

The Arts Mean Business  
Press Conference  
March 14, 2000  
12:00 p.m.  
State Capitol

\*this is a press conference for the Mississippi Arts Commission.

Good afternoon.

I have always been proud to be from the state that is recognized for its wealth of creative thinkers. Artists and their craft seem to grow right out of Mississippi's dark, rich soil.

I find the results of the study on the economic impact of the arts in Mississippi exciting. It proves that non-profit arts organizations are bringing money to this state. But, I also think that there is more where this came from. I think we are yet to fully tap the economic potential of the arts.

We've experienced success by attracting record-breaking crowds to events such as Palaces of St. Petersburg, the USA International Ballet Competition and to festivals across the state including Jackson's Jubilee Jam, The Natchez Opera Festival and Mississippi Blues & Heritage Festival in Greenville.

But, our challenge is to do more. Why should other states, with a far less compelling cultural heritage, draw the tourist dollars? In most instances, communities need to take a look at what art forms are already thriving in their area and create a venue or event to promote what makes their community unique. Natchez is an excellent. Town leaders wanted to boost the economy in May. They began

the Natchez Opera Festival, which last year had a financial impact of \$2 million in their community.

And, that is just one example. Crossroads Quilters in Port Gibson, the Walter Anderson Museum in Ocean Springs are two other ways communities tapped what was already there and began attracting visitors to their area.

I encourage you all to look to the Mississippi Arts Commission and your government officials for leadership and as partners in helping your communities grow economically through the arts.

The study shows that we are drilling the will of artistic wealth in Mississippi. Now is the time, tap it.