

Mississippi Department of  
Economic and Community Development  
P. O. Box 849  
Jackson, MS 39205-0849

**FOR RELEASE AT 3 P.M.,  
THURSDAY, MARCH 2, 2000**

Contact: Buddy Bynum, Director of Public Affairs, 601.359.3030  
Date: March 2, 2000

**BURNS NAMES DARIENNE WILSON AS STATE TOURISM DIRECTOR  
Veteran Tourism Professional From Private Sector Lauded For Vision, Experience**

JACKSON, Miss., March 2 -- Darienne Wilson, a veteran tourism professional whose private sector work has helped Mississippi's tourism industry grow to record proportions, today was named to head the Mississippi Department of Economic and Community Development's (MDECD) Tourism Development Division.

The announcement was made at a Capitol news conference by MDECD Executive Director J.C. Burns, who cited Wilson's leadership and vision in what has become a \$5.5 billion business in Mississippi.

"Darienne Wilson brings to tourism the keen vision for what Mississippi can be," said Burns. "She has the professional foundation in Mississippi tourism as well as the energy and vitality to direct our tourism efforts to a higher level and I am delighted to have her on board."

Echoing Burns' praise, Gov. Ronnie Musgrove said, "The importance of tourism to economic development cannot be overstated. It offers great prospects for long-term job creation in Mississippi and goes to the heart of cultural life and social progress in our state.

"Darienne Wilson knows this and is eminently qualified to continue the progress Mississippi has made to become one of America's premier tourist destinations," said Musgrove. "I look forward to working with her as she brings national and worldwide attention to the attractions we have in Mississippi."

Wilson has served for more than 10 years as executive director of the Mississippi Tourism Association, the state's private sector association which has members from throughout the tourism industry. The association's membership has grown to more than 225 from about 20. Members include convention and visitors bureaus, hotels, restaurants, attractions and casinos.

(more)

BURNS NAMES DARIENNE WILSON

Page 2

March 2, 2000

"This is a wonderful opportunity for me to be the voice of tourism for Mississippi," said Wilson. "I believe that tourism is Mississippi's untold success story and I am anxious to tell that story. I look forward to working on a team with the Governor, J.C. Burns, the entire staff of MDECD and the tourism industry in Mississippi to take tourism to a higher level."

Since 1989, Wilson has served as an owner and vice president of Mississippi Association Managers Inc., a company specializing in the management of non-profit associations. She also has experience as interim director, marketing director and the first tourism director of the Jackson Convention and Visitors Bureau.

An honors graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, Wilson holds a B.A. degree in speech communications. Active in civic affairs and professional organizations, Wilson received MTA's Tourism Achievement Award of the Decade for 1999 and was named by Convention South Magazine as one of the 100 meeting planners to watch in 2000. She is a certified association executive and a certified tour professional, two professional distinctions earned through advanced education programs sponsored by the American Society of Association Executives and the National Tour Association, respectively.

###

Darienne Oliver Wilson  
Director of Tourism Development  
Mississippi Department of Economic and Community Development  
(Announced March 2, 2000)

**Significant Accountabilities/Career Accomplishments**

- C 18 years of direct from-the-ground-up tourism experience in Mississippi, starting as Director of Sales & Catering at the Natchez Eola Hotel, when it first re-opened, and emerging as the private sector spokesperson for the tourism industry, as the Executive Director of the Mississippi Tourism Association.
- C One of the founding visionaries of the Mississippi Tourism Association, at the time helping pull together five Convention & Visitor's Bureaus to cooperate and collaborate. Today, there are 43 CVB's participating with the association. Served for 10 years as Executive Director of the Mississippi Tourism Association, boosting membership from 20 to 275.
- C Strong management experience, as co-owner and vice president of Mississippi Association Managers Inc., a company specializing in the management of 12 non-profit organizations with diverse needs.
- C Created the Tourism Department of the Jackson Convention and Visitor's Bureau and supervised the opening of the bureau's Festival Office and Film Division. Organized and implemented an in-house advertising agency at the Jackson Convention & Visitor's Bureau and managed two tourism centers with combined visitation of 38,000 and responsibility for all group tour sales.
- C Produced the first Governor's Conference on Tourism, and continued to launch the event for the past nine years, boosting annual attendance from 90 to 375.
- C Launched the Mississippi Tour Guide, distributed at all of the state's Welcome Centers -- and served as its editor for the last three years.
- C Was selected by the Mississippi tourism industry in 1999 as the recipient of the Tourism Achievement Award of the Decade, for outstanding work in the industry in the 1990's.

- C Has a unique understanding of the tourism opportunities available for Mississippi, having lived in Gulfport, Greenville, Natchez and Jackson – and having worked both as a direct tourism provider and as the private sector leader through work as an association executive.
- C Facilitated strategic planning sessions for a number of organizations, including the Natchez Convention & Visitor's Bureau, the Natchez Pilgrimage Tours, Starkville Convention & Visitor's Bureau, Corinth Area Tourism Promotion Council and the Ridgeland Tourism Commission.

### Career History

- 1989–Present                    **Mississippi Association Managers Inc.**  
Jackson, MS  
Co-owner & Vice President
- 1984–1989                    **Jackson Convention & Visitor's Bureau**  
Interim Director, September–December, 1988  
Marketing Director, 1986–1988  
Tourism Director, 1984–86
- 1982–1984                    **Natchez Eola Hotel**  
Director of Sales & Catering
- 1981–1982                    **Coast Federal Savings & Loan**  
Student Loan Coordinator

### Education/Professional Certifications

Honors Graduate, University of Southern Mississippi  
B. A. in Speech Communications  
Minor in Personnel Management

Certified Association Executive earned through education program of the American Society of Association Executives.

Certified Tour Professional earned through education program of the International Association of Convention & Visitor's Bureaus.

Certified in Sales & Marketing, awarded by the International Association of Convention & Visitor's Bureaus.

### **Community Activities**

Has played an active role over the years in a wide variety of community activities and tourism industry groups.

### **Awards/Honors**

Consistently recognized for achievement. Among the honors: Best Tourism Promotion for 1986, by the International Association of Convention & Visitor's Bureaus; Outstanding Young Woman of America for 1985 and 1995; 100 Meeting Planners to Watch in 2000, by Convention South Magazine; and Association Executive of the Year for 1991, by the Mississippi Society of Association Executives.