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|   |  ***Alabama Tourism Department******NEWS RELEASE*** |  |

**For Immediate Release:**

April 3, 2012

**WHAT’S NEW IN ALABAMA TOURISM**

*Bass Trail,**State’s First**Iron Chef Winner, Statewide Restaurant Week*

**Montgomery, Ala.—** A statewide bass trail, 100 road trips campaign, the state’s first Iron Chef America winner and the groundbreaking for a new baseball park in Birmingham are among the list of what’s new in tourism across Alabama. The 20th anniversary of the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail and the 60th anniversary of the Birmingham Museum of Art mark milestones of tourism attractions. Additions to venues include Burritt Museum in Huntsville, Sloss Furnace in Birmingham, an amphitheatre at the Old Courthouse Museum in Monroeville and a new theatre at the Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham.

The Alabama Tourism Department has compiled the following list of new tourism-related events, attractions, restaurants, hotels, outdoor and entertainment since November 2011.

**STATEWIDE TOURISM CAMPAIGNS:**

**100 ALABAMA ROAD TRIPS**

**The Alabama Tourism Department has launched a multi-year Alabama Road Trips campaign. The first 10 road trips have been published on the state tourism website** [www.RoadTrips.com](http://www.RoadTrips.com) **and include a romantic getaway in Mobile, Gulf Coast Beaches, a downtown Birmingham walking tour, an adventure at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center and the “To Kill A Mockingbird” experience in Monroeville. One hundred road trips will be published over the three-year campaign. Visitors are encouraged to frequent the website for the addition of new road trips.**

**Alabama Food**

**The Alabama Tourism Department’s multi-year campaign kicked off in January 2012 and will run through 2014. The campaign includes special events such as the first statewide Restaurant Week and a BBQ Sauce contest. The brochure “100 Dishes to Eat In Alabama Before You Die” was update with more than 30 new listings. A statewide BBQ is scheduled to launch in 2013.**

**The campaign also included the addition of a new website** [www.yearofAlabamafood.com](http://www.yearofAlabamafood.com) **and social media sites: twitter @Alabamafood; facebook www.facebook.com/AlabamaFood.**

**RESTAURANT/FOOD:**

**Restaurant Week** - Statewide

As part of the *Year of Alabama Food* campaign, the tourism department will hold a statewide “Restaurant Week” August 17-26, 2012, during which locally owned and operated restaurants will be able to showcase their dishes by offering fixed price menus at a discount.

**Birmingham Named one of Tastiest Towns in Southeast**

The April issue of *Southern Living* magazine places Birmingham among the South’s “10 Tastiest Towns” for its chefs, artisans and restaurants that give the city its distinct local flavor.  The feature article makes special note of local chef Frank Stitt and his three Birmingham restaurants that elevate Southern staples with refined culinary techniques. <http://bit.ly/H8WDyA>

**Alabama Chefs Finalist for James Beard Foundation Awards**

The James Beard Foundation has once again selected two Birmingham chefs as finalists in this year’s awards competition. For the fourth year in a row, Frank Stitt’s Highlands Bar and Grill is among five finalists for the country’s most outstanding restaurant. Chris Hastings, who owns Hot and Hot Fish Club, is one of five finalists for best chef in the South. The Alabama nominations spanned four categories: Best New Restaurant (Ollie Irene, Mountain Brook), Outstanding Restaurant (Highlands Bar and Grill, Birmingham), Outstanding Restaurateur (Nick Pihakis, Jim ‘N Nick’s Bar-B-Q) and Best Southern Chef (Chris Hastings, Hot and Hot Fish Club; James Lewis, Bettola; Wesley True, True, Mobile).

