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MISSISSIPPI BLUES TRAIL EXTENDS FROM HEART OF DELTA TO CHICAGO'S GRANT PARK

JACKSON, Miss. (June 1, 2009) -- Get ready, Chicago, The Mississippi Development Authority's (MDA) Tourism Division will showcase the "Birthplace of America's Music" in Chicago, Illinois, at the 26th annual Chicago Blues Festival, June 12-14, 2009, in downtown Chicago at Grant Park.

"The Chicago Blues Festival is the largest free blues festival in the world and remains the largest of Chicago's Music Festivals," stated Mississippi Development Authority's Tourism Director D. Craig Ray. "During three days on six stages, more than 640,000 blues fans will find out more about the Birthplace of America's Music, Mississippi."

MDA's Tourism Division along with hospitality partners Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau, Yazoo County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Greenville Convention & Visitors Bureau, McComb Visitors Bureau, Philadelphia Community Development Partnership and the Mississippi Blues Commission promote and market Mississippi's music heritage and wealth of travel offerings from its booth during the festival.

Again this year, MDA's Tourism Division will be the title sponsor of the *Mississippi Juke Joint Stage* that will feature artists Big Jack Johnson, Terry "Harmonica" Bean, Grady Champion, Eden Brent, Ben Payton, the legendary David "Honeyboy" Edwards and many more. They will also host a reception during the event on Friday, June 12, 2009 at the Petrillo Music Shell Tent for tour operators, meeting planners, expatriates and blues enthusiasts. Mississippi tourism professionals from around the state will be on-site to welcome the group.

"This opportunity keeps getting better each year. We have established a great partnership with the City of Chicago. Now that we have the Mississippi Blues Trail to promote to attendees of the festival, we are eager to see their response," said Alex Thomas, program manager for the Mississippi Development Authority's Tourism Heritage Trails Program. "The Mississippi Juke Joint Stage was a big hit at last year's festival. This year we have more great artists from our state to showcase their talents."

Prior to the festival, the Mississippi Blues Commission and the tourism staff will partner with the City of Chicago Mayor's Office of Special Events to erect the second out-of-state Mississippi Blues Trail marker in downtown Chicago. The ceremony will take place at Grant Park at 2:00 PM on Thursday, June 11, 2009.

The Chicago Blues Festival is June 12 through June 14 in Grant Park. This free and critically acclaimed event showcases the talents of Blues musicians known throughout the world. This year will celebrate the life and work of Robert Nighthawk on the centennial of his birth. The festival hours are from 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.

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 Tourism website at www.visitmississippi.org.

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