

**MISSISSIPPI CELEBRATES RELIGIOUS FREEDOM  
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Moss-laden ancient oak trees graced the lawn of Tullis-Toledano Manor overlooking the beach in Biloxi, Miss. The music of a jazz band wafted in the Gulf breezes and mingled with the laughter of children at play. Watermelon juice trickled down the chins of two little girls holding hands. Adults anticipated the fireworks and cooler temperatures nightfall would bring.

What appeared to be a typical Independence Day celebration was in fact a momentous occasion. The first annual "All-American Picnic," sponsored by the Interfaith Alliance of Mississippi, was a great success. SGI-USA members from Mississippi Chapter joined members of the Jewish, Muslim, Wiccan, Unitarian Universalist and Christian faith groups in celebrating freedom of religion afforded us by our forefathers.

One SGI-USA member was quoted in the local newspaper, saying: "The goal of the Interfaith Alliance of Mississippi through this kind of activity is the promotion of mutual respect and tolerance for one another's differences. Take a look around you. You have every ethnic, religious and racial background here. It's proof we can do this."

The Interfaith Alliance of Mississippi received a \$1,000 grant from the national organization to put on the Independence Day event. The community showed support for such efforts of unity by waiving fees and lowering the cost of equipment, property, banners and t-shirts.

"We're here today to show no matter what your faith, everyone can work together and have fun together," said SGI-USA member Tim Lockley.

The spirit of many in body, one in mind was in action, with people of diverse backgrounds working together toward a single goal. This one event provided a great opportunity to inform elected officials and candidates of the Interfaith Alliance and its mission. Among the many invited dignitaries, candidates running for the United States Senate and House of Representatives were present. Mississippi State Supreme Court Justice Oliver Diaz said, "This event embodies everything the Fourth of July stands for."