Often called the “Oscars of the culinary world,” the James Beard Foundation Awards will be announced May 7 in New York City.  [www.jamesbeard.org](http://www.jamesbeard.org)

**Chef Frank Stitt named to Esquire Restaurant Hall of Fame - Birmingham**

**Birmingham Chef Frank Stitt has been inducted into** [Esquire](http://www.esquire.com/features/food-drink/best-restaurants-2011/best-chefs-america-1111?click=main_sr) **magazine’s Restaurant Hall of Fame. The publication first named Highlands in Birmingham one of the Best New Restaurants in America in 1984. The magazine reads, “**back when Paula Deen was working as a bank teller, Alabama-bred Stitt was already at the forefront of New Southern cuisine.” <http://www.highlandsbarandgrill.com/>

**Hot & Hot Fish Club Chef Chris Hastings wins Iron Chef -** Birmingham

Birmingham Chef Chris Hastings competed against world-class Chef Bobby Flay during an episode of the Food Network’s Iron Chef America to win. Hastings is the first Alabama Chef to appear on the show and to win the competition. He beat out Flay by one point and his peach moonshine was a hit with the judges. The secret ingredient was sausage. <http://www.hotandhotfishclub.com/>

**Pepper Place ranks #4 in nation for Farmers Markets - Birmingham**Pepper Place Market in Birmingham ranked No. 4 in the nation on the America’s Favorite Farmers Market online contest.  American Farmland Trust holds the annual America’s Favorite Farmers Market contest to raise national awareness about the importance of buying fresh food from local farms and saving the farmland where it’s grown. Pepper Place Market is held in the Lakeview District of downtown Birmingham Saturdays from 7 a.m. to noon from mid-April through mid-December. <http://www.pepperplacemarket.com/>

**BBQ Pitmasters to Film Show in Dothan**

TLC will be in Dothan for the 7th Annual tri-State BBQ Festival to film an episode of BBQ Pitmasters, a show that portrays the world of BBQ competition. The festival takes place April 13-14 at the Houston County Farm Center. It is scheduled to air on TLC Memorial Day weekend. Sixty-five BBQ teams from around the Southeast will compete for $11,000 in prize money. [www.tristatebbq.com](http://www.tristatebbq.com), <http://tlc.discovery.com/tv/bbq-pitmasters/>

**Garage Café named among 50 Best Southern Bars** - Birmingham

*Garden & Gun* magazine has named one of Birmingham’s most treasured watering holes, The Garage Café among the ‘50 Best Southern Bars.’ The magazine reads, “Walk past the shabby facade and gloomy interior and you’ll discover one of Birmingham’s treasures, a wisteria-covered courtyard filled with concrete tables and an assortment of quirky antiques, the soul of this unassuming Southside haunt.” “The cash-only bar has no beer on tap, but there’s a generous lineup of bottled brews, plus surprisingly tasty deli sandwiches made to order until 10 p.m.”  [www.garagecafe.us](http://www.garagecafe.us)

**Alabama All-Star Food Festival** - Montgomery

The Hampstead Institute and Renaissance Montgomery Hotel & Spa at the Convention Center announced the first Alabama All-Star Food Festival in Downtown Montgomery. Join chefs, farmers, breweries and musicians from across the state from 3 to 7 p.m. on Saturday, May 12, 2012 to celebrate the best in local cuisine. Enjoy tastings from featured restaurants using fresh, locally-sourced ingredients, meet your favorite Alabama chefs, listen to the state's best homegrown musicians, catch a variety of on-stage demos from guest chefs, farmers and producers and take part in hands-on gardening and nutrition workshops. Visit [www.alabamafoodfestival.com](http://www.alabamafoodfestival.com) or [www.facebook.com/alabamafoodfestival](http://www.facebook.com/alabamafoodfestival) for more details.

**Alabama Cattlemen's Association Names Best Burgers in Alabama**

**The Alabama Cattleman’s Association declared Callaghan's Irish Social Pub in the winner of “Alabama's Best Burger.” Contest. Rounding out the top 5, which were selected by popular on-line voting and a team of three judges, were: Rattlesnake Saloon, Tuscumbia, The Stockyard Grill and Hamburger King, Montgomery and Mugshots in Tuscaloosa.**

**Compleat Angler Restaurant to Open at The Wharf - Orange Beach**Bob Baumhower announced the opening of the Compleat Angler Seafood Grille and Bar at The Wharf entertainment, retail and residential complex in Orange Beach. The restaurant will open to the public in April and bring 100 plus direct job opportunities to the area.

