information on the musicians, sites, and promoters honored by the Mississippi Blues Trail, contact: Jim O'Neal, Mississippi Blues Trail Research Director (816-931-0383, [bluesoterica@aol.com](mailto:bluesoterica@aol.com)).

For more information, about this event contact the Canton Convention and Visitors Bureau 601-859-1348 or visit the Mississippi Blues Trail on the web at [msbluestrail.org](http://msbluestrail.org) or the official MDA Tourism site [visitmississippi.org](http://visitmississippi.org). To contact the Mississippi Blues Trail office in Jackson, contact Alex Thomas (601-359-3297, [athomas@mississippi.org](mailto:athomas@mississippi.org)) or Leigh Portwood (601-359-3061, [lportwood@mississippi.org](mailto:lportwood@mississippi.org)).

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