

# APPLICATION



City Name City of Hernando

Population ☐ Under 10,000 ☒ Over 10,000

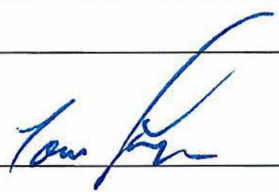
Category ☐ Public Safety ☐ Planning & Economic Development  
☒ City Spirit ☐ Public Works

Title of Entry Hernando Dickens of a Christmas

Description of Project \_\_\_\_\_

Hernando Dickens of a Christmas was created to enhance the Chamber of Commerce  
Christmas Open House. The event supported efforts to preserve Hernando's cultural  
heritage and improve the economic vitality of the community, recreating an  
atmosphere of Christmas in Hernando during the Victorian Era.

Project Summary (use additional pages if necessary) \_\_\_\_\_  
Please see attachment.

Signature of Chief Elected or Appointed Official 

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

Contact Name Gia Matheny

Title Community Development Director

Address 475 West Commerce Street

City Hernando Zip 38632

Phone 662-449-9127 Email gmatheny@cityofhernando.org

**Hernando Dickens of a Christmas  
City Spirit Award  
Mississippi Municipal Excellence Award Application**

Hernando Dickens of a Christmas was created to enhance the downtown business's Christmas Open House weekend and attract more visitors to our local shops and restaurants, while recreating an old-fashioned Christmas that enriches and preserves the historic charm of our small town. The event created a destination for visitors to shop, eat and stay in Hernando overnight increasing hotel occupancy and sales in local businesses for the weekend.

With a grant from the Mississippi Hills National Heritage Area grant the City of Hernando was able to host its first holiday event. This included historic programming centering on the Victorian era, the time when the city was founded, and a holiday atmosphere surrounding the downtown attracted new shoppers. As the county seat, the City of Hernando is fortunate to be home to the DeSoto County Museum (DCM), DeSoto Arts Council (DAC) and DeSoto County Courthouse. We wanted to draw awareness of these cultural resources as well as increase tourism and economic activity in the city. Programming with a focus on our cultural heritage during the holidays allowed our small city with little funding an opportunity to create a merry atmosphere and encourage more people to learn about our past.

As part of this event the DCM partnered with the City of Hernando to host two continuous historic carriage-ride tours, from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm, that provided an accurate storytelling of the history and heritage of Hernando during the 18th century Victorian era to the present day. The carriage ride gave the historic tour guide and guest the means to get from the museum to other significant historic and cultural sites around the Hernando town square.

The tour guide also played an important role through storytelling. The museum curator and tour guide dressed in period clothing, was educated on the history and heritage of Hernando and was experienced in storytelling. He offered a tour that informed and entertained guests, creating an unforgettable experience. This was attractive to Mississippi citizens and out-of-state visitors, and gained the attention of those who are both history buffs and those who were not necessarily interested in history, but came for the experience. This attraction provided all visitors an opportunity to walk away with a better understanding of our culture and traditions from the past and today.

A local contra dance group performed dances on the town square in period clothing enticing visitors to learn even more. Dancing of the era enlightened the public about the form of dance during the Victorian era. Contra dance originated from folk dance, made up of long lines of couples with roots dating back to the 17th century in Europe. By the 18th century contra dancing was considered one of the most popular social dances across class lines in the late 18th century and fashionable in the United States, among all social classes and still endures as a form of dance today.

The DCM offered, "Twist & Loop," a twist on writing to teach the dying art of cursive handwriting and reading historical literature. The activity was led by a museum instructor in period clothing who educated the public about the Dickensian style of handwriting. Children also had an opportunity to learn how to write and read cursive. A form of writing that is no longer taught in schools.

The DAC educated the public on arts and crafts of the time including spinning, weaving and woodworking demonstrating how these skills were vital to everyday life.

The inclusion of historical entertainment and a Christmas farmers market played a very important role in creating an ambiance and attracting visitors to the historic downtown. It was a key component to entice people who were interested in learning about history and captivated those who may not have had intentions of learning but left the event with a better understanding of our Mississippi heritage.

All activities for the event increased tourism, improved the quality of life of residents during the holiday season and increased sales tax revenues for the city. Data was collected by the local businesses participating in the Christmas Open House. Sales were at an all-time high for the holiday weekend with increases of 15%-70% per business over the prior year. Seventy-nine zip codes were tracked and 14 part-time jobs were created, ultimately improving our local economy.

The event was a partnership between many local organizations who volunteered their time to improve the quality of life and economic vitality of Hernando during the Christmas season including the Hernando Main Street Chamber of Commerce, DeSoto County Museum, DeSoto Arts Council, Hernando Farmers Market, DeSoto County Board of Supervisors and local non-profit organizations. Planning for the event also spurred interest from local businesses who had not participated before. Many of these businesses came together to decorate for the holidays in warm white lights to expand the Christmas décor. What a beautiful site it was attracting residents and visitors to view the decorations. This event generated so much support from local businesses, organizations and the community that they plan to grow the event each year.















































