

MISSISSIPPI... *Believe It!*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MISSISSIPPI CAMPAIGN SHOOTS DOWN NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES

JACKSON, Miss. – Where is one of the fastest solar cars in the world built?

Mississippi, Believe It!

Where did this year's Super Bowl MVP go to school?

Mississippi, Believe It!

Where were the first heart and lung transplants performed?

Mississippi, Believe It!

Despite its numerous accomplishments, because of its tumultuous past, Mississippi can't seem to shake its negative stereotypes. However, one Mississippi business has spent three years and more than half a million dollars of its own money trying to do just that. And now, it's at it again.

"It's often reported that Mississippi is first on every bad list and last on every good list, but we want the country to know the positive attributes that we offer to the nation, which is why we started the *Mississippi, Believe It!*[™] campaign," said Rick Looser, chief operating officer, The Cirlot Agency.

"What's unique about these ads is that they're in your face, in a gentle Southern way. We're not afraid to confront the criticism head on," he added.

With headlines like, "Yes we can read. A few of us can even write," featuring Mississippi authors like William Faulkner, John Grisham and Eudora Welty, and "No Black. No White. Just the Blues," which features artists like B.B. King and Bo Diddley, the campaign is sparking attention worldwide.

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www.MississippiBelieveIt.com

As politicians and media flock to Mississippi for the first presidential debate at the University of Mississippi in September, Looser hopes this year's new ads will be just as effective. In addition to releasing the new ads to media and launching them on the campaign's Web site, www.MississippiBelieveIt.com, a new section has been added to the Web site to encourage an open dialogue about the state's past and future.

"When I travel across the United States, and I tell people I'm from Mississippi, I get asked questions like, 'Do you have paved roads? Do you have running water? Do you wear shoes?' This year's *Mississippi, Believe It!*TM campaign addresses those uneducated remarks," said Looser.

"Yes, our roads are paved...AND we have the best student drivers under the sun," reads a headline to one of the new ads. The ad recognizes a group of teenagers from Houston, Miss., who has not only built a road-ready solar car, but who has taken first place in the Dell-Winston School Solar Car Challenge seven years in a row, beating out teams across the globe.

"Yes, we have running water...right next to the world's finest kitchen appliances," reads another ad, referring to the Viking Range Corporation based in Greenwood, Miss. Viking's cooktops and appliances are continuously featured on Food Network by celebrity chefs like Bobby Flay, Rachel Ray and Paula Deen, and each one is manufactured in Mississippi.

"We hope that people are touched by our messages and that they leave viewers with a lasting, positive impression to combat the negative baggage that our state has carried for far too long," said Looser.

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Looser is the Chief Operating Officer of a Mississippi-based communications firm, which created this campaign as a gift to the state. The Cirlot Agency developed the initial ads in 2005, and they rely on the voices of the media and the power of the Internet to spread the message. To date, *Mississippi, Believe It!*TM has reached an estimated 120 million people worldwide, which is equivalent to \$20 Million in advertising.

“The feedback has been tremendous,” said Looser. “Through our Web site, www.MississippiBelieveIt.com, thousands of people around the world, in at least 23 countries and every state in America, have shared their stories and offered their support. We are constantly getting suggestions for new ads.”

The campaign was showcased at the 2008 Governor’s inauguration, is on display at the Jackson-Evers International Airport and was recently added to a textbook used in Mississippi schools.

“One of the many targets for this campaign is our own Mississippi school children,” said Looser. “We want to inspire them. We want them to know that they can accomplish anything they set their minds to.”

With the generosity of Service Printers, a Flowood-based printing company, a set of all 17 posters will be printed and mailed to every public and private school in the state.

“Service Printer’s donation exceeds \$50,000 in support of this campaign,” said Looser. “We couldn’t do this without their help. They are a shining example of the generous spirit that keeps Mississippi strong.”

Another generous Mississippian is featured in a new *Mississippi, Believe It!*TM ad for 2008 titled, “A State of Grace.” It spotlights the late Oseola McCarty of Hattiesburg, Miss., an African-American woman who made a living washing and ironing for more than 75 years. She lived modestly, saved her money and donated \$150,000 to The University of Southern Mississippi for an endowed scholarship.

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“In addition to new ads, we revamped previous ads to include Mississippians who continue to reach new heights. This year, we added recent Pulitzer Prize winner Natasha Trethewey to the notable writers and Eli Manning, this year’s Super Bowl MVP and a University of Mississippi graduate, to the notable athletes,” said Looser.

The Cirlot Agency also revised its entertainment ad by dividing the actors and singers into two ads. “We created a new ad to showcase Mississippi’s great singers because one ad couldn’t contain all of the contributions Mississippi has made to the world of entertainment,” added Looser.

“Y’all may think we talk funny, but the world takes our music seriously,” reads the new ad that highlights artists like Elvis Presley, Jimmy Buffet, Faith Hill and 3 Doors Down.

“We acknowledge that these stereotypes were created because of past events that tarnished our state, but we are working together to make progress. We want the country to get to know us as we are today,” said Looser.

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The Cirlot Agency, a Mississippi-based, full-service, marketing, public relations and corporate communications firm, represents accounts on a national and international basis, ranging from Fortune 100 companies to some of the world’s largest privately held corporations. www.cirlot.com