“Bob Baumhower has become a significant force in the culinary industry in the South and it is great to see Orange Beach get this kind of attention and investment from his company. His strong support of the local seafood industry is a model that others should embrace,” Alabama Tourism Director Lee Sentell said. <http://www.baumhowers.com/>

**ENTERTAINMENT HEADLINES:**

**March 23 Proclaimed October Baby Day in Alabama**

Governor Robert Bentley proclaimed March 23 as “October Baby” Day in Alabama in celebration of the release of the faith-based movie. It’s the first full-length feature movie that was filmed entirely in the state to gain full theatre release and it had a budget of less than $1 million. The film is the first of brothers Jon and Andrew Erwin of Erwin Brothers Motion Pictures in Shelby County.

“October Baby” is a coming-of-age love story that follows college freshman Hannah, who learns she's not only adopted, but an abortion survivor. After learning of this, Hannah embarks on a road trip to Mobile in search of her birth mother. “October Baby" is a fictional story inspired by a real-life abortion survivor, [Gianna Jessen](http://www.giannajessen.com/main/octoberbaby.html). It was filmed in several locations around metro Birmingham, Mobile, and Dauphin Island.

It stars newcomer, Alabama native and University of Montevallo graduate Rachel Hendrix, as Hannah. Other actors include John Schneider and Jasmine Guy. <http://octoberbabymovie.net/>

***The Help’s* Octavia Spencer is Honored - Montgomery**

Academy Award-winning actress Octavia Spencer came back to her hometown of Montgomery where Governor Robert Bentley called her “our favorite daughter of the day.” Bentley proclaimed March 21, “Octavia Spencer Day.” Spencer won the Academy Award for her performance in “The Help” as the sassy maid Minny Jackson.

She grew up in Montgomery, graduated from Jefferson Davis High School, attended Alabama State University and earned her degree at Auburn University Montgomery.

“Growing up in Alabama, I daydreamed about going to Hollywood, not realizing it was possible for Hollywood to come to me,” said Spencer. “But that all changed when a little movie starring Whoopi Goldberg and Sissy Spacek called ‘The Long Walk Home’ came to Montgomery. The experience on that film set me on the path that finds me before you all today.”

***The Hunger Games* has Strong Alabama Connections**

The author behind the “Hunger Games” hit franchise, Suzanne Collins graduated from the Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham. The movie based on the first book in Collins’ trilogy had the third best debut in box office history at $155 million.

Two Music Duos from Alabama are very also familiar with the Hunger Games, they have songs on the movies soundtrack. The Secret Sisters “Tomorrow Will Be Kinder” is the second track on the album. The Civil Wars have a duet with Taylor Swift, “Safe and Sound” that’s listed as track 4 and “Kingdome Come” which is track 9 on the album.

**MEDIA HEADLINES:**

**Two Alabama Attractions Make Kid’s List in Budget Travel**

**The *U.S. Space & Rocket Center* in Huntsville and the *Birmingham Civil Rights Institute* made Budget Travel’s list of “15 places every kid should see before 15.” A total of 562 attractions across the U.S. were nominated and more than 138,000 votes were cast. The final list of 15 represents the beast the nation has to offer according to Budget. The requirements were that an attraction had to be fun, educational, and magical through the eyes of a child. The entire list is posted on Budget’s website.** <http://bit.ly/H96A01>**,** [www.ussrc.com](http://www.ussrc.com)**,** [www.bcri.org](http://www.bcri.org)

**GQ magazine names Billy Reid one of the 25 best men’s stores in America - Florence**
The April 2012 issue of [GQ Magazine](http://www.gq.com/style/gq-100/201204/25-best-menswear-stores-america-gq-style-bible-april-2012#slide=15) named Billy Reid’s flagship store on North Court Street in Florence as one the 25 Best Men’s Stores in America.

