

[<Back](#)

 [Print](#)



January 2008

## Downtown Update

The Latest News about Downtown Mobile

### In This Issue

**Downtown Developments**

**Funds Received for Master Plan**

**Attorney Donates to Beautification Plans**

**Mural Unveiled at GM&O**

**Explorem Open Blockbuster**

**Sign of the Times**

**GO Zone Projects Proceed**

**Downtown Doings**

**USS Gettysburg in Town for Fat Tuesday**

### Quick Links

[Downtown Alliance Web Site](#)

[Business and Development](#)

[Explore Downtown](#)

[Downtown Real Estate](#)

Dear Carol,



If you needed any proof that Carnival season is well upon us, you needed to look no further than the streets of downtown as a team of Clydesdales pulled the Budweiser beer wagon through town Thursday afternoon. The team was in Mobile to join the revelry and marched with the Conde Cavaliers and the Pharaohs for the season's first downtown parades. Though the streets of downtown were originally designed and built for horses, wagons and carriages, it is such an uncommon sight these days that crowds gather and traffic stops. It's the kind of event that creates the constant delight we seek and encourage downtown.

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### Downtown Developments



This is the time of year when developers take a back seat to revelers, but there is actually some big news to report on the new project front. With things moving as quickly as they are downtown, no

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one can afford to take a month off to enjoy Mardi Gras in proper style! We recently wrote about the plans for the **Gayfer's** building and today those plans are racing to reality. The Architectural Review Board not only approved the design, but applauded the professionalism of the developers and quality of the project. The Gayfer's building will continue its transformation from an abandoned eyesore into a mixed use development of upscale residential units, a roof top pool and commercial/retail space facing Bienville Square. Other development news:

- A key downtown Mobile property has just been purchased by Hargrove Properties. Most of the **Kress Building**, which has entrances on Dauphin, Royal, Conti and St. Emanuel Streets, has been vacant for decades, but will now become part of the new Hargrove and Associates offices. The engineering firm, which is already in the process of renovating the Neisner Building on Royal Street, is moving from Washington and Canal Streets and bringing more than 200 employees to the heart of downtown. Hargrove will occupy the Conti and St. Emanuel portions of the Kress Building and is offering the remainder for sale or lease.
- Most exciting for those of us who need a little (or perhaps a lot of) pampering is the announcement that not one, but two spas are coming to downtown. The luxurious **Spa and Fitness Center** connected to the Battle House Hotel will be built on top of the RSA parking deck at Water and St. Francis Streets. The grand opening is still a few months away, but with a \$4.2 million price tag, it promises to be worth the wait.
- If you simply can't wait for that facial or massage, however, a new spa is opening soon on Dauphin Street. The **Penthouse Salon and Spa** is moving from the Oakleigh Garden District Area to 450 Dauphin Street and is planning on opening in a few weeks. The salon will have several stylists and a massage therapist, and will be selling Paul Mitchell hair and body products.
- The Battle House Hotel will open the **Joe Cain Café** in early spring at the corner of Royal and St. Francis Streets. The café will feature Starbucks coffee, light meals and freshly baked breads and pastries. Look for it to be open in the early Spring.
- The RSA Tower is quickly filling as new tenant announcements are made weekly. **American Equity Underwriters** has leased two of the upper floors of the tower and a corporate headquarters will soon relocate there. **Signal International**, a marine and fabrication company will move from Pascagoula in the next six to nine months. **CitiGroup/Smith Barney**

and the architecture firm of **Goodwin Mills & Cawood** are now also operating out of Alabama's tallest building.

