

APPLICATION



City Name City of Hattiesburg

Population Under 10,000 Over 10,000

Category Public Safety Planning & Economic Development
 City Spirit Public Works

Title of Entry Hattiesburg's Pocket Museum Alley Attracts Residents & Visitors From All Over

Description of Project _____

In 2019, Hattiesburg began partnering with property owners that flanked either side of a small alley with the goal to turn an underutilized space into something special. Fast-tracked by a need for safe and innovative ways to escape the isolation that came with COVID-19, the Hattiesburg Pocket Museum Alley was born. Now with an estimate of 10,000 visitors each week, it's a community staple that serves as a reason to visit Hattiesburg.

Project Summary (use additional pages if necessary) _____

See additional pages for full project summary, photos and interactive hyperlinks.

Signature of Chief Elected or Appointed Official 

Please provide the following information in case of questions about the application.

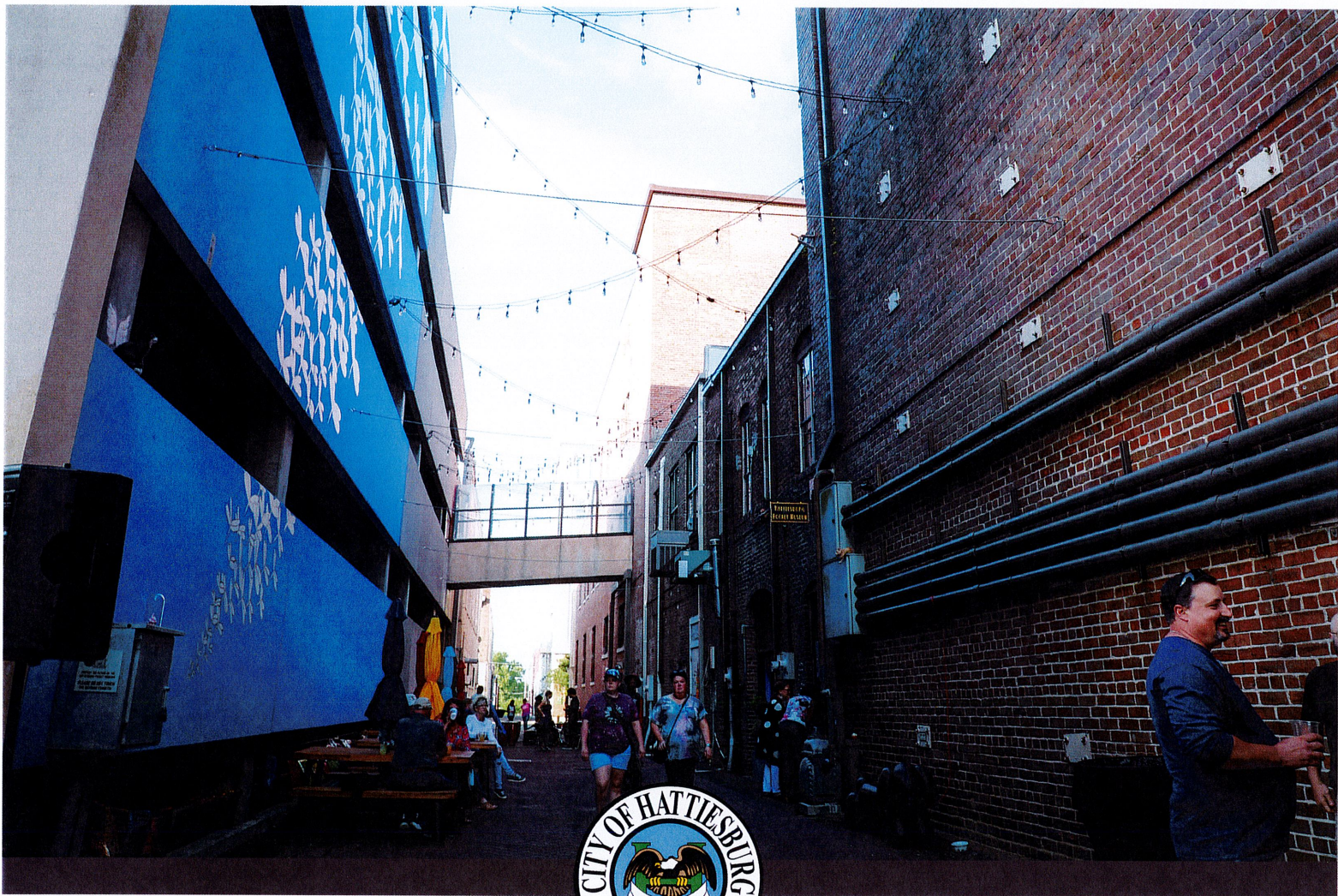
Contact Name Samantha McCain Alexander

Title Chief Communications Officer

Address PO BOX 1898

City Hattiesburg, Mississippi Zip 39403-1898

Phone 601-545-4501 Email smccain@hattiesburgms.com



Hattiesburg's Pocket Museum Alley Attracts Residents & Visitors From All Over

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

In 2019, Hattiesburg began partnering with property owners that flanked either side of a small alley with the goal to turn an underutilized space into something special. Fast-tracked by a need for safe and innovative ways to escape the isolation that came with COVID-19, the Hattiesburg Pocket Museum Alley was born. Now with an estimate of 10,000 visitors each week, it's a community staple that serves as a reason to visit Hattiesburg.

POPULATION | OVER 10,000

CATEGORY: PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Pocket-Sized Dreams for a Hattiesburg Alley

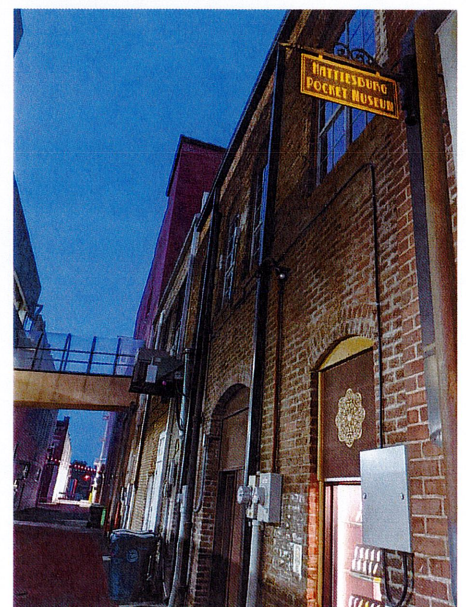
