



MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY
Community Action Team

MSCAT Messenger

A Publication of the Mississippi State Community Action Team

our mission: to further community and economic development throughout the State of Mississippi by engaging Mississippi State University faculty and students with local citizens to build toward a prosperous future

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from the director's desk...

Welcome to *MSCAT Messenger*, a new venue of the Mississippi State Community Action Team (MSCAT) created to stimulate meaningful dialogue among community development practitioners around the state. Hopefully, you will find this newsletter informative, useful and applicable to accomplishing daily tasks and long range planning efforts in your

immediate area. It is another reminder that MSU faculty, staff and students want to help and also a way for us to link you to other resources, educational conferences and seminars and people around the state that may be able to help you achieve sustainable development where you live and work. The individuals working directly for MSCAT have diverse interests and backgrounds, including education, economics, landscape architecture, technology, public relations, community

and economic development and government. Our linkages throughout the university, however, put a much broader pool of experts to work on your behalf. If there is anything MSCAT can do for you, please don't hesitate to call upon one of our staff members at any time. □

Virgil Culver

Dr. Virgil Culver, Director

a Mississippi hometown

I N D I A N O L A

Indianola, home of B.B. King, is just one of the towns visited by the MSCAT First Impressions team earlier this year.

The visit was requested by Kate Failing, the director of the town's Main Street program. So, what were our first impressions? Indianola is in the heart of the Mississippi Delta and its location is one of its assets. The bayou meandering through downtown provides natural cooling during the hot, dry, Mississippi Delta summers. The bayou, while unique, needs some care but is a

real asset.

You can't visit Indianola without riding by Club Ebony, the celebrated first home of the blues and B.B. King. If you've never been to a Delta juke-joint, you might be disappointed. But, these juke-joints and clubs are fast becoming famous as part of the heritage tour better known as the Mississippi Blues Trail. Check it out.

Downtown Indianola is a bustling little hub of retail, restaurant, and government activities. The Planter's Bank building is unique, and you are prone to stare as you try and figure what's wrong with the top building and then it hits you. You smile and say,



"that's cool!" Then, there are the lions in the park. When we asked about the lions, we learned we probably shouldn't have asked about the lions. Ride downtown; you can't miss them. Be sure to check out the BB King corner and the brand new BB King Museum.

Indianola is a community with a growing sense of place and folks like Kate Failing working to improve the town's first impressions.

It is certainly worth a day trip to take in the sites, sounds, and food that make the Mississippi Blues Trail famous. □

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faculty profile

Jeremiah Dumas



Jeremiah Dumas is an Assistant Research Professor of Landscape Architecture in the Geosystems Research Institute at Mississippi State University. Born and raised in Prentiss, Miss., Jeremiah received both his bachelor's and master's degrees in landscape architecture from MSU. Prior to joining the faculty at MSU, he worked for Design Workshop in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

His current research interests include working with the Department of Transportation at the federal level to help develop a process using spatial technology that will more effectively and efficiently minimize environmental impacts. This research encourages transportation projects that minimize adverse effects on quality of life.

Even though Jeremiah is a researcher, he has a passion

for outreach and service. "There is so much expertise and resources on campus. It's important that we apply this knowledge in communities across the state to improve social and economic opportunities for our residents," said Dumas. "I've worked in some really great towns that have the minds and the people capable of doing great things. I'm proud of Mississippi and want to do my part to make a difference." □

what is community development?

understanding 'community' is a first step

Community development...

- (1) is complex.
- (2) is interconnected.
- (3) must be inclusive.

Ask several folks to define *community development*, and varying opinions and many definitions will likely emerge. Regardless of the definition that is used, practitioners, government officials, and other stakeholders need to understand the complexity and interconnections that exist in community development. Today, it is a highly respected and recognized field of study, and more and more emphasis is placed on understanding these complexities to ultimately improve quality of life for citizens all across the world. It is important, however, to first understand *community*.

When one thinks of *community*, groups of people living and/or working in a particular area sharing common services likely comes to mind. This is certainly true, but it is important to understand that geographic or other boundaries do not necessarily define a given community. It is the people who share common interests whether socioeconomic, political, cultural, etc. that make up a community—not necessarily the physical attributes.

Community development activities may, indeed, occur at the municipal, county, or regional level, but they may also occur at much smaller locales such as neighborhoods or

rural places. On the contrary, larger efforts may occur at the state, multi-state, or national level.