- Some former employees of Cell Block are opening up an interesting collection of enterprises under one roof at **251 St. Louis Street**. During the day the building will house working space for up to 15 artists who will be able to display their work for the public to view. On weekends the building becomes a live music venue with late night food offerings. A coffee shop is also planned.
- The **Crescent Theatre** on Dauphin Street is a few short weeks away from a "soft opening." The project now has two screens, each seating about 200 people. Developer Max Morey says he wants the theatre to be responsive to the community and will take requests. He also hopes to keep ticket prices low and promises we won't need to take out a second mortgage to buy a box of popcorn.
- We wrote about the **Serda's Coffee House** on Royal Street a couple of months ago and are excited to report that you'll be able to stop by for your morning cup of joe sometime next week. His timing is perfect -- never is a population more in need of caffeine than during Mardi Gras.

[Find Out More](#)

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## Funds Received for Master Plan

Two generous foundations have stepped forward to help pay for the cost of a new master plan for downtown Mobile and the surrounding neighborhoods. The Alabama Power Foundation has pledged \$10,000 and the Ben May Charitable Trust contributed \$5,000 for 2007. The Downtown Mobile Alliance has committed to raise \$100,000 to help the city cover the estimated \$400,000 total cost.



With work on the master plan for downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods set to begin soon after Mardi Gras, identification and coordination of the various stakeholders is well underway. This exciting process will chart the course of development for the next decade and will require the cooperation of citizens, elected officials and

city employees.

If you would like to make a donation to this very important project, please contact Elizabeth Sanders at 434-8498 or [esanders@downtownmobile.org](mailto:esanders@downtownmobile.org).

### Attorney Donates to Beautification Plans



Herndon Inge, III believes in sharing the wealth. "I've had a good year and felt that it was important to give back to the city that has given me so much," he says. There are, of course, dozens of deserving non-profits, but Inge was encouraged to support

downtown after reading about two businessmen who had made an anonymous contribution to the Downtown Mobile Alliance for public art. Inge decided right then to donate \$10,000 to the Alliance for beautification projects. "I've been so delighted with all the progress the Alliance has made in the redevelopment of downtown, that I wanted to contribute directly to the effort," Inge says.

"A contribution such as Herndon's allows us to proceed with projects we've been anxious to start," says Elizabeth Sanders, Executive Director of the Alliance, "and will help us begin a dramatic phase of transformation." A primary focus will be improving downtown gateways, such as the intersection of Water and Government Streets seen above. Inge says the beauty of public art and grand landscaping projects are a benefit to the entire community and serve as a reminder of what can happen when citizens desire to improve their neighborhood.

### Mural Unveiled at GM&O

Downtown Mobile's public art scene got a big, and we mean **big**, boost last week with the



unveiling of a new mural at the Wave's Transportation Center. The extraordinary painting by Jason Guynes, art professor at the University of South Alabama, depicts the past, present and future of bus service in Mobile, and features remarkable portraits of folks who take advantage of it.

Devereaux Bemis, director of the Mobile Historic Development Commission and member of the mural Selection Committee, says, "The best public art is educational and inspiring, and it creates shared memories for the entire community." Of what many might consider an unusual topic for such a large project, Guynes says, "Transportation, especially public transportation, is transformative." Be sure to stop by the Transportation Center at the GM&O Building at the corner of Water and Beauregard Streets to see the mural for yourself. Never has riding the bus looked like so much fun!

**For more info on "The Wave"**

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### Exploreum Opens Blockbuster



The latest blockbuster exhibit at the Gulf Coast Exploreum is drawing crowds and eliciting remarkable reactions. Our Body: The Universe Within is an exhibition of actual human bodies that have been preserved with plastics and displayed to reveal the different systems that combine to make up the human body.

Similar exhibits have seen sell-out crowds across the country, and this show has the potential to set records in Mobile as well. It may be a little unsettling to think of viewing actual bodies, but visitors are quickly swept up in the wonder of our creation. And it can be a great experience for school children who love science or perhaps those who don't yet know they love science.

One downtown business, Page and Jones, is reimbursing employees to visit Our Body: The Universe Within-a great way to support the Exploreum and expand the experiences of our citizens. Perhaps the Reverend Steve Dill put it best when asked what he thought of the experience. Quoting Psalm 139 he said, "We are wonderfully and fearfully

made."

