

**Mississippi River Heritage Tourism Conference
Comments for Mr. John Saia
November 29, 2001**

Good morning and welcome to the Third Annual Tulane University-Corps of Engineers Conference on the Mississippi River. My name is John Saia and I am the chief of the Planning, Programs and Project Management Division and the Deputy District Engineer at the Corps' New Orleans District.

I am relatively new to the lower Mississippi Valley and the New Orleans area. My career with the Corps has taken my family and me to many places over the years and I have seen many impressive sites. But when I take the opportunity to look out my office window, I can't help but marvel at the majestic Mississippi River. It is truly a natural wonder.

This natural wonder has influenced the landscape, our culture, our history, the very way we live...and the way we are buried when we die. As a result, New Orleans is one of the most remarkable cities in America. Each year more than 8 million people come from all over the world to visit a city made unique in part by the Mississippi River.

Because of the Corps' 200-year-history of flood control and navigation on the Mississippi River, the New Orleans District has a strong interest in heritage tourism.

We support the efforts of the American Heritage Rivers Initiative to enhance heritage tourism and economic development of the lower Mississippi River.

The New Orleans District is currently designing visitor centers at the Old River Control Complex above Baton Rouge and another one in Morgan City, while the Vicksburg District is developing the Lower Mississippi River Museum and Riverfront Interpretive Center in cooperation with the City of Vicksburg.

The representative and architect for the city, David Clement, is in the audience today and we appreciate his being here.

In addition, the Corps is participating in a number of heritage tourism projects as part of our Planning Assistance to the States program. And we have numerous master plans for recreation and tourism underway for cities and parishes including Iberia and St. Martin parishes, the city of Opelousas and the town of Washington. We're also working closely with the town of Donaldsonville and West Baton Rouge parish on riverfront development.

Like the river, both Tulane and the Corps have had an impact on the history of New Orleans. That is what makes this conference so important and personal to us. The District is very proud of its close association with Tulane.

Back in 1999, we signed a cooperative agreement beginning several successful programs, one being the graduate program Tulane offers to Corps employees. And Army officers who are studying for a master's degree attend Tulane in preparation for teaching assignments at West Point.

Everyone benefits from a very successful cooperative student education program where Tulane students work part time at the Corps performing a variety of tasks and gaining useful skills.

Because of our close association, both Tulane and the Corps have experienced an increase in the amount of information we share on Mississippi River issues.

Tulane students and faculty regularly utilize Mississippi River information sources at the Corps. Corps employees speak to a number of classes and symposia at Tulane.

And we both participate in lectures and field trips for the Mississippi River Basin Colloquium.

The list of mutual benefits derived by both the Corps and Tulane in our ongoing partnership has become as expansive and free flowing as the Mississippi itself. We are proud of the direction this partnership is taking us. And like the Mississippi River, we expect the partnership to have a profound and lasting effect on the city and the region.

Now let's enjoy today's conference.

Thank you.