

MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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DIVISION OF TOURISM UPGRADES WEBSITE CREATING FASTER AND EASIER ACCESS FOR VISITORS

The Mississippi Development Authority's (MDA) Division of Tourism officials recently announced that accessing information on its website is now more user-friendly than ever. The announcement highlights new streamlined features that expedite the visitor's ability to get the most current and accurate information on travel and tourism in Mississippi.

"We are excited to implement these upgrades to our website," said Darienne Wilson, Director of the Mississippi Division of Tourism. "We feel that these innovative additions will increase retention and interest resulting in more travelers to our state."

MS Division of Tourism's new website features include:

- A trip-planner enables travelers to create their own Mississippi itinerary.
- On-line accommodations via WorldRes, Inc. facilitates travelers' abilities to make reservations at hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts.
- The Mississippian's Guide to Mississippi lets users request information about sites, events and attractions in their own state.
- The addition of quick links affords savvy computer users the opportunity to expeditiously navigate the site.
- Tourism incentive and matching grant program information with applications to download are available for Mississippi tourism partners.
- A Mississippi Certified Travel Specialist locator connects travelers with the nearest professional who will assist in planning their next Mississippi getaway.
- The inclusion of a unique single database allows individual inquirers, group tour operators, meeting and convention planners and hunting, fishing and outdoor enthusiasts to retrieve the most current information searching by category, city or attraction.

"Our vision is clear. Our goals are set high and we are committed to advancing economic development to the next level with your continued support."

Robert J. Rohrlack, Jr., CED
Executive Director
Mississippi Development Authority

These upgrades are only the beginning," said Wilson. "The Tourism Division will continue to be proactive in its efforts to attract visitors to Mississippi by adding features that meet the ever-changing and sophisticated needs of our travelers and tourism industry partners."

To explore Mississippi Division of Tourism's new and improved site, log on to the World Wide Web at www.visitmississippi.org.

USM TO SHIP FIRST BATCH OF PENTAGON PAINT

American Pride, an environmentally friendly paint developed by University of Southern Mississippi polymer science researchers, will be used in the repairs of the Pentagon in Washington D.C.

The first shipment of the paint -- 100 gallons of off-white paint -- was unveiled to the public Tuesday at USM. In all, at least 20,000 gallons will be used to paint one-fifth of the interior walls in the Pentagon, as well as repaint the wing damaged in the terrorist attack on Sept. 11, 2001.

"It will be 12-14 months before we start painting the rebuilt wing," said Bob Billak, who is in charge of maintenance at the Pentagon. "Before then, we will use the paint on the corridors and offices in the (rest) of the building."

Billak said the paint has been tested extensively and has shown to be more durable than conventional paint. More tests await the paint in Washington.

"They will take this paint and use it on a mock-up of Pentagon offices," said Dr. Shelby Thames, distinguished professor of polymer science at the Southern Miss School of Polymers and High Performance Materials. "By this summer, they will be ready to start ordering it in big volumes."

The paint, developed by a Southern Miss research team led by Thames, was unveiled during an Earth Day celebration last April.

"We had wanted to call the paint 'Pentagon Five-Star,' but when we checked with the trademark office, Pentagon was already taken," said Thames, explaining the origin of the American Pride name. "So we sat around and brainstormed. We wanted something associated with patriotism. We checked and American Pride was not taken. But it is now. It's ours."

In developing the paint, Southern Miss researchers, under Thames' direction, developed a monomer, a chemical building block, from an agricultural product - in this case, castor oil - which is built into the chemical base of the paint. The monomer, called a "castor oil acrylated monomer," takes the place of a solvent in the formulation of the paint. That, in turn, dramatically reduces the amount of toxic pollutants given off by water-based paint into the atmosphere.

Conventional paint, Thames said, contains volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which pollute the air and give fresh paint its unpleasant odor. The new technology developed at Southern Miss will remove the VOCs from the paint, cutting the level of pollutants from, typically, 200-400 grams per liter of paint to as low as three grams.

