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Date: November 5, 2001

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**STATE TOURISM OFFICE ASSISTING WITH PROMOTION OF HIGHWAY 51**

JACKSON, Miss.,- Fans of the Blues around the world immediately can identify with the mention of the famous, Highway 61 running through Mississippi. Now, with the efforts of a group of dedicated individuals, Highway 51 is working to achieve the same recognition with the variety of tourist attractions located along this portion of the state.

The Mississippi Development Authority's Division of Tourism Development is facilitating the formation of a coalition to promote and market visitor attractions along Highway 51. Highway 51 connects with Tennessee at Memphis and Louisiana north of New Orleans. Along its 300 mile route through Mississippi are some 40 communities. Running parallel to I-55, the opportunity to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors exists. Some 500,000 visitors register at the Welcome Centers located on I-55 in DeSoto and Pike counties.

"I believe our strategy of promoting the unique attractions Mississippi has to offer is sound. The efforts we expend to promote tourism produce results. Tourism not only brings dollars to Mississippi's economy, it opens doors for the economic enhancement of our state," said Governor Ronnie Musgrove.

Research indicates the top five Mississippi visitor attractions are: Casino Gaming, Entertainment, Dining, Shopping, and Sightseeing. The area along Highway 51 provides the opportunity for visitors to experience Railroad History, Historic Architecture, Festivals, Military, Antique Shopping, Arts & Crafts, Old South and Outdoor Activities.

" We are delighted to be involved in the development and promotion of adding to the list of attractions, events and activities that comprise our tourism industry. By working together the communities along Highway 51 have the opportunity to market a corridor sending visitors to the next stop. Developing partnerships benefits everyone, said Darienne Wilson, director, Tourism Development Division.

**(MORE)**

Page 2

State Tourism Office Assisting with Promotion of Highway 51

In addition to communities, representatives from the U. S. Army Corp of Engineers; the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks; and the Mississippi Main Street Program are also participating.

Tourism provides strong economic benefits to local communities and businesses. It is not just food and lodging businesses that benefit. Providers of gasoline; retail shops; repair services; suppliers of laundry, food, produce, restaurant needs all of which create economic growth are affected by Tourism.

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