

*Providing research-based community rural development programs and technical assistance to the communities of rural Louisiana*

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## Tourism Supports Rural Louisiana

Rural communities can benefit from tourism. New money that enters a community supports local businesses and provides a boost to sales tax revenues.

Agricultural producers can benefit from tourism as well. When landowners provide educational tours or activities on-farm, they can diversify their operations and increase profits through agri-tourism.

The value of agri-tourism is more than tourist recruitment and diverse use of resources. The sustainable economic impact is significant as noted by Department of Agriculture Commissioner Dr. Mike

Strain, "Agri-tourism is a great opportunity for farmers, foresters and other producers to increase their bottom line. The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry is pledged to



do everything it can to promote the industry. We helped shepherd a bill through the State Legislature earlier this year that will reduce liability limits for agri-tourism profes-

sionals, so I think we'll see a dramatic increase in Louisiana agri-tourism this year."

Regional organizations such as Louisiana Delta 65 Inc. market regional amenities. Other groups in Louisiana parishes and Mississippi counties market amenities across state lines, such as the Miss-Lou Rural Tourism Association (*see pg. 2*).

Landowners in the Delta are finding new ways to sustain family farms and bring tourists looking for heritage and culture-based education to enjoy the outdoors. For more on agri-tourism, look for the upcoming special issue of the DRDC newsletter!

*Dr. Kay Tettleton*

## Internet Connectivity Key to Rural Economy

In 2000, the Web had 7 million sites; up 50 percent from 1999. In 2007, the estimate was 109 million with over 1 billion Internet users, according to Pandia Search Engine News.

These statistics combined with reports from PEW Internet & American Life Project ([pewinternet.org](http://pewinternet.org)), which report 75 percent of American

adults are connected to the Internet, 50 percent have a broadband connection at home and 66 percent of those connected have purchased something online, are good news to struggling businesses in rural economies.

Today, 60 percent of all small businesses, whether in rural or urban communities, have Web sites according to E-Biz:

Strategies for Small Business Success.

To support rural entrepreneurs who wish to build a Website, the LSU Agricultural Center has partnered with Louisiana Economic Development to launch a new program, "E-Business: Build or Buy?" (*see pg. 3*).

*Dora Ann Hatch & Dr. James Barnes*

# Miss-Lou Regional Tourism Summit

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*"Cultivating Your Community with Fresh Ideas and Fresh Air"* was the theme that enticed more than 125 community leaders, educators, volunteers and tourism professionals to come to Vicksburg, Ms, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Miss-Lou Regional Tourism summit, Aug 12-14. The Summit is a project of the Miss-Lou Rural Tourism Association with partners including LSU Agricultural Center, Mississippi State University, Louisiana Office of Tourism, Mississippi Development Authority, Southern Rural Development Center and Louisiana Delta 65 Inc.

The purpose of this conference was to provide educational programs and networking opportunities to agencies and organizations focusing on tourism-related issues and owners of tourism-related operations in the Miss-Lou region of 16 parishes and 17 counties.

Forty participants arrived early to participate in a pre-conference tour of the Louisiana Delta. The Hermoine Museum, Poverty Point Reservoir, High Delta Safari, Poverty Point Commemorative Area, Thomas Jason Lingo Center, Panola Pepper and the Louisiana Cotton Museum were showcased.

President Sally Durkin kicked off the three-day conference at the Southern Cultural Heritage Center (circa 1885) where exhibits were viewed and a number of speakers were heard. The keynote speaker, David Latona, encouraged participants to "Go with the Flow!" An agri-tourism panel discussion led by Dr. Daryl Jones, Mississippi State University, Natural Resource Enterprise Program, showcased Mitchell Farms, Collins, Ms, and the Jim Bowie Relay Station, Enterprise,

La. Jo Lynn Mitchell and John Ed Bartmess inspired attendees with their rural agri-tourism success stories.

