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**RIDGELAND TOURISM OPENS NEW VISITORS CENTER AND UNVEILS NEW BRAND**

**RIDGELAND, MISS.** – After nearly two years of research, focus groups, design, and interpretive creation, officials gathered to open the new visitors center for the Ridgeland Tourism Commission (RTC) and unveil the destination’s new brand: Explore Ridgeland. The new brand elements will be used to market the city across the nation to attract visitors helping to positively impact the local economy and increase the quality of life for residents.

“These projects have been the result of cooperation and collaboration with stakeholders and leaders from our community as well as visitors from around the region who came to Ridgeland as leisure consumers, group travel experts, small meeting planners, and event and sports organizers,” said Chris Chapman, president and CEO of Explore Ridgeland. “We look forward to getting the word out to our audiences about our new brand and MANY new offerings.”

As Mississippi’s fourth-largest industry, tourism plays a vital role in Ridgeland, and RTC has been leading this charge for almost 27 years (March 2024).

“We have seen growth and changes in all departments - marketing, sales, visitor services - and in the world, through the digital landscape and the evolving role of destination marketing organizations in their communities,” added Chapman. “Collectively, our staff has over 80 years of tourism experience to help make Ridgeland one of the fastest-growing tourism markets in our State, especially for outdoor enthusiasts, shoppers, and event-goers.”

Because of this growth, RTC board members and staff wanted to better reflect the Ridgeland product through creative messaging to out-of-market visitors as well as with the in-market welcome center. Thus, two major projects began consecutively: plans for the new visitors center and a full creative rebranding campaign and website.

After a nationwide search for a creative partner, RTC selected Mad Genius, based in Ridgeland, Miss. Mad Genius kicked off the branding process with a Brand Fusion workshop which included local stakeholders. After researching, the team created a new look and message, enhanced photography and videography assets, and updated advertising and collateral materials. A new strategy in public relations was launched and is being led by Foster Relations, Inc.; a new advertising brand campaign is being implemented by the Godwin Group; and a brand-new website has been designed by Tempest: [www.exploreridgeland.com](http://www.exploreridgeland.com). Each area of RTC has been reviewed and updated to “Explore Ridgeland.”

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“Mad Genius has called Ridgeland home since its inception 19 years ago,” said Rob Bridges, CEO of Mad Genius. “We are proud of our city and eager to see it continue to flourish. Everyone at Mad Genius is honored to be Ridgeland Tourism’s creative partner, and we are keen to help them launch their new brand strategy to provoke curiosity, stir a passion for exploration, and guide visitors new and old to our great city.”

With new creative assets in place, RTC and their board began combining the creativity into interpretive tools designed to tell the story of Ridgeland and the city’s offerings as guests explore the new Visitors Center, located on the I-55 side of the Renaissance at Colony Park (1000 Highland Colony Parkway, Suite 3002 between Barnes and Noble & AT&T).

“We truly appreciate Andrew Mattiace and the visitor center design team for helping us to visualize what our new space could truly offer,” said Lesley Holleman, RTC board president and owner of Fleet Feet Jackson. “The tourism team has accomplished so much by moving to this location as we increase visibility for our visitors, add parking spaces, and have a more modern center to tell the story of Ridgeland.”

Mattiace is the president of Mattiace Properties and co-developer and manager of Renaissance at Colony Park. In addition to Mattiace, architect Amy Trim, interior designer Lorrie Driver, and Brent Cryer of Cryer Construction helped to make the new visitors center a reality.

New features highlighted include a Bikeshare patio with Explore Ridgeland branded bikes, an outdoor scenic mural, Bill Waller Craft Center displays, local art, a 24-hour accessible True Omni Kiosk, and a branded conference room and bike wall depicting Ridgeland trails.

The visitor economy is vital to Ridgeland’s success. In 2022, visitors spent \$106.8 million in Ridgeland which generated an economic impact of \$121.6 million. That money came from outside the region and benefited the local community and even helped to create 1,093 jobs. This was a growth of over 11% from 2021.

“Ultimately, our mission is to increase opportunity and economic impact for our city, and we believe the ‘Explore Ridgeland’ message will encourage guests and residents alike to explore their passions and tell others about our thriving city,” said Chapman.

The event concluded with the invitation to explore the new visitors center and stations set up to reflect the various Ridgeland attractions such as outdoor recreation, shopping, and dining. The Ridgeland Visitors Center public ribbon cutting will be held Friday, Feb. 16 at 10 a.m.

For more about the brand and the Ridgeland tourism offerings, visit [www.explorridgeland.com](http://www.explorridgeland.com).

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*In Ridgeland, Mississippi, small-town southern charm meets big-city luxury, and travelers have near-endless possibilities to explore their passions. Just north of the capital and along the historic Natchez Trace Parkway, is a paradise for cyclists, with nationally recognized trails and a vibrant biking community. “The Rez” beckons water lovers for boating, fishing, and more on its sprawling 33,000 acres. Guests can discover unique art at the Bill Waller Craft Center, indulge in diverse culinary delights, and enjoy top-tier shopping, or high-end spas. [www.explorridgeland.com](http://www.explorridgeland.com)*