

JAMES H. WATTS IS MSEA'S
2018 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

James Watts says he was “probably promoting an economic development program” when asked what did you do prior to the creation of the Mississippi State Equine Association.

James calls himself a public relations guru and insists he was trained by some of Mississippi’s greatest. “I’m not saying I was one of them, but I worked for numerous public relations giants in Mississippi,” he said.

As one of the founders of the MSEA, James started his career as a copy boy for the STATE TIMES, a competitive daily for Mississippi news in 1959. It was part time and he worked for owner and publisher Dumas Milner, editor Paul Tiblett and sports editor Jimmie McDowell. After a full summer at the corner of South State and Lamar Streets in Jackson, “I decided I had some experience” so maybe the CLARION-LEDGER might be interested in me.

“All I can say was Purser Hewitt must have been amused at my vast knowledge of how the news was written, assembled, printed and circulated,” James said to the Clarion-Ledger’s executive editor. “I remember Mr. Hewitt listening to my remarks intensely, and somehow he still hired me,” he said.

“Off and on, high school, basketball, college, marriage, children, part time, full time, I proudly worked for the Hederman Press for more than 10 years,” Watts said. “I loved that newspaper, P.O. Box 40, Jackson, Mississippi (there was no zip code back then); Mr. Tom, Mr. Bob and Mr. Arnold; the morgue (the huge underneath room below the newspaper), where the 20th century newspapers were stored; Mr. Hewitt (one of the finest Christian gentleman I’ve ever known); and hundreds of great people that it afforded me the opportunity to meet. I personally met governors, politicians, educators, writers and editors, doctors and athletes, builders and realtors, industrialists and business owners, who were all part of the daily scenery at 311 East Pearl Street, one-half block to the Post Office and the Federal Building, and across the street from the Electric Building and the old Jackson City Auditorium.” he said.

I attended Mississippi State University and the University of Southern Mississippi. At Mississippi State I worked for Bob Hartley, who was the director of the Sports Information Department (and the Clarion-Ledger), and at Southern I worked for Robert (Ace) Cleveland, who was USM's Public Relations Director (and the Clarion-Ledger). I received a B.S. in Mass Communications in 1967 from USM. After graduating I was a reporter for the Jackson Daily News, when I was hired as the Public Relations Director for the Mississippi Game and Fish Commission in 1968. Billy Joe Cross was the agency's director, and Bill Turcotte was the dean of the Game and Fisheries divisions. Wallace Dabbs was Governor John Bell Williams Press Secretary, and I was an occasional replacement.

In 1972 James answered a call from Brad Dye, director of the Mississippi A & I Board, to serve as a public affairs official with the agency that is now named the Mississippi Development Authority. At the Game and Fish Commission and the A&I Board, I wrote news releases, edited publications, and developed exhibits and worked trade shows to promote Mississippi and tourism in such cities as Atlanta, Dallas, Memphis, Cincinnati, Chicago and Milwaukee.

From 1976 to 1990 I was the Executive Vice President of the Home Builders Association of Mississippi. I worked with 18 local home builder associations and 2,000 member-firms from Biloxi and Pascagoula to Southaven and Corinth. I was editor of a bi-monthly magazine, similar to the journals I published at the Game and Fish and the A&I Board. I developed and planned annual events such as the Home and Products Extravaganza, board meetings, state conventions, parade of homes and was the lobbyist for local governments and the State Legislature.

In the 1990's I planned, developed and executed trade show events in Biloxi and Jackson. I started, advertised and promoted events such as the Mississippi Business Expo, the Gulf Coast Business and Computer Exposition and the Southeastern Gaming Business Expo. The latter event had exhibits from some 35 states and several foreign countries. At my last SEGBE extravaganza I had legislators from five states as speakers, and that included Mississippi's Lt. Gov. Eddie Briggs and Speaker of the House Tim Ford "welcoming" attendees.

And all of that must have influenced the Mississippi State Equine Association. In 2006 James met with other horse owners who wanted to establish a statewide event for equestrians and people who participated in horse grooming and

competition that matched skills with horses and owners. It has to do with meeting with Board members from different groups, the State Legislature, the Department of Agriculture, county officials, the MSU veterinarian school and horse lovers from Little Britches all the way to big cowboys stretching the limits of their size 20 saddles.

At the MSEA we've presented monetary assistance to at least 25 different horse show associations, and that includes being the lead sponsor of the SOMHSA show held annually in September at the Kirk Fordice Equine Center in Jackson. We've sponsored veterinarian school scholarships for the past seven years through our endowed scholarship program at Mississippi State University. MSU's latest presentation was to a former great student at Madison Central High School. Lauren Blalock, daughter of Dr. Jason and Susanne Blalock, will be another eminent veterinarian and blessed with an education from Mississippi State.

Previous recipients of MSEA's veterinarian scholarship program include: Abby Cantrell of Pontotoc, Rachael Wilson of Pearl, Suzy Barnett of Batesville, Tara Mullins of Lakeland, TN, Trusten Moore of Batesville and Sydney McConnell of Brandon and Northwest Rankin High School.

And then there was a call from MSU's Animal and Dairy Science Department. That department decided the students and faculty at Mississippi State needed a new Animal and Dairy Sciences building. The three-story building will contain 34,500 square feet of offices, conference rooms, classrooms and labs. The first of three buildings will be completed later this year. Mississippi State asked for monetary assistance from dozens of Mississippi companies and non-profit "associations" to assist with the costs of construction and property.

The Mississippi State Equine Association is proud to say it was the "first" to say "we will assist and here is our dollars and our commitment signature." Forever, you'll be reminded of MSEA's participation in the Food Retail space on the first floor of the building. The building is located near the southwest corner of the campus, at the intersection of Black Jack Road and Stone Boulevard.

Life is good when you are part of the Mississippi State Equine Association, but we can always use the assistance of the public in all 82 counties. If you are not a member of MSEA, I genuinely ask for your consideration. You can join by filling out a membership application form on the www.mssaddleup.org website. You

can benefit further by purchasing one of our “Saddle Up” vehicle license plates from your local county tax collector ... cars, trucks, trailers ... or you can provide donations to any one of our different programs.

We’re proud of our accomplishments, and we would feel even better if you and your family would join us for future achievements. The Mississippi State Equine Association is a 501-C3 (tax exempt) association.

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