Flanked by both Main Street and Forrest Street, a single alleyway that runs east and west in the heart of Downtown Hattiesburg was not being used by the properties that lined it. With an end goal of creative place-making in mind, the City of Hattiesburg engaged property owners and stakeholders to imagine a place where pedestrian traffic could walk safely and provide for a unique opportunity to highlight the talent that abounds in Hattiesburg.

What began as a small vision in 2019 was catapulted into existence during the height of 2020's pandemic, drawing a more substantial need for something that could help residents and visitors escape the isolation of health-related restrictions and enjoy both surprise and delight in the grandness of an innovative space. However, much of what the alleyway would inevitably be had to be built on a sturdy foundation.

The City prepared for the alley's transformation by working with neighboring property owners in preparation of the change of access. Trash pickup was redirected and other utilities were secured or improved. By May of 2020, the alley was closed to vehicle traffic, underlying infrastructure issues were addressed and plans for paving were made.

With new paving, the City also took the opportunity to stamp a faux brick pattern into many areas of the alley, a design element that encourages foot traffic and added to the historic character of the alley environment.

It was also by this time that the alley's most prominent neighbor, the Hattiesburg Saenger Theater, shuttered its doors due to COVID-19. Managed by the Hattiesburg Convention Commission, its team was determined to create a way for people to enjoy the surprise and delight of the alleyway, just as they might at a theater performance. With an initial budget of \$800, they began converting a boarded-up window in a rear storeroom of the theater. From here, the tiniest museum in Mississippi was born... but, it was just the beginning.



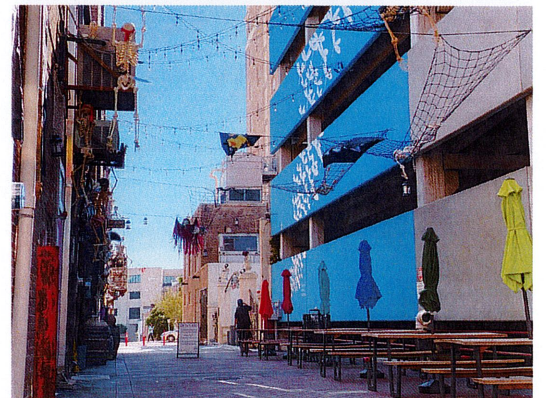
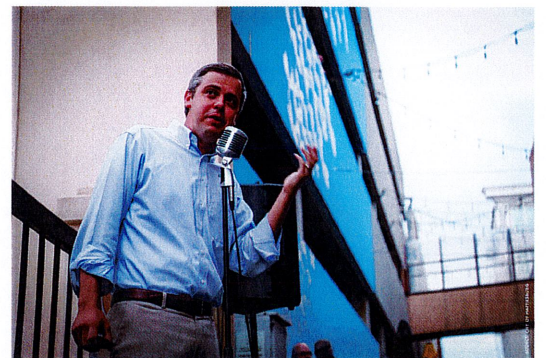