The second day of the conference began at the Old Courthouse Museum with a brief tour. Participants boarded buses for a day trip to Rolling Fork. Step-on speakers informed the group about local crops, economic impact data and regional nature tourism success stories. In Rolling Fork, the group learned about innovative and successful farm tour ventures, Mont Helena and Delta National Forest. Dr. Matt Reonas, Louisiana Office of Tourism and Dr. Tom Pullen with Audubon Mississippi shared expertise about the Great River Birding Trails and the newly formed Louisiana Birding Trail. Updates on legislation impacting tourism was shared by Sen. Buck Clarke from Mississippi and Dora Ann Hatch from LSU Agricultural Center.

President-Elect Glen McGlothlin presided over the final session of the conference. The group embraced presentations from Dean Wilson, The Last Wilderness Swamp Tours, Bayou Sorrel, La. and Chris Turner addressing liability insurance. Capnote speaker, Dwight Landreneau, LSU Agricultural Center, spoke about the value of public lands and parks in promoting rural tourism.



The closing session included the business meeting of the Miss-Lou Rural Tourism Association. Considered a success by all who participated, steering committee members have already begun plans for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in August 2009 under the guidance of newly elected president-elect, Wilbert Carmouche, Avoyelles Parish.

*Drs. Kay Tettleton and Cynthia Pilcher*

# E-BUSINESS: BUILD OR BUY?

The convenience of shopping online from home or work has changed the way today's consumers purchase goods and services. Online sales reported by the U.S. Department of Commerce for the second quarter of 2007 were \$33.6 billion compared to just \$5.5 billion in 2000.

On-line shoppers are not interested in where they shop, only in what is available for purchase delivered to their doorstep. Therefore, rural store owners who have both a physical storefront location and a Web site have an opportunity to sell in two venues.

One store owner, Diane Heard, from Winnfield, said that selling on eBay has allowed her to increase inventory in her local store. Increasing inventory has also helped increase local sales. Customers value choices and having an Internet storefront provides more shopping value.

Realizing that e-commerce can support rural businesses, the LSU Agricultural Center is partnering with Louisiana Economic Development and Southern University Agricultural Center to provide the **E-Business: Build or Buy?** course in the fall of 2008.

## ABOUT THE *E-BUSINESS: BUILD OR BUY?* COURSE

### The e-commerce classes are designed for:

- Owners of existing retail and service businesses
- People wanting to start an Internet business
- People operating businesses from their homes
- Retired persons seeking new challenges
- Agricultural producers
- People considering alternative employment

### During the 1-1/2 day workshop participants will:

- Learn to use the Internet as a business research tool to find new markets or suppliers or to check out the competition.
- Decide if a Web presence is right for their business.
- Learn the process of planning a website.
- Learn techniques to effectively market a Web site.
- Learn the basics of an e-business model

*Dora Ann Hatch & Dr. James Barnes*

## WHY IS E-BUSINESS IMPORTANT?

According to E-Biz: Strategies for Small Business Success, small businesses use the Internet to:

- Build an existing business
- Add value to products or services
- Reach distant markets
- Offer innovative products and services
- Build credibility
- Build brand recognition
- Cut operating costs
- Build a returning customer base
- Start a business

## E-BUSINESS: BUILD OR BUY?

**Course:** Participants will gain a working knowledge of how to build an effective Web site or hire a Web consultant to build a Web site. Basics of eBay, on-line storefronts, auctions, PayPal, marketing strategies and more will be taught. For more information, go to the registration Web site.

### Dates/Locations:

**Oak Grove**  
 LSU AgCenter Office  
 9/23, 8:30 to 4:30 p.m.  
 9/30, 8:30 to noon

**Ruston**  
 Ruston-Lincoln Chamber  
 of Commerce  
 10/21, 8:30 to 4:30 p.m.  
 10/28, 8:30 to noon

**New Roads**  
 Pointe Coupee Parish Library  
 11/12, 8:30-4:30 p.m.  
 11/19, 8:30 to noon

**Winnsboro**  
 Scott Educational Center  
 12/2, 8:30 to 4:30 p.m.  
 12/9, 8:30 to noon

**Requirements:** Participants are required to have basic computer skills and be able to search the Internet. Minimum (maximum) class size is 10 (25) participants. Laptops will be provided.

**On-line registration will be open starting September 9.** Go to: [Http://www.lsuagcenter.com/drdc](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/drdc)

**Fee:** The workshop supply fee is \$50 and includes all course materials, meals and refreshments.

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