“Billy's brand of Southern cool is unmatched in these parts. Soft-shouldered jackets, beat-up boots, and washed down dress shirts take well-heeled outlaws from the saloon to SoHo... no sweat.”-  GQ magazine. <http://www.billyreid.com/>

**Barber Motorsports Museum Named a Must-See Private Museum - Birmingham**
[Four Seasons](http://magazine.fourseasons.com/concierge-recommends/arts-culture/landmarks-attractions/wheres-the-world%E2%80%99s-best-private-museum) magazine has named the Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum in Birmingham as one of the world’s ‘must-see’ private museums. Other museums that made the list include those in Miami, Italy, Switzerland, Thailand and Germany.

The magazine article says of Barber: “The spacious and utilitarian Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum is home to the world’s largest collection of motorcycles - nearly 1,300, including street bikes, dirt bikes and rarities, along with vintage and restored vehicles and racing machines from around the world. Founder George Barber may call his museum a “parking garage,” but the complex also has a 2.38-mile, 17-turn track, and it hosts sports-car rallies, a grand prix and the Porsche Driving School.” <http://www.barbermuseum.org/>

**USA TODAY Names U.S. Space & Rocket Center Among Top Space Sites - Huntsville**
From the article “10 great places to explore space from earth” by Larry Bleiberg in USA TODAY:

With the final Space Shuttle’s launch, space fans are facing cosmic withdrawal. Never fear, an array of museums and historic sites can keep the high-flying spirit alive, says Shuttle astronaut Thomas D. Jones, who has spent 53 days living in space. He shares some favorite earthbound stories with Larry Bleiberg and they include the U.S. Space & Rocket Center.

“This was the birthplace of the Saturn family of rockets that took astronauts to the moon.” The popular hands-on museum shows how it all happened,” said Jones. [www.spacecamp.com](http://www.spacecamp.com)

**Golf Digest Names Sylacauga’s FarmLinks and Birmingham’s Ross Bridge Two of the “Best Golf Resorts in North America”**
FarmLinks Golf Club at Pursell Farms in Sylacauga was named number 39 and Ross Bridge came in at number 56 in Golf Digest’s ranking of the 75 best golf resorts in North America.

In the listing, Golf Digest focused on the Farmlink’s resort's PGA TOUR-quality putting green being so close to lodging. “Feel like putting while your coffee's brewing?” Golf Digest reads. “Five cottages and cabins on Masters Row offer access to practice greens in a courtyard right outside your door, stocked with balls each morning.”

**Biscuits Stadium Named One of America’s Coolest Ballparks - Montgomery**Riverwalk Stadium, home of the Montgomery Biscuits minor league baseball team, has been named one of the [**“25 Coolest Minor League Ballparks in America”**](http://cdn.optmd.com:80/V2/84692/271494/index.html?g=AQBoZ0Q=&r=www.al.com/sports/index.ssf/2011/08/biscuit_stadium_one_of_coolest.html) by Complex magazine.

The 7,000 seat, eight year old stadium was ranked number 23 by Complex. The article reads,

“Built into the facade of a decommissioned train station, Riverwalk easily trumps San Diego's Petco Field for the Best Use of an Existing Structure award in ballpark design.”

The stadium has received numerous national distinctions including ESPN.com's Sports Travel Series, Man vs. Food's Adam Providence, who named the now-famous Chicken Biscuit with Alaga Syrup the 4th-best ballpark food in the country, major or minor league.  [www.biscuitsbaseball.com/](http://www.biscuitsbaseball.com/)

**HONORS AND ANNIVERSARIES:**

**Railroad Park Wins Award from SATW - Birmingham**
The Society of American Travel Writers’ (SATW) annual convention announced the 2011 Phoenix Award winners which recognizes conservation, preservation, beautification, and environmental accomplishments as they relate to travel.  Birmingham’s Railroad Park was one of four developments in the nation recognized with a Phoenix Award. Nearly four decades in the making, Railroad Park is a linear, 19-acre green space created on a former urban wasteland in downtown Birmingham.