Curated and steered by the Hattiesburg Convention Commission's executive director Rick Taylor and his wife, Vicki, the alley's museum window houses an exhibit that changes monthly. With very specific themes, the exhibit meets a variety of criteria to share the history of special, quirky, weird and often unusual themes and topics from pop culture. Just in the past year, it has hosted the history of McDonald's toys through the ages, an ode to 1969's Woodstock with a look at hippie counter-culture, POP-TARTS and Pop Art, Smurfs and more.

As the popularity of the Pocket Museum grew, the City continued to add improvements suitable for more visitors. During its one-year anniversary celebration in 2021, string lights were added overhead as a continuation of the string lights seen throughout Downtown Hattiesburg and a key partnership to host one of the city's largest murals on the city parking garage (which lines the alley) was initiated.

In the wake of COVID-19, it was clear that the City needed to find more innovative ways to support existing small businesses and restaurants. For the alley, this meant the addition of tables to provide an alternative environment for residents to take meals "to-go." Because the alley is centrally located among many restaurant options, it was a simple, yet necessary addition.

Since its initial days of planning, the City has invested more than \$100,000 in the alley through both infrastructure improvement and art contributions.



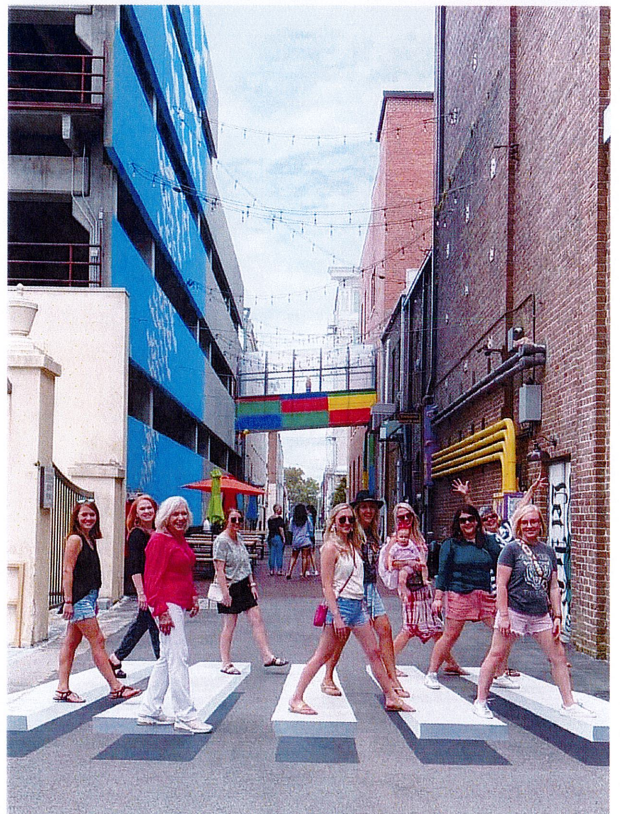
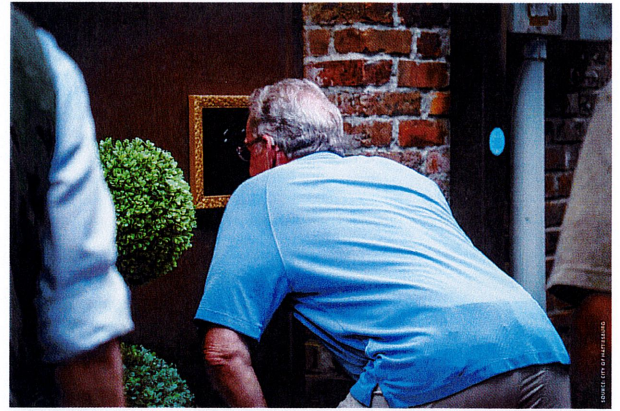
Pocket Art

While the Pocket Museum might be addressed as the star of the alley, it is only a small part of what makes the alley special for Hattiesburg. Over time and often with limited resources, the Hattiesburg Convention Commission has worked closely with art partners over the years to add special features and interactive artwork that continues to bring thousands to visit, stay and play. These include:

The Pocket Theater: This addition features short films that complement the Hattiesburg Pocket Museum exhibitions, and just like the museum, the film changes at the beginning of each month. It can be accessed through a viewfinder from the alleyway.

