



Drive PLUS Determination EQUALS Success

Promising a Ray of Hope: Sandy Ray
is Moving Mississippi Politics

By JACK CRISS

As Chief Executive Officer of her firm, Southern Consulting Associates, Inc., Cleveland-native Sandy Ray brings nearly twenty-five years of experience in both state government and politics in Mississippi and throughout the southeast.

As a well-known, registered lobbyist, Ray assists clients in legislative lobbying in a variety of sectors including insurance, economic development, state bond acquisition, state agency management and regulatory issues. In addition to lobbying and regulatory affairs, Ray specializes in

human resource management, non-profit organization, campaign management, grass roots organization and fundraising.

And, although in some quarters, lobbying is considered a political “dirty word”, Ray defends her work as not only necessary for the issues and the voters they affect, but also for the type of dedication and knowledge that is required to succeed in the field.

“Lobbying is not dependent on drinks and golf outings contrary to popular, but untrue, stereotypes,” says Ray. “Today’s lobbyist must have a firm grasp of their client’s industry and objectives and be able to identify and then find legislative allies

to reach a win/win solution. It’s not just about cozying up to legislators and buddying around with them. To be effective you have got to be educated on the issues and maintain the trust of an elected official when they come to you about an issue.”

Growing up in Cleveland, Ray says her recently-retired father (a jewelry repairman and store owner) and her mother (a nursing home administrator) provided Ray and her siblings with a middle-class environment that pushed the value of hard work. “I had almost every job imaginable, from working at Sonic to Jay’s Department Store downtown, to pay



my own way into Delta State,” says Ray. One of Ray’s brothers is an industrial engineer, and her two other brothers took the respective paths of business owner and highway patrolman. Ray tragically lost her twin sister, Cindy, last September, “which still seems unreal,” she says.

Later, while working for Delta State, Ray was brought on to serve as the Executive Director for the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Mississippi Delta. It was there she had her first encounter with the political world that she would eventually enter—a meeting with former Attorney General, Mike Moore.

“General Moore was heavily involved with the Boys & Girls Clubs and wanted to see more activity in the Delta,” recalls Ray. “While working with him as Children’s Division Liaison for the Office of the Attorney General, I frequently came to Jackson, went to the legislature for meetings and saw the whole political process up close and personal. That’s when I first became passionate about it.”

As General Mike Moore neared the end of his tenure as Attorney General, Ray decided to open Southern Consulting Associates. “This was about a year before

Hurricane Katrina, which left a profound effect on me, both as a learning experience about the power of natural disasters and the tragedies they often cause, and as an eye opener to the resilience of the human spirit. I was lobbying for the Boys & Girls



Clubs at the time, and figuring out how to help the coastal clubs was a challenge. We would unload 18-wheelers of supplies at my house to be picked up and driven to locations on the Coast during the relief effort,” recalls Ray.

In 2007, as part of her business, Ray assisted with Mike Chaney’s campaign for Mississippi’s Insurance Commissioner and was asked to come aboard the administration after a successful election. Shortly thereafter, she was named Chief of Staff for State Insurance Commissioner

Chaney. Ray, her husband Jody, a high-school teacher, and their son Caleb then decided to make the move to Madison to be closer to the Capitol. It would be a role she would occupy until 2018 before she decided to again devote her full attention to her personal business, Southern Consulting Associates, Inc.

“Working with Mike was a great experience,” says Ray. “Insurance is a fascinating field that, really, touches every aspect of our lives. And, I loved my job as Chief of Staff for Commissioner Chaney. It was hard work, but incredibly rewarding at the same time.” Just recently, Chaney was quoted as saying of his former co-worker, “(Sandy) is a very intelligent, highly motivated, respected, charismatic rainmaker.”

And, while Ray did love the work she did with Commissioner Chaney, and obviously made a strong impression on him, she made the decision to turn her full attention back to the company she started.

“I had always kept a few clients on, but not too many and none that would conflict with the Insurance Commission. But, I found that I began to miss doing my own work full time. I wanted my freedom and I like to pick my own



THE MARTY STUART CENTER AND CONGRESS OF COUNTRY MUSIC HALL WAREHOUSE



Ray touring the Marty Stuart Congress of Country Music in Philadelphia, Mississippi.



Ray with Commissioner of Insurance and State Fire Marshall Mike Chaney.

challenges. So, that's what I did," she says of her decision to leave the agency and go back to Southern Consulting Associates.

The decision was obviously a good one.

"I've tripled my clientele since 2018, when I left Commissioner Chaney's office," says Ray. "I love solving problems that are presented to me and, of course, the political work. I pick the person I want to work with—the party they might belong to is of no consequence as far as client preference for me. For example, I not only worked for Mike Chaney and Lynn Fitch, I also recently supported longtime friend from Cleveland, Willie Simmons—a prominent Democrat—in his campaign for Highway Commissioner. I've always believed in him and respected all of the work he had done for Cleveland, and the Delta, when he was in the Senate," she says. "Rather than focusing on partisanship, I focus on being loyal to the people and principles that will make

Mississippi a better place. I always look out for people that have looked out for me."

Ray is extremely enthusiastic about a current project for a certain client she's working hard on: the Marty Stuart Congress of Country Music Museum slated to open in Philadelphia.

"Marty Stuart is currently my most exciting client," she enthuses. "The work I have done and am doing for the 'Congress of Country Music' is going great and momentum is high. Working with a country music artist, who has now been named to the Country Music Hall of Fame, and the folks from the Philadelphia community has been a true pleasure. In February of this year, I was told that \$2.5 million had to be raised to get things moving in order for the State to get involved. We had two weeks to raise the money and then, if successful, I also had to lobby for state bond funds. This was

just before the outbreak of the pandemic. All parties were nervous, to say the least, but we were able to do it," says Ray. Working with the locals and the Mississippi legislature, the organization will finish Phase I of the project and when the Museum is open it will house the largest collection of country music memorabilia in the world."

When summarizing her life and career thus far, Ray explains, "The many years I spent learning the people all across Mississippi state government will prove valuable for the rest of my life. It takes time to build relationships and to gain respect. I love to help people and I enjoy fixing problems. I think that, throughout my life, all of my work experiences and even hardships have made me better at what I do. I provide a wide array of services that few, if any, other company offers and I am selective about who I work for and with. I want to enjoy my work and be proud of who I represent. When I get handed a problem or issue, of course it's because a fix is needed. That's when I take the ball and run with it and find a solution for the client. I've never been afraid of hard work—I thrive on it—and when I say I'm going to do something, I deliver," says Ray. **DBJ**