

Cat Head Delta Blues Inc. by deborah fagan carpenter

photos by fagan carpenter

Look closer. At first glance, *Cat Head Delta Blues & Folk Art, Inc.* on Delta Avenue in Clarksdale, Mississippi appears to be a store where one can purchase Blues CDs, books about the Blues and Blues related folk art. Indeed one can pick up all of those items, along with a fountain of information about the Blues delivered by the



store's owner, Roger Stolle. But the foundation of the operation and what Stolle is truly hawking is the "culture behind the music."

Admittedly, he "didn't know one Delta town from the other," but he landed at *Junior's Place* in Holly Springs, an authentic "Juke Joint," and there he had an evening listening to live Blues that literally changed his life. Roger Stolle was a successful advertising executive, traveling the world and living the good life, when an obsession with the Blues took him on a trip to Mississippi in 1995 to hear the musical form performed where it was born. Subsequent trips to Mississippi were the result of that life changing night, and in 2002 Roger moved to Clarksdale, MS and directed his promotional skills toward telling the story of "what makes the Blues the Blues."



Teaming with local developer Bubba O'Keefe, the two organized The Juke Joint Festival in 2004, and it, along with endeavors by others determined to bring a dying downtown Clarksdale back to life, brought the Blues to center stage in the town of slightly less than 20,000. Early on, some residents were opposed

to making the Blues such an important focus in the revitalization of the downtown area, but today even "little ole ladies donning hats" can be seen wearing festival arm bands and traveling from "joint to joint" during the event!

Ten years ago the average stay for a tourist in Clarksdale was two hours and there was live music typically only on Saturday night. Today there is live music 7 nights a week and the town boasts tourists from at least 28 foreign countries and 46 U.S. States, plus D.C., some of whom spend a night or two in one of the charming boutique hotels. In addition to the Juke Joint Festival, there are 8 smaller festivals a year and a Film Festival that fills the slower winter months.

Roger has dedicated his life to presenting the authenticity of the Blues and Cat Head is headquarters for that intent. If there is a Blues event happening anywhere in the Delta, you can be relatively certain of uncovering complete details from the "pusher of the Blues" at Cat Head Delta Blues and Folk Art, Inc. The store was listed by *Pane's Magazine* as one of the "17 coolest record



stores in America,” was named in *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*, (Workman Publishing) and received a Keeping the Blues Alive award, from the Blues Foundation.
www.cathead.biz

In addition to his participation in the organization of the Juke Joint Festival, owning Cat Head Delta Blues and Folk Art, Inc. and a Music and Tourism business, Roger Stolle has written a book about the Blues, Hidden History of Mississippi Blues, co-produced the award winning film M for Mississippi: a Road Trip through the Birthplace of the Blues and has produced several critically acclaimed Blues CDs/DVDs. In his “spare time” he is a magazine columnist for Blues Review, WROX deejay, XM/Sirius radio correspondent and Ground Zero Blues Club music coordinator.