**More on Our Body: The Universe Within**

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### Sign of the Times

A great sign has always communicated more than the name of a business. Sometimes it reflects the goods sold, the actual nature of the business, even the personality of the owner.



Take a look at photos of downtown Mobile from decades past, when the streets and sidewalks were bustling with activity. The storefront and business signs were bold, perhaps even tacky by today's standards, but they signaled a healthy, vibrant retail and business community.

One of downtown's liveliest night spots also has one of its most engaging signs. Soul Kitchen, once in the 450 block of Dauphin Street and now in the heart of the entertainment district, packs the house with a variety of live music. We admit we don't know the significance of the moose, but don't really care--it makes for an interesting sign, and after all, isn't that the point?

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### GO Zone Projects Proceed

If you've been considering a downtown project using Gulf Opportunity (GO) Zone financing, time is running out. \$44 million in the special low interest loans has been set aside for Mobile, but the loans must close by July 18, 2008. The first round of closings, involving 3- 5 projects, will occur in the next couple of weeks, but at least \$20 million in financing is still available. If you'd like more information on GO Zone money, contact Denise Browning at 251-434-8498 or [db@hunterventures.com](mailto:db@hunterventures.com).

Downtown Mobile is also one of about 100 Renewal Community/Enterprise Zones in the U.S., meaning financial

incentives are available for qualified projects including accelerated depreciation, employee wage credits and 0% capital gains benefits. Some of the benefits of the Renewal Community designation are set to expire at the end of 2009, however U.S. Representative Artur Davis is sponsoring a bill to extend and modify the legislation. The Downtown Mobile Alliance, with guidance from the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission, is working to market the RC/EZ benefits to potential downtown developers, making this extension critical to future projects. Please support Rep. Davis in his efforts by letting him know of your interest. Call the Alliance office at 251-434-8498 for more information.

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### Downtown Doings

Some upcoming events in downtown Mobile



**Mardi Gras - Through February 5th.** Hit the streets with thousands of revelers as the original Mardi Gras in America hits the streets of downtown Mobile. For a full schedule of parades and activities, go to [www.mobile.org](http://www.mobile.org).

**Our Body: The Universe Within - Through May 11th, Gulf Coast Exploreum.** This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness the elegant design of the human body's form and function up-close in an artful, compelling and dignified environment. The inspirational human anatomy lesson is comprised of more than 11 actual human whole-body specimens and 75 anatomical displays that have been preserved through polymer impregnation. For more information please call 1(877)625-4FUN or visit the [www.exploreum.net](http://www.exploreum.net)

**Med School Cafe - Wednesdays, Jan 23, Feb 20, March 26, April 23 at noon, Gulf Coast Exploreum.** During the run of **Our Body: The Universe Within** the University of South Alabama Physicians Group will be holding a community lecture series. Topics will cover everything from the latest in stroke treatments to understanding how cancer develops and spreads. Attendees are eligible for a discounted ticket to Our Body: The Universe Within. Lunch and the lectures are free, but reservations are required. Call 251-460-7770.

**We Remember - Through May 26th, Museum of Mobile**

This moving exhibition features seventy-five black and white photographs offering a glimpse into life during World War II. From the battlefield to the home front, this exhibit creates windows back to the people and events that shaped history and the modern world. For more information please call (251)208-7686 or visit [www.museumofmobile.com](http://www.museumofmobile.com)

***Indigo Girls with special guest Brandi Carlile - Jan. 26th, 9:00 p.m. at the Saenger Theatre.*** Tickets are on sale now at the Box Office, all TicketMaster outlets, and Ticketmaster.com. For info visit [www.saengermobile.com](http://www.saengermobile.com) or call 251-208-5600

***George Jones and the Jones Boys in concert - Thursday, Feb. 7th, 7:30 p.m., Saenger Theatre.*** Legendary country music performer George Jones returns to the Saenger, this time with special guest Jason Byrd. Go to [www.saengermobile.com](http://www.saengermobile.com) for ticket information.

