



STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE
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Column

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Successful New Strategies Result in Better Experiences at the 2022 Mississippi State Fair
By: Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson

Hosting the Mississippi State Fair is a lot of fun! At the same time, it is a challenge. As the State's largest public event, the Fair always attracts hundreds of thousands of attendees from every background and from every geographic corner of the Magnolia State. Whether livestock show families, 4-H and FFA youth from all 82 counties, vendors, lunch patrons, or fair attendees, the State Fair truly brings together a diverse cross section representative of all of Mississippi. People come to make family memories, and that's what I really like about the Mississippi State Fair.

For many people the State Fair is an annual tradition they get to be a part of and pass on childhood experiences to the next generation. The State Fair is one of our largest agricultural events, and also a huge economic driver for Mississippi and the metro area. A recent study concluded the economic impact of the Fair is nearly \$50 million annually. This year alone, some 519,000 people attended the Mississippi State Fair. Given that this year's Fair was a shorter 11-day event, we nearly reached pre-pandemic attendance levels. During the Fair, our new Fairgrounds water well pumped 1.3 million gallons of fresh well water that was used for everything from making lemonade and sweet tea, to washing cattle, sheep pigs and goats.

But following the recent rise in crime in Jackson and across America, hosting events like the State Fair has become more of a challenge. I don't have to tell anyone about the issues with crime we've seen in Jackson, and crime has escalated in recent years. Going into planning this year's Mississippi State Fair, we knew we would have to create some new partnerships and adopt some new policies to curb crime while at the same time providing a safe, enjoyable atmosphere for our livestock show families and fairgoers. We were successful, and I want to tell you how.

Fairgrounds Director Michael Lasseter and our Fairgrounds Chief of Security Jimmy Herzog assembled a world class team of state, county and municipal law enforcement. I would like to personally thank each and every one of them: Hinds County Sheriff's Office, Jackson Police Department, Pearl Police Department, State Capitol Police, Mississippi Highway Patrol, Department of Homeland Security, State Fire Marshal's Office, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, Mississippi Agricultural and Livestock Theft Bureau, and private security officers. These additional law enforcement resources served as a major deterrent to would-be criminals. And, when problems arose, the issues were dealt with immediately.

We adopted a new youth curfew policy requiring youth under the age of 18 to have adult supervision when entering the Fair after 9:00 p.m. And to keep bad actors and illegal weapons out of the Fair, we controlled access to the State Fair Midway by placing magnetometers at each of our seven entry points. All this resulted in keeping potential troublemakers out of the State Fair, while allowing law abiding

citizens in. We did all this without sacrificing the rights of lawful citizens who choose to carry for personal protection.

While the new procedures resulted in slightly lower attendance numbers than prior years, I'm very pleased to say we accomplished our Goal for 2022: We recreated an experience of peaceful family-friendly, fun and security at the Mississippi State Fair. For this, we owe sincere appreciation to all our staff but especially to our law enforcement and security officers.

With the success we had for the state's largest event, I have no doubt that this same type of law enforcement presence and teamwork can be implemented on a much larger scale to restore peace and safety for the entire City of Jackson. The law-abiding people of Mississippi, including the people of Jackson, deserve nothing less for our capital city.

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Photo Attached:

