

Nancy Carpenter's 'City That Has It All'

Columbus/Lowndes Convention and Visitors Bureau

Small town Columbus, Mississippi, has a lot going for it — historic homes, pretty riverfront, lively downtown, Columbus Air Force base, historic Mississippi University for Women, and a successful hospital — but its greatest asset may be Nancy Luke Carpenter, Executive Director and CEO of Visit Columbus Mississippi and the Columbus Cultural Heritage Foundation.

The booster-in-chief of what was once called “Possum Town” arrived from



Nancy Carpenter

Jackson in 1990 with 20 years of bank marketing experience under her belt, and life in this town of 23,000 hasn't been the same since.

Presenting numerous special events every year, Carpenter and her team of nine have made Columbus a magnet for visitors and new residents alike through “quality of life” projects. A concrete measure of that success is a 21 percent increase in the city's sales tax revenues since 2010.

Tennessee Williams, Catfish Alley and Sunset on the Riverwalk

Tennessee Williams' childhood home is here, along with 650 other properties on the National Register of Historic Places. This April, the 77th Annual Spring Pilgrimage drew visitors from 42 states and 14 countries to tour homes and gardens; take carriage rides; run a half-marathon or 5K; learn about local personalities on a cemetery tour; listen to blues artists; browse handcrafted period items; celebrate African-American heritage; and enjoy catfish, crawfish, jambalaya and cheese straws, all washed down with mint juleps.



Tennessee Williams Home and Welcome Center

While music, culture and heritage activities appeal to older visitors, fishing, boating, soccer and tennis tournaments primarily attract an under-40 crowd, says Carpenter. Each event welcomes over 1,000 people, she estimates, and the largest offering, Fireworks on the Water, entertains over 10,000 annually.

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– Nancy Carpenter

Its charms have garnered Columbus numerous accolades. Two of particular note were the Editor's Choice award in *Garden and Gun* magazine's 2014 “Southern Agenda,” and recognition as one of 12 “Distinctive Destinations” by the National Trust in 2008.

Mississippi's Business Woman of the Year

Carpenter has her own full trophy case. She is especially proud of being

Visit
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The City That Has It All!

the youngest person ever named VP of sales and marketing at Unifirst Bank in Jackson, and of her 2017 Mississippi Business Woman of the Year award.

She is a Wingman and Honorary Commander at the Columbus Air Force Base and serves on numerous boards, including the Columbus-Lowndes Development Link advisory board, the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum Commission and the Mississippi Hills National Heritage Area. Carpenter is president of the Mississippi Tourism Association and a trustee of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Nonetheless, Carpenter and her husband, Carol, still find time to visit their three grown children and two grandchildren, who live as far away as Ohio.



Restored Pedestrian Bridge

Stronger as One

Visit Columbus partners with the Mississippi University for Women, the Columbus Air Force Base, the R.E. Hunt Museum and Cultural Center, the Golden Triangle Development Link, the city of Columbus and Lowndes County, Starkville and West Point, as well as Mississippi State University.

Carpenter thinks those partnerships are what make Columbus so robust. “We are preserving our past, but always looking to the future,” she says. “We can all become stronger as one.”