The Pocket Gallery: Described as the “Tiniest Art Gallery in Mississippi,” this feature is actually a renovated newspaper stand that boasts small gallery patrons and easels that give full attention to each and every piece of art that is placed in the gallery by the public.

Art in the Alley: In addition to the museum, theater and art galleries, numerous outdoor art installations are featured in the alley, including a Kelsey Montague painting on the city parking garage across from the museum window, two Damian Guerrero street-art installations, “Let it Go” and Fox in the Wind” adjacent to the museum, and five pieces, “Mice in Peril”, “Why Can’t We Be Friends”, “Abbey Road – in 3D”, “Hub City Chasm – in 3D” and “Nothing but Bubble”, “Rubber Duckie”, “Save the Narwhal” by Mississippi artist, Lissa Ortego. In 2022, Gabby Smith added two art pieces to the alley, “Something’s Fishy” and “Bugs in the Burg”, and the formerly drab skywalk was transformed into the “Let’s Connect Skybridge” a Lego creation complete with Lego rock climbers aexplorerby artist River Prince.



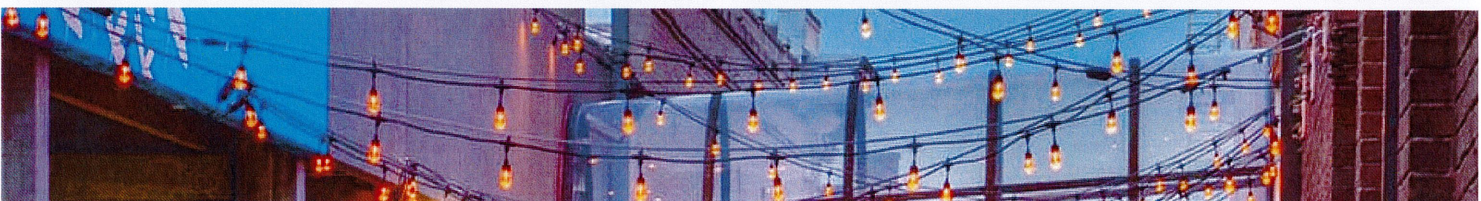
An Alley That Could is Now an Alley That Did

Along with these works of art, are ever-changing miniature model dioramas, which can be found on electrical boxes, ledges and in the many nooks and crannies, creating a “find and seek” component to every visit to the alley. Hiding in the magic passageway are also 13 resident cats who oversee the visitors that come to see the almost weekly changes that happen in the magical Hattiesburg Pocket Museum alley.

And to add more experience-based joy, the alley also serves as home to several unique events throughout the year - including Ink in the Alley (a tattoo-inspired arts market), Cinco de Milo (an ode to the alleyway mascot during its anniversary), the Great Downtown Duck Hunt in October and Confetti Countdown in the Alley (an early, children-focused countdown as part of the City’s New Year’s Eve Celebration). It’s also decorated seasonally to provide destination photo opportunities around Halloween and Christmas (complete with snow).

Since the alley’s opening in May of 2020, it has transformed from a small vision into a destination space for residents and visitors from all over. This very unique space and its destination - the Pocket Museum - was an additional boost to why Hattiesburg was named an international leader in public art in January of 2022 for Travel + Leisure Magazine and a primary factor for why Mississippi is on Forbe’s Best Places To Travel In The U.S. for 2023.

Ultimately, many like-minded partners in the community came together and turned an underused space and a community crisis into an opportunity that has been a major economic catalyst for Downtown Hattiesburg and beyond. Now, it is a thriving, blossoming destination that gives back to the community through the joy and delight of art and fellowship. It is uniquely Hattiesburg and is loved by all.







Scan for drone footage of alley from 2022.
https://youtu.be/GUlun4sgG_o