The first stage of a planned “Three Parks Initiative,” features a two-acre lake and meandering creeks; paths for bicyclists, runners, and walkers; benches; free wifi; a skate park; play areas for children; a grassy hillside amphitheatre; outdoor workout equipment; and a shaded plaza with covered sheds that hold park offices, bathrooms, and areas for concessions. It serves as a space for recreation and events. [www.railroadpark.org](http://www.railroadpark.org), [www.satw.org](http://www.satw.org)

**RTJ Golf Trail celebrates 20th anniversary - statewide**Alabama’s Robert Trent Jones Golf (RTJ) Trail came to life 1992 as Dr. David Bronner, CEO of the Retirement Systems of Alabama (RSA) turned his concept into a reality. Since then, RTJ has expanded to 11 sites, 26 courses, 468 holes and more than 100 miles of breathtaking landscapes from the Shoals and Huntsville to Mobile. The trail is on course this year to welcome its 10 millionth visitor.

To celebrate its 20th anniversary RTJ has several promotions during 2012, most notably, on the 20th day of each month golfers can enjoy a round of golf at most of the RTJ courses for $20 (golf cart not included, not valid at Ross Bridge or Lakewood). The trail also has a loyalty program where golfers can earn free rounds. <http://www.rtjgolf.com/>

**Rick Hall from FAME Studios Honored by American Music Association**
Rick Hall was honored by the American Music Association with a Lifetime Achievement award at the Association’s Honors & Awards show at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville.  Hall founded FAME Studios in Muscle Shoals and is recognized as the “Father of Muscle Shoals Music.” Hall’s talents include songwriting and musicianship, but it is his groundbreaking production work at FAME Studios that attracted artists from across the nation such as Wilson Pickett, Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, Etta James, The Osmonds, and Bobbie Gentry.

<http://www.fame2.com/>

**Birmingham Museum of Art celebrates 60th year**
The Birmingham Museum of Art (BMA) has been offering visitors a free tour of one of the finest collections in the Southeast. The museum has several events planned for the year including a celebration around an exciting exhibition of art purchased in honor of the institution, and the opening of a colorful new interactive gallery for children and families.

It’s all part of BMA’s commitment to enhancing understanding of the arts and improving the quality of life for all of the region’s residents, said Gail Andrews, director of the Museum. “Our community has so much to be proud of in the Museum we have built together. We hear so often from visitors from out of town, ‘this is fantastic,’ ‘what a gem,’ ‘I had no idea Birmingham had a museum of this caliber,’ and we could go on and on,” she noted. “My goal for our 60th anniversary is for everyone in this community to take pride in our combined achievement and celebrate this treasure together.” <http://www.artsbma.org/>

**NEW ADDITIONS:**

**Old Courthouse Museum Gets New Amphitheatre - Monroeville**

**Guests to the 22nd annual “To Kill A Mockingbird” production on the Old Courthouse Museum lawn will experience the performance in newly landscaped amphitheatre sponsored by Georgia-Pacific. The dedication of the amphitheatre will take place Thursday, April 19th during the opening night of the production. The 50th anniversary of the movie also takes place in 2012.** [www.tokillamockingbird.com/](http://www.tokillamockingbird.com/)

**New Visitor Center at Sloss Furnaces - Birmingham**A $10 million visitors and educa­tion center at Sloss Furnaces in Birmingham is under construction with opening set for late 2012. The $5.7 million, 16,000-square-foot center will include 12,000 square feet for public exhibition and multipurpose space and around 4,000 square feet for administrative and support space. More than $4 million in exhibits and furnishings will follow the construction. The new center is expected to help tell the story of Sloss in a new way with programs and exhibits that will take place inside the building as well as adjoining plaza. The National Historic Site is open for tours during construction. [www.slossfurnaces.com/](http://www.slossfurnaces.com/)

**Burritt on the Mountain Breaks Ground on Addition - Huntsville**
Huntsville’s historic park and mansion, Burritt on the Mountain museum broke ground on a $2.9 million meeting facility. With a seating capacity of 336 people, the facility will allow Burritt to host larger conferences, conventions and educational programs. A favorite with groups, Burritt on the Mountain first opened in 1955.

