

# Delta Sources and Resources

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## **The B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center** 400 Second Street Indianola, Mississippi

The B. B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center is located in the heart of the Mississippi Delta on US Highway 82 between Greenwood and Greenville, not far from the famous Crossroads at Clarksdale. Opened in September 2008, following six years of planning and a \$14 million fundraising effort, the 20,000 square-foot museum celebrates the life, character and music of native son B.B. King, and serves as a vital resource to the State of Mississippi and the City of Indianola. The exhibition preserves, examines, and interprets the cultural and musical heritage of the Mississippi Delta. The Museum's programs and visiting artists illustrate and expand upon this tradition to enhance understanding and build bridges between the community and the world.

A major goal for the B.B. King Museum is, and always will be, to bring the community together and offer as many new experiences and opportunities as possible. The Museum accomplishes that goal by presenting several programs and events throughout the year to create an atmosphere for the community to work together and interact with one another. The annual B.B. King Homecoming Festival has been held in Indianola for the past thirty-two years, and it was held on the grounds of the Museum for the first time in 2012, which has now become its permanent venue. Each year, B.B. King visits his hometown of Indianola, Mississippi to perform for the Delta community, as well as national and international travelers who come from far and wide to see the "King of the Blues." Other Museum programs include the "Tune in to Black History" musical celebration, "Music on

the Lawn" free concert series, the Gospel Festival, and B.B.'s Bridge Building Ambassador Program.

The Museum recognizes the significant role that youth in Indianola and Sunflower County can play in community development through active participation. Initiated in 2011, B.B.'s Bridge Building Ambassadors Program is designed to engage Indianola and Sunflower County middle and high school students in discovering their own leadership abilities by exploring history and participating in a variety of learning and leadership development opportunities. This program is modeled on and associated with the Bringing the Lessons Home program begun in 1994 at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

Focusing on teen docent training, leadership development and connecting the museum with the immediate community, this program has been replicated in museums and other non-profit organizations around the country, including the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in Alabama. The program staff of the USHMM and the Birmingham Institute recruited the B.B. King Museum to become a part of this program, and both institutions have worked closely together in its design. Through the Ambassador program, the Museum hopes to develop long-term partnerships with the local middle and high schools, enabling students to participate in a series of training experiences and internship opportunities that will help them develop into lifelong learners, productive citizens, and community leaders.

In June 2010, the B.B. King Museum partnered with the Indianola Promise Community, an initiative through Delta Health Alliance, to present The Art of Living Smart Program. Designed and taught by the Museum staff, local educators (at the elementary, secondary and



B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center  
Photograph courtesy of B.B. King Museum

university levels), and artists, and assisted by student counselors from Mississippi Valley State and Delta State Universities who reflect the diversity of the community, the Art of Living Smart Program, through the vehicle of visual and performing arts, teaches young people ages six to fifteen years old to make healthier lifestyle choices.

Modeled after the famous Harlem Children's Zone in New York, the Art of Living Smart Program offers a wide range of coordinated services with intense coverage in one community. These programs, including health-care, literacy, and early childhood education, have proven to be extremely successful in the reversal of national trends in at-risk communities. Sunflower County, the home of the B.B. King Museum, suffers from extreme poverty, as well as high rates of high school dropout, teen pregnancy, and numerous health-related issues.

The Art of Living Smart Program, funded initially by the Indianola Promise Community, is aimed at combating these problems.

In summer 2010, the Museum provided a summer camp each afternoon for seven weeks for fifty-eight young people in Indianola and has increased that number each year. Students learned to play popular blues and gospel songs, designed choreography, prepared healthy snacks to learn how to improve their eating habits, and created handmade instruments, among other projects. Special events included a daylong visit from the St. Dominic Health Services Care-A-Van for health screenings of the campers and others in the community. The campers also collaborated with Delta Music Institute's Mobile Music Lab from Delta State University to record a camp theme song. The Art of Living Smart Program has become the heart of our programming. Using the arts to teach health and

wellness, the B.B. King Museum hopes to improve literacy, instill a love of learning, and enhance self esteem.

Expanding on the summer camp initiative, the B.B. King Museum began The Art of Living Smart After-School Program in September 2012. This program provides local youth, ages eleven to fifteen in grades 6th through 9th, with exposure to tutoring and homework guidance and assistance, as well as healthy lifestyle education, access to the arts, and other activities to enhance their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Students meet five afternoons a week Monday through Friday. By incorporating an after-school component to our already existing programs, the Museum intends to carry the healthy learning, both physical and academic, throughout the year.

The B.B. King Museum also brings visiting artists into the local schools to enhance and strengthen the aims of their programs right in the classrooms. The Museum works closely with the Indianola and Sunflower County school districts and has an ongoing dialogue with teachers and principals in area schools to make education exciting and powerful for students. Bluesman Ben Wiley Payton presented a music program to several Indianola schools in December 2012 which served over a thousand children. Payton is a respected instructor at music programs and workshops across the country, including the renowned Berklee College of Music in Boston, Massachusetts. His curriculum includes demonstrating the roots of this uniquely American music, using live performance to illustrate the historical and musical connections in African-American culture.

The B.B. King Museum welcomed nearly 20,000 visitors in 2012 to the Mississippi Delta community and hopes to welcome many more in the future. Visitors not only experience the museum, but they experience the Mississippi Delta by visiting the excellent local restaurants, touring the colorful cities, admiring the beautiful scenery, and much more. The Museum has shared the wonderful life story of B.B. King with

the people of the Mississippi Delta, all fifty states and more than thirty countries, and they hope to continue striving for their vision to inspire hope, creativity, and greatness in everyone who walks through the exhibit doors. ▲▼▲



Birds in field near Cleveland, Mississippi  
Photograph by Melissa Brawner