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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Profits from Pageant, not Taxpayer dollars, used to purchase Miss Hospitality Program Tiffany & Co. jewelry

August 10, 2016—For the past 18 years the Mississippi Miss Hospitality Pageant, held at the Saenger Theater has successfully generated a profit in Hattiesburg. The winner of the state-wide pageant receives a prize package, including Tiffany jewelry, and a trip to the New York Mississippi Picnic in Central Park, paid for by pageant profits, not tax-payer dollars.

The Mississippi Miss Hospitality pageant is a program produced by VISITHATTIESBURG™, and is staffed by employees of VISITHATTIESBURG™. The pageant was first created by the State Legislature in 1946, and the statewide program has now been hosted in Hattiesburg for the past 18 years. The Miss Hospitality Pageant is a for-profit program. Year after year, the Pageant generates more dollars than it spends. Through ticket sales and sponsorships, the program contributes additional monies toward VISITHATTIESBURG™ for other marketing efforts. In 2015, the Miss Hospitality program had more than \$16,000 positive cash balance. The profits generated by the pageant cover the pageant costs, including prizes, travel, and scholarships awarded to Miss Hospitality. The pageant brings \$450,000 in visitor spending to Hattiesburg each year.

Mississippi's Miss Hospitality traditionally traveled to New York City for the Mississippi Picnic in Central Park each June. Miss Hospitality's travel to this event was part of the statewide delegation of communities, colleges, and other organizations that hosted thousands of visitors in Central Park to highlight Mississippi's food, music, and culture. Miss Hospitality was a featured speaker during each year's picnic.

Traditionally, as part of the prize package, the winner of Miss Hospitality was awarded a shopping trip to Tiffany's jewelry store in New York City where she could select a keepsake of sterling silver jewelry.

In 2016, the New York Mississippi Society canceled the Central Park Picnic. As a result, Miss Hospitality did not travel to New York as part of the delegation. The monies set aside for this trip were awarded to the winner in the form of a \$5,000 college scholarship.

Bonnie Warren, founding member of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, played an integral role in bringing the pageant to Hattiesburg in 1997. Bonnie Warren has served on the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission board for 26 years as a volunteer. Her hours of unpaid service on the board are estimated to total 3,600 hours since 1990. Estimated total hours donated to bring and operate the Mississippi Miss Hospitality Pageant program from 1997 until 2016 (she continues to serve) is more than 2,800 hours in recruiting, organizing, directing, and operating the Miss Hospitality Pageant. By bringing the pageant to Hattiesburg for 18 years, Warren has created an economic impact of \$8.1 million for businesses in Hattiesburg. Collectively Warren has donated without compensation over 6,400 hours of community service to better Hattiesburg.

In December of 2013, in recognition of Warren's anticipated retirement from the board, a Tiffany & Co. bracelet was purchased with pageant profits as a retirement gift. The bracelet is valued at \$525.00, an amount that was approved by commission auditors. Proceeds from the pageant funded the purchase of the bracelet. No part of the 2% hotel tax collected by VISITHATTIESBURG™ or the 2% restaurant tax collected by the Hattiesburg Convention Commission were used to purchase any Tiffany jewelry, wardrobe pieces or travel for the winner.

Bonnie Warren has yet to officially retire from the board. As such, the Tiffany bracelet is currently being held in a safe until Warren's official retirement.

The Mississippi Miss Hospitality Pageant is a program of VISITHATTIESBURG™, is presented by VISITHATTIESBURG™ and the Mississippi Development Authority, in conjunction with Forrest General Hospital, The University of Southern Mississippi and the City of Hattiesburg. For more information about the Pageant, contact the State Pageant Office at 601.268.3220 or mshosp@hattiesburg.org. Additional Pageant information can be found online at www.MissHospitality.com.