<http://www.burrittonthemountain.com/>

**Grand Opening of ‘Dream Theater’** - Birmingham

The Alabama School of Fine Arts is basking in the success of its first production in the school’s new 500-seat theater.  The 19,000-square-foot Dorothy Jemison Day Theater was eight years in the making at a cost of $8.5 million. Equipped with the latest technical and acoustical technology, this stellar arena hosts ASFA student performances, as well as performances with other arts organizations.  [www.asfa.k12.al.us](http://www.asfa.k12.al.us)

**Railroad Depot Museum Expanding - Tuscumbia**

**The Tuscumbia Railroad Depot Museum is under expansion and expected to open in June with a new brick roundhouse being constructed on the property. The roundhouse is located next to and will complement the historic 1880’s Tuscumbia Depot, which served the Memphis and Charleston Railroad in Tuscumbia at the site of Alabama’s first railroad, chartered in 1830. An authentic turntable from the late 1800’s has been secured from a site in Maine and is being installed adjoining the roundhouse. Restored cabooses from various time periods are already on site and are available for tours.**

**OUTDOOR/RECREATION:**

**Alabama Bass Trail opens - statewide**Gov. Robert Bentley helped unveil the Alabama Bass Trail at Lake Guntersville State Park in March. The trail consists of 11 lakes that offer outstanding bass fishing in a variety of watersheds and fishing conditions. The lakes are Guntersville, Wheeler, Pickwick, Lewis Smith, Neely Henry, Logan Martin, Lay, Jordan, Eufaula, the Alabama River and the Mobile-Tensaw Delta.

“When Don Logan [Birmingham native and one of the BASS owners] came to my office, we discussed the concept of promoting the great fishing places in the state of Alabama. Today is a realization of that goal,” said Gov Bentley. “Anglers across the nation will be encouraged to come and fish where the pros fish. The creation of the Alabama Bass Trail will bring more visitors into this state,” he said.

The trail is a joint effort among the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Alabama Tourism Department, Bass Anglers Sportsmen’s Society (BASS), the Governor’s Office, Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association and the tourism offices in the various communities located near the trail lakes.

Kay Donaldson of the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association is the Alabama Bass Trail program director. For more information on the Alabama Bass Trail please visit [www.alabamabassrail.org](http://www.alabamabassrail.org)

**New Baseball Park to Open in 2013 – Birmingham**City leaders broke ground on a new baseball park that will be home to the AA Birmingham Barons baseball team. The facility sits on land right next to Railroad Park and will have a nice view of the downtown skyline.  Officials anticipate the ballpark will be open in time for the 2013 season.

The design will include elements from historical places like Rickwood Field and Sloss Furnace as well as modern amenities. The structure will be made of brick, exposed metal, concrete and glass. Retail and dining space will have the opportunity to open within the park during games and outside on the street during non-game days. [www.barons.com](http://www.barons.com)

**Red Mountain Park** - Birmingham

Visitors to Red Mountain Park can experience adventure with a zip line tour at Red Mountain Park. Scheduled to open in April 2012, the project is believed to be the country’s first universal-access tour of its kind. There are 10 platforms connected by zip lines running from 100 to 350 feet long.  The platforms are built at elevations in the trees, gradually descending down the side of the mountain.  Harnessed riders will be as high as 50 feet above the ground and will zip at speeds of 25 to 30 mph. [www.redmountainpark.org](http://www.redmountainpark.org)

**Alabama’s Birding Trail Expands**

A tourism effort that hatched in the northern and southern ends of Alabama is taking flight statewide. The Piedmont Plateau Birding Trail in east-central Alabama officially opened in November with 34 bird-watching sites in nine counties. It is one of eight bird-watching trails open or being developed to include every county in the state. The North Alabama Birding Trail opened in 2005 and The Coastal Alabama Birding Trail opened in 2002.

