

It's that time of year again.

You know, the time when family and friends gather for a week of food, music, harness racing and political speeches in the red clay of east central Mississippi.

The Neshoba County Fair is here, and it's a great place to be.

Thousands of Mississippians will get together during this week. The cabins have been opened up and aired out, the refrigerators are stocked and everyone's looking forward to the visits on front porches and the crowds at Founder's Square.

There's nothing like the Neshoba County Fair anywhere else in America. It is uniquely Mississippian, and over the years it has become almost legendary.

The history of the Fair extends back to the late eighteenth century. The cabins on Founders Square are like a family tree, the roots of a tradition that have grown over the years and spread around the grounds of the Fair.

Families are raised on this event. Generations have lived in the same cabins, zealously guarding their place on the grounds while welcoming visitors onto the porch for some of the best food anywhere. There's nothing better than walking "porch-to-porch" and sampling the subtle differences between recipes for fried chicken or cornbread.

Over the years, the Fair has become known as a place to visit by some of the most colorful and historical figures in our state and nation. Since Governor Anselm Joseph McLaurin first spoke in 1896, the Pavilion in Founder's Square is the place to meet to hear great speeches.

But there's so much more the Fair has to offer.

Just a short walk from Founder's Square, people gather in the grandstand to watch the harness racing. Both day and night, music fills the air as acts play inside the racetrack and under the Pavilion. It might be a national act or a local high school choir, but the music is always good.

The midway, with its rides, food and games, always has something new to offer for the families. Grandparents and grandchildren walk slowly down the grassy lanes of the midway, sampling the cotton candy and lemonade and trying to win a prize to take back to the cabin.

Arts and crafts exhibits display the handiwork of local artisans, cakewalks mean a chance to get more of the great home cooking, and livestock barns are open to show off prize cattle.

Perhaps most importantly, the Fair offers a chance to slow down from the hectic pace that comes with working and raising a family. It's a place to escape from desks, phones, fax machines, and the pressures that come with making a living. It's a place to get back to the roots of what makes Mississippi great.

It's that time of year again. Make the time to drive to Neshoba County, take Highway 21 out of Philadelphia, and step back into another time. You won't regret it.