

*Remarks for
Blues Commission
October 24, 2003*

■ Recognize:

- Thank Paula Sykes, Chancery Clerk, and her staff for help
- Thank Sherry McFadden, Circuit Clerk also for use of courthouse
- Mayor Marble
- All other local officials
- Members of the commission

■ Welcome everyone to Indianola

- June of this year, came to dedicate the marker across the street
- Spot where the legendary B.B. King started playing the blues
- Countless others have taken their inspiration from him

- This has been an exciting year for the blues, in Mississippi and nationwide
- In August of 2002, our Congress officially proclaimed 2003 as “The Year of the Blues”
- Mississippi is the undisputed birthplace of the blues
- 1903, W.C. Handy, was sitting on a railroad platform in Tutwiler listening to a man play what he described as “the weirdest music I had ever heard”, thus the blues were born
- We’ve produced some of the world’s finest blues musicians
 - W.C. Handy
 - Muddy Waters
 - Robert Johnson
 - Howlin’ Wolf
 - John Lee Hooker
 - And, B. B. King- (Who I named as blues ambassador for the State of MS in June of this year)

- They have all shaped and defined this authentic and truly American form of music

- From Greenville to Clarksdale, from Indianola to Tutwiler
 - We've shown the world our musical talent

- The blues has been performed, studied, and emulated around the world
 - But it all began here
 - Proud of Mississippi's blues heritage

- In February of this year I also proclaimed 2003 as "The Year of the Blues"

- help of the MS Development Authority and its Tourism Division / we've been promoting the blues in Mississippi / in America, and around the world

- There have been several blues festivals held statewide this year
 - Deep Delta Festival in Rolling Fork
 - B.B. King Homecoming in Indianola
 - Highway 61 Blues Festival in Leland and
 - Muddy River Music Fest in Columbus

- Week-long celebration at the state's welcome centers with special media tour of cities in the MS delta that culminated at the Delta Heritage and Blues Festival in Greenville-the 2nd oldest blues festival in the U.S.

- Clint Eastwood, Martin Scorsese, and five other directors even filmed a seven-part series entitled "The Blues", that aired on PBS in September- in which they trace the origin of the blues from Africa to the Mississippi delta

- Mississippi- the birthplace of the blues and several nationally known artist has had a tremendous effect culturally, musically, and historically on the people of all ages and races

- In order to continue to promote, advance, and foster an appreciation of the blues in our state, nationally, and worldwide- the Mississippi Blues Commission has been established

- The board will consist of 15 members who will analyze the tourism potential of the blues in Mississippi, particularly in the delta and prepare a plan for marketing the blues to conferences, music performances, filmmakers and others

- Fred Carl of the Viking Range Corporation, who could not attend due to family obligations, will serve as Chair and

- Robert Moore of the University Center for Economic Development at MS Valley State University, who is out of the country, will serve as Vice-Chair

- Other members of the board that are present:
 - Sen. David Jordan
 - Representative Chuck Espy
 - Luther Brown, Dir. of the Delta Center for Culture and Learning at Delta State
 - Tim Hedgepeth, Director of the MS Arts Commission
 - Bill Serat, Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau
 - Darienne Wilson of the MDA Division of Tourism, representing her today is Alex Thomas

- Members that are not present:
 - Rep. May Whittington
 - Charles Regan Wilson of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at Ole Miss

- Issac Byrd from Jackson
 - Will Jacks from Cleveland
 - Morgan Freeman has been asked, but he is currently out of the country
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- Willie Dixon said, “The blues are the true facts of life expressed in words and song, inspiration, feeling, and understanding.”

 - It is up to us to keep this legendary and uniquely Mississippi art form alive and educate our citizens about the impact blues has had on people from all walks of life