Two of the bird watching trails in the new initiative, the Pinewoods Birding Trail in southwest Alabama and the Black Belt Nature and Heritage Trail across the middle of the state, are open. Three other trails are in the development or planning phases. [www.alabamabirdingtrails.com/](http://www.alabamabirdingtrails.com/)

**EVENTS:**

**Alys Stephens Center Commemorates Civil Rights History in 2013** - Birmingham

Plans are underway for next year’s commemoration of civil rights landmark events that took place in Birmingham 50 years ago. Among the top events will be the world premiere of “A More Convenient Season,” by composer Yotam Haber.  The work is specifically designed to address the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church on September 15, 1963.  The blast killed four little girls in the basement of the church and was a turning point in America’s Civil Rights Movement. The score will be written to be performed by the Alabama Symphony Orchestra with guest conductor Damon Gupton and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church youth choir. The name is lifted from the text of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s *Letter from Birmingham Jail*.  The Alys Stephens Center will present the work September 21, 2013.  [www.alysstephens.org](http://www.alysstephens.org)

**Alabama's Black Belt Region First World’s Widest Yard Sale**

A new event is coming to Alabama’s Black Belt, the World’s Widest Yard Sale May 31-June 2 on Hwy. 80. From Phenix City in East Alabama, follow U.S. Hwy. 80 West throughout Alabama’s Black Belt region for the first “World's Widest Yard Sale.” The event will feature more than 350 miles of great bargains. Look for an abundance of antiques, collectibles, one-of-a-kind treasures, arts and crafts, food, and other items from vendors in designated Black Belt counties and small towns. The event is organized by the Alabama Rural Development Office/ Black Belt Commission’s Marketing and Tourism Committee, for more information: 334.649.3788 or 334.353.5185, [www.widestyardsale.com](http://www.widestyardsale.com).

**ACCOMMODATONS:**

**Wynfrey to Become Hyatt Regency** - Birmingham

The hotel known as the Wynfrey since its opening in 1986 is set for major renovation and a name change.  Following a multimillion-dollar overhaul of guest rooms and public spaces, the hotel will convert to the Hyatt brand.  Renovation will begin this fall and is expected to be completed in early spring of 2013.   Hyatt Regency is internationally considered a top-tier hotel, and the upgrade is projected to impact occupancy substantially.  The 329-room property is one of the area’s premier convention hotels and adjoins the Riverchase Galleria, one of the Southeast’s largest shopping malls.  [www.wynfrey.com](http://www.wynfrey.com)

**Dothan and Montgomery on National List of Most Affordable Cities**
A survey released recently by Hotel.com ranks Dothan third and Montgomery ninth among cities with the most affordable hotel rooms. According to the Hotels.com Hotel Price Index, the average daily rate for Dothan hotels came in at $76 and Montgomery was at $79.

“This is wonderful for us. This is like buying advertising we could never afford,” Dothan Convention and Visitors Bureau Executive Director Bob Hendrix said. Dothan currently has about 3,000 hotel rooms and Hendrix said the occupancy rate is a healthy 64 percent.

**New Hotel for Downtown Montgomery**

The Clarion Hotel, formerly the Madison Hotel, will be renovated into a top-notch hotel in the Hilton franchise, Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange announced. John Tampa purchased the building and is planning to invest close to $6 million in the hotel. The new Doubletree Hotel is expected to open in mid- to late summer 2012.

The hotel now has about 170 rooms, but when the renovation is complete the new hotel will have 130 traditional rooms, 33 studio suites and 12 three-room suites. The hotel will also boast more than 10,000 square feet of meeting room space. Strange said the hotel's proximity to downtown restaurants, the Montgomery Performing Arts Center and Cramton Bowl helped spur the investment.

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