***LoDa Art Walk - Friday, Feb. 8th, 6:00 - 9:00 p.m., Cathedral Square Arts District.*** Exhibitions and entertainment in a variety of downtown galleries and other venues on the second Friday of each month. New this month, St. Louis Lofts is a venue for great art and a taste of downtown living.

***The Hermitage Ballet - February 11th, 7:00 p.m., Mobile Civic Center.*** The legendary Hermitage Ballet from St. Petersburg, Russia has been touring Europe and the Far East for several decades and is making its debut performance in the United States. Tickets are available at TicketMaster outlets or by calling 251-434-0033.

***Mobile Opera Presents "Some Enchanted Valentine" - Thursday, February 14th, 7:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre.*** A tribute to Landmark American Musicals continues with an evening of selections from the best works by the luminary team of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein in an enchanting program of your favorite excerpts from Carousel, Sound of Music, The King & I, State Fair, Oklahoma, and South Pacific. Mobile Opera guarantees you and your special someone the most romantic Valentine's Day imaginable with a lavish concert of music for lovers. Call the Mobile Opera office at 251-432-6772 for tickets. [www.mobileopera.org](http://www.mobileopera.org).

***Mobile Symphony Presents "Legendary Love" - Saturday, February 16th, 8:00 p.m. and Sunday February 17th at 2:30 p.m., Saenger Theatre.*** Gold Medal winner of the 2001 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, Olga Kern, returns to Mobile to perform the most romantic of all piano concertos, Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto no. 2. This concert also features Dvorak's rustic and tuneful Sixth, which is the most Bohemian of all his symphonies. DVORAK

Symphony no. 6 RACHMANINOFF Piano Concerto no. 2

**Through Feb 5 - *SHADOWS OF GREATNESS: THE JIMINI COLLECTION***. Silhouette oil paintings of legendary musicians by Jim Maurer. Veet's Bar & Grill (66 S Royal St) Through Feb 5. Mon, 11 AM - 10 PM; Tue, 11 AM - midnight; Wed - Sat, 11 AM - 2 AM; Sun, noon - 2 PM. Contact: [www.thejiminicollection.com](http://www.thejiminicollection.com)

***Go Red for Women Luncheon - Friday, February 15th, 10:30 a.m., Battle House Hotel.*** The chairwoman for this annual event is the Honorable Jamie Ison with keynote speaker Alabama First Lady Pasty Riley. Red Purse raffle and all male fashion show "Men Who Love Women in Red" with state and local celebrities. In honor of the event the RSA Tower will be going "red" on the 15th. For more information contact the American Heart Association at 251-461-4004.

[For a complete list of events...](#)

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### USS Gettysburg in Town for Fat Tuesday

As has become tradition for Mardi Gras, the Navy is planning a special visit of one of its finest ships. This year Mobile will host the cruiser USS Gettysburg, which arrives Friday, February 1st and leaves on Ash Wednesday.

The ship will have about 350-400 officers and crew members aboard who will participate in various ceremonies, parades and parties. They'll still have plenty of time to wander the streets of downtown, however, so please welcome them. If you have a business that would like to offer a discount to these fine men and women, please call Susan Daniels at 434-8498.

The Downtown Mobile Alliance is a not-for-profit membership organization representing businesses and organizations in creating and sustaining exposure for the downtown business community through marketing and education. Membership is open to businesses and individuals interested in the welfare and development of our city center and is the ideal way to contribute to the revitalization of downtown. Membership support is a vital ongoing investment in our city's future.

Sincerely,

Carol Hunter  
Downtown Mobile Alliance

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email: [chunter@downtownmobile.org](mailto:chunter@downtownmobile.org)  
phone: 251-434-8498  
fax: 251-434-8538  
web: <http://www.downtownmobile.org>

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