



Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Beauvoir to Launch New Holiday Tradition
Festival of Trees to launch Christmas at Beauvoir**

BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI - The grounds of Beauvoir: The Last Home of Jefferson Davis will be transformed to the 1880s this holiday season, as the national landmark in Biloxi presents a two-month celebration of Christmases past and the beginning of what organizers expect to be a nationally recognized event.

On Thursday through Sunday evenings in November through January, Beauvoir will feature church and school choirs, period-garbed storytellers and actors, food vendors and civic groups amidst a menagerie of lights, caroling, a Father Klaus workshop, and activities, such as cranberry stringing and making paper chains or pitching a game of horseshoes.

Mississippi's First Lady, Deborah Bryant, will be on hand Thursday, November 8 to flip the switch to illuminate 100 brightly lit Oak trees, during a \$50 per person gala and tour. Otherwise, admission to tour the grounds will be \$20, with discounts for seniors, students and military. It will end on January 6.

"I've seen this kind of thing done before, and I've always wanted to see us on the USA Today Top 10 places to see Christmas decorations," said organizer Andi Rushton Oustalet, a volunteer at Beauvoir. "And when we started to think about fund-raising ideas for Beauvoir, we thought, sure we could do another dinner at a casino, or a live auction, or a silent auction. Those things are all nice, but they've all been done.

"Instead, we've come up with something that will showcase a National Landmark here in our midst, present living history from the 1880s, and we'll create something in the fourth quarter of the year, when tourism is notoriously slow, and it will be something that people will be willing to travel to see.

"Our ultimate goal is to be on the USA Today list within three years. So there's a plan and a goal, and we're going to make it happen."

"Christmas at Beauvoir"

Days and times: Each Thursday through Sunday, 5 to 9 p.m., Nov. 8 to Jan. 6. Celebration begins with the Festival of Trees on Thursday, Nov. 8, a \$50-per-person cocktail party and silent auction featuring 100 three-foot Christmas trees decorated by south Mississippi businesses, groups and individuals. Gingerbread houses created by local pastry chefs will be raffled.

What to see and do: The beachfront portion of the 52-acre site will feature church and school choirs, period-garbed storytellers and actors, train rides for children, a toy workshop featuring Father Claus, food vendors and civic groups amidst a menagerie of lights, caroling, and activities such as cranberry stringing and making paper chains, or pitching a game of horseshoes.

Admission: \$20 for adults; \$12 for seniors, military and children ages 5-15; and children under 5 are free. Admission fee includes tour of grounds and Jefferson Davis home.

Parking: Free parking available at Mississippi Coast Coliseum, immediately west of the grounds, on Beauvoir Road.

Website: www.beauvoir.org

Details: (228) 388-4400



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Christmas at Beauvoir and The Festival of Trees will allow visitors to experience a historically accurate depiction of Beauvoir at Christmastime in the 1880s, leading up to 1889, the last year that Confederate President and U.S. statesman Jefferson Davis lived at the beachfront estate.

The endeavor, not by happenstance, follows the vision of what new Beauvoir Director Bertram Hayes-Davis hopes to see at the west Biloxi site. "Beauvoir will be a nationally prominent destination," the great, great-grandson of Jefferson Davis has said, "and this Christmas event will be one of the inaugural steps in helping realize that goal."

At the outset, the Beauvoir undertaking is expected to join a year 'round lineup of such popular events as Cruisin' the Coast, the Peter Anderson Arts and Crafts Festival, and Mardi Gras.

Oustalet is already on her way to creating a Christmas menagerie of lights: She is arranging sponsors to string bright lights among 100 of the Live oaks at the forefront of the 52-acre Beauvoir property.

"I realize that the lighted Live oak trees were not something you would see in the 1880s," Oustalet said with a laugh, "but people expect to see Christmas lights, and this will not only highlight the stately oaks at Beauvoir, but it will provide an inspiring backdrop for our celebration."

Otherwise, historical accuracy will be at the forefront.

Local designer Sheila Gray is creating a flowing red robe that will be worn by a traditional Father Klaus, and each night of the Thursday through Sunday schedule – 34 nights in all – will offer something new and exciting, but all borrowed from the 1880s.

"We'll have Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, civic groups and church choirs all hosting a night where they will be singing Christmas carols, or organizing period activities. We'll have some of the best local restaurants serving samples of some of their best dishes so people can get a taste of the local cuisine."

A host of local civic groups and others are decorating 100 mini-trees – about three feet tall – that will be auctioned at the Nov. 8 kick off.

And the finale of the event – on Jan. 6 – will also have historical significance. "We'll end on Twelfth Night, which is the kickoff of Carnival season, so our plan is to have a small parade, maybe a float or two, from Beauvoir in west Biloxi to the Gulf Coast Carnival headquarters in east Biloxi. We'll be passing the baton from one season to the next."

Sponsorships for Christmas at Beauvoir and the Festival of Trees range from \$2,500 to \$35,000.

Potential sponsors or civic groups interested in volunteering to take part in the affair – caroling, tour guides or coordinating activities – can email Oustalet at andioustalet@gmail.com

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