

Reception finds sponsors to promote Southaven

Businesses ante up \$55K for Municipal League event

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Private businesses are paying more than \$55,000 toward an \$80,000-plus reception that Southaven Mayor Greg Davis and aldermen will host at this year's Mississippi Municipal League conference in Biloxi beginning Monday.

Expenses from the 2009 conference were among those cited by state auditors during an investigation of Davis' spending that resulted in an order to repay more than \$170,000. Davis, who has repaid about \$96,000 with help from supporters, is also the subject of a federal probe over spending of city funds.

This year, Davis will be accompanied by Aldermen William Brooks, Ronnie Hale and George Payne. The Southaven delegation will sponsor the reception scheduled for Tuesday night at the Beau Rivage, the host hotel for the conference. Now in its 81st year, the MML conference brings more



Greg Davis

than 3,000 city officials and vendors together for four days.

Despite the ongoing scrutiny of Davis, he and city leaders say it's important to promote the city.

"Look, we are not the only city to have a reception," Davis said. "There are two or three cities that are holding receptions on different nights."

"This reception gives the aldermen and the city of Southaven a chance to network with other municipalities in an informal setting during a statewide conference."

In the past, the Southaven Chamber of Commerce has paid for the reception. But this year, after details emerged about Davis submitting the same charges to both the city and the Southaven Chamber of Commerce for reimbursement, the nonprofit organization opted out of hosting.

Instead, Davis said local businesses have donated \$55,500 for this year's event. Coupled with

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\$25,000 from the city's tourism fund, \$80,500 was available this year.

The event will feature an '80s band, Dr. Zarr's Amaz-

ing Funk Monster, which has performed at the city's reception in past years. Appetizers and an open bar also will be available.

"In America, companies can still donate money for causes without there being a conflict," Davis said. "And no one gave money with a pending contract with the city."

Southaven's city attorney, Nick Manley, added that "as long as no contract is being promised based on a sponsorship, there is no conflict."

Manley's firm, **Butler Snow**, is one of the reception sponsors.

"We've done work with the city for the last two or three years," Manley said. "We saw the sponsorship of the reception as an opportunity to work with the city, and also get our name out there, to highlight our capabilities to other municipalities at the conference."

Southaven has printed a brochure with information about each sponsor to thank them for their contributions. The brochure will be given out during the reception.

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