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Former UM Director Receives Arts Commission Lifetime Achievement Award

Bill Ferris to be honored at 2017 Governor's Arts Awards

FEBRUARY 15, 2017 BY REBECCA LAUCK CLEARY



Bill Ferris (left) looks over a copy of Living Blues magazine with blues great B.B. King during a visit by King to the University of Mississippi in the 1980s, when Ferris was director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. Photo by Robert Jordan/Ole Miss Communications

OXFORD, Miss. – William R. Ferris, the preeminent scholar and documenter of Mississippi's rich culture, music and folklore, has been documenting the lives of Mississippians for more than 50 years. On Feb. 16, the **Mississippi Arts Commission** will honor him with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2017 Governor's Arts Awards.

Ferris is a scholar, author, documentary filmmaker and founding director of the **Center for the Study of Southern Culture** at the **University of Mississippi**. For him, the award is linked to the center in a deep and wonderful way, as well as to the Oxford community.

"It's a tremendous honor, and I know it would never have happened without the work I was blessed to do at the University of Mississippi and at the center," Ferris said. "It was a special period in my life that connected me to Mississippi in ways that were very special and very moving, and I know full well that the friendships I was able to share there are a big part of why I was selected for this honor."

The award is an opportunity to look back and appreciate more deeply what one's life's work represents, since in the moment, totally engaged and working, it can be difficult to see where things will land, said Ferris, who was on the Ole Miss faculty from 1979 to 1998.

Southern studies students are leading various areas in new and exciting ways, said Ferris, who keeps up with the program's students and alumni.

"I look around the state, the region and the nation and know there are powerful voices that were shaped at the center and by the Southern studies program," he said.

Ferris grew up on a farm south of Vicksburg and developed an early love of storytelling, books, art and music. In 1997, he became chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities under President Bill Clinton.

Since 2002, he has served as Joel Williamson Eminent Professor of History and senior associate director of the Center for the Study of the American South at the University of North Carolina.

The 2017 recipients will be recognized at the 29th annual Governor's Arts Awards ceremony at the Old Capitol Museum in downtown Jackson at 6 p.m. Thursday (Feb. 16). A public reception at 4:30 precedes the awards.

"When I first found myself out in the cultural landscape of Mississippi's vast richness, Bill was already there, established and knee-deep in the exploration of art and culture," said Malcolm White, executive director of MAC. "Bill is a pathfinder and an icon of this work, and I am proud to be at the helm of MAC on this occasion of his recognition."

Other award recipients include Sammy Britt (MFA art '66), Excellence in Visual Art; Vasti Jackson, Arts Ambassador; Lucy Richardson Janoush, Arts Patron; Jaimoe Johnie Johnson, Excellence in Music; and the Mississippi Opera, Artistic Excellence.

"Because these six recipients have made a significant and lasting impact on our state's arts culture, it is fitting to recognize them during Mississippi's bicentennial celebration," White said.

Ferris is the author of 10 books, including "Give My Poor Heart Ease: Voices of the Mississippi Blues"

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Campus Briefs

Donations Sought for 25th Annual Books and Bears Program

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children's play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith's Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith's enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith's 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school's first African-American student.

(University of North Carolina Press, 2009), "You Live and Learn. Then You Die and Forget it All: Ray Lum's Tales of Horses, Mules, and Men" (Anchor Books, 1992) and his latest, "The South in Color: A Visual Journey" (University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Charles Frankel Prize in the Humanities and France's Chevalier and Officer in the Order of Arts and Letters. The Blues Hall of Fame recognized his book "Blues from the Delta" (Anchor Press, 1978) as one of the classics of blues literature.

Established in 1988, Governor's Arts Awards are given to individuals and organizations for the excellence of their work in a wide variety of art forms including visual, literary and performing arts, and community development through the arts in Mississippi.

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"James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier," a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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