"The bottom line is this technology uses castor oil, soybean oil or lesquerella oil to allow us to make latex polymers that have wide applications," Thames said. "Not just paints, but inks, adhesives, carpet backings, coating for fibers, coatings for concrete steel, just a huge potential for applications. And we can make these coating systems that have no odor and release no pollutants into the atmosphere."

Despite its environmentally friendly makeup, the paint has shown a consistently high quality in lab tests, including government testing as a precursor to

environmental certification and U.S. Defense Department approval, Thames said.

"According to the specifications called for by the Green Seal Society, our (paint) far exceeded their expectations - in terms of the amount of volatiles in it, the odor, the washability, the scrub-resistance values. It meets the required Green Seal specifications according to an independent lab. Application for Green Seal certification is in progress."

In addition to meeting high standards, the paint will be a money-saver for the Pentagon and, by extension, U.S. taxpayers, Billak said.

"Since the paint has no VOCs, there is no downtime in painting," he said. "We repaint every five years, and by using this paint, we won't have to shut down offices and move personnel out while we paint."

The task of producing enough paint to cover the Pentagon walls has fallen to Southern Diversified Products, which has contracted with USM to market the monomer that is the chemical foundation of the paint. Southern Diversified Products was formed under an arrangement made possible by the Mississippi University Research Act, which allows university researchers to market the results of their work under an agreement with the university and the state College Board.

Southern Miss holds all of the patents on the monomer research and will receive royalties on those patents. Thames said there are currently six patents on the project, and predicts there could be as many as 20 by the time the research runs its course.



INDUSTRY EDUCATION DAY COMING TO PINE BELT

The Economic Development Authority of Jones County and the Jones County Chamber of Commerce will hold its Jones County Industry Education Day on Feb. 15. More than 800 educators are expected to either tour local businesses and industries or attend seminars on technology led by guest speakers.

"The purpose of this event is to allow our local educators the opportunity to view, first hand, what our industries are all about," said Billy Hyatt, chairman of the EDA of Jones County. "They will also have the opportunity to speak to the industry representatives about what they are looking for in employees."

The industries that have agreed to host tours include: South Central Regional Medical Center; Masonite Corporation; Howard Industries; Howard Computers; Howard Ballast; Ellisville State School; Mississippi Power Company; and Jones County Junior College. Also participating are BancorpSouth, Union Planters Bank, Howse Implement Company, Cellular One, Trustmark National Bank, BellSouth and the Association for Excellence in Education.

South Central Regional Medical Center and BellSouth are Gold Sponsors of the event. The Silver Sponsor is Masonite. Bronze Sponsors include BancorpSouth, Howard Computers, Trustmark, Cellular One, Howse Implement Company, First National Bank of the Pine Belt, Bank of Jones County, Citizens National Bank and the Essmueller Company.

The guest speakers will be Randall Hicks and Dr. Angie Dvorak. Hicks is the coordinator of the Educator Resource Center at the John C. Stennis Space Center in Hancock County. Dvorak is president of the Mississippi Technology Alliance, a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of technology in Mississippi.

For additional information, call the EDA of Jones County at (601) 649-3031.

ALMOND TO BE FEATURED AT MEDA ANNUAL MEETING

The MetroJackson Economic Development Alliance (MEDA) will hold its Annual Meeting Feb. 12, 2002, beginning at 5 p.m., at the Old Capitol Inn in downtown Jackson. More than 200 guests are expected.

The guest speaker will be Michael A. Almond, president and CEO of the Charlotte Regional Partnership, an economic and community development organization representing 16 counties in the Charlotte, N.C., region. Also, Preston Gough will pass the leadership of MEDA to Bill Brown of Brown Bottling Group in Jackson. Brown is also serving as the 2002 chairman of the board for the MetroJackson Chamber of Commerce.

MEDA, formed in 1994, is a consortium of five entities — the Hinds County Economic Development District, the Madison County Economic Development Authority, the Rankin First Economic Development Authority, the MetroJackson Chamber of Commerce and the Jackson Municipal Airport Authority.

For more information, call the MetroJackson Chamber of Commerce at (601) 948-7575.