Regardless of the location of community development work, it is important to remember that inclusiveness is a key component in the process. Organizers of any initiative should carefully consider who defines the particular community so it can be determined who needs to be involved in the efforts. Taking the time to be inclusive with community development initiatives can lead to faster and more successful impacts for years to come. □

design ideas for Clarksdale’s downtown *using history to guide recommendations*

MSCAT was invited by the newly-formed Clarksdale Revitalization Inc. organization to conduct the typical First Impressions visit as well as provide streetscape design ideas for the downtown area, specifically the 200 block of Yazoo Avenue. The main observation of Yazoo Avenue was that the street appeared very dated. Metal awnings and

facades have hidden the original historic architecture that makes the buildings unique; unmaintained street trees and sidewalks have created an unappealing experience for residents and visitors. The conceptual design recommendations were guided by historic photographs of Yazoo Avenue that showed the buildings in their prime, prior to the addition

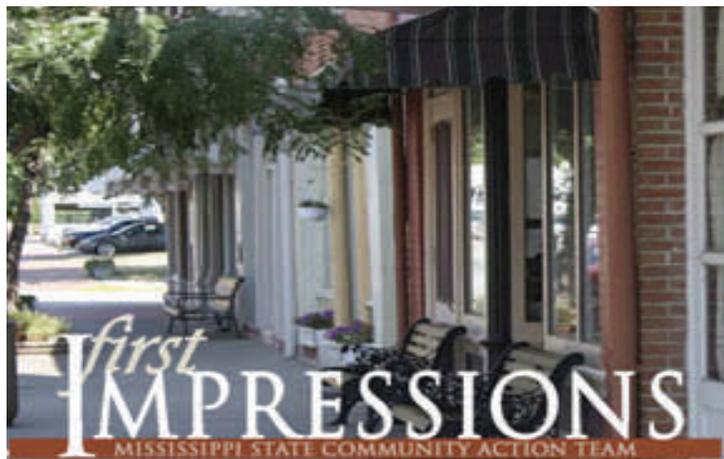
of the temporary facades. The design recommendations included short-term, medium, and long-term objectives, all of which could be phased in over time. Clarksdale is in a very unique position because the city is already attracting tourists from all over the world, so it needs to build on that opportunity and enhance the experience for visitors. □

first impressions sweeping the state *more than 60 communities have already participated*

The “First Impressions” program is just what the name implies, capturing the thoughts and observations of visitors on their first visit to a community. These observations, both positive and negative, are then used to raise issues that the community can evaluate and prioritize for in-depth study or immediate action. The program is designed to increase awareness of community strengths and opportunities.

Teams all across Mississippi swap communities for a day where they mingle with local folks, visit shops and restaurants, and take lots of pictures—all preferably without any warning!

When team members return to their respective communities, they prepare written



comments that help the MSCAT team prepare the reports and community presentations that are made within a few weeks after the visit.

Any recognized group representing community-wide interests, such as a Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Association, local government entity, or for-

malized citizens group can make a request for a community visit.

To view reports and photo galleries from communities in Mississippi or to complete an application form for your community, visit www.mscat.msstate.edu and click on the *First Impressions* link. □

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- (1) Helps set goals and priorities**
 - (2) Helps identify ways to strengthen community perceptions and services**
 - (3) Helps identify initiatives for community leaders**
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EVENTS OF INTEREST

EVENT	DATE	LOCATION	INFORMATION
Mississippi Municipal League Annual Conference	July 13-16, 2009	Biloxi	mmlonline.com
Mississippi Economic Development Council Summer Conference	July 22-24, 2009	Biloxi	medc.ms
Miss-Lou Regional Tourism Summit	August 11-13, 2009	Marksville, LA	srdc.msstate.edu/misslou
Destination Downtown	September 14-16, 2009	El Dorado, AR	destinationdowntown.org
National Preservation Conference	October 13-17, 2009	Nashville, TN	preservationnation.org
Mississippi Economic Council Hobnob Mississippi	October 21, 2009	Jackson	mec.ms
Alabama-Mississippi Rural Tourism Conference	October 26-28, 2009	Sheffield, AL	almsruraltourism.com
Mississippi Municipal League Small Town Conference	November 4-6, 2009	TBA	mmlonline.com