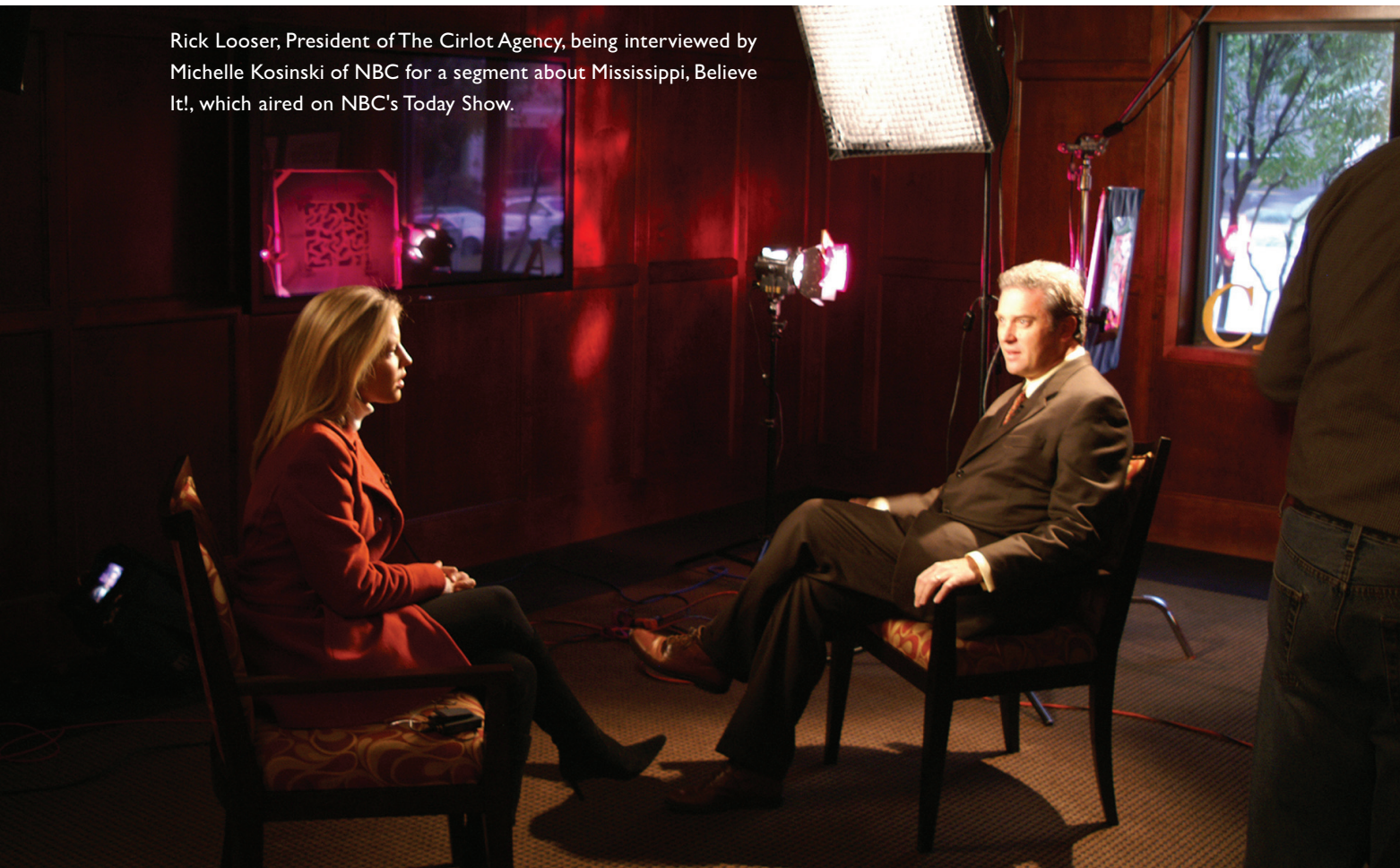


Rick Looser, President of The Cirlot Agency, being interviewed by Michelle Kosinski of NBC for a segment about Mississippi, Believe It!, which aired on NBC's Today Show.



Mississippi, BELIEVE IT!

BY KATHY K. MARTIN / PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF THE CIRLOT AGENCY

The Cirlot agency public service campaign, designed to tackle stereotypes, scores a big win for the state of Mississippi.

The public service announcements are edgy; some are even comical. Better yet, political correctness takes a backseat to raw honesty.

And that's why Jackson-based marketing, public relations and corporate communications firm, The Cirlot Agency, believes that its "Mississippi, Believe It!" public service campaign serves its purpose. It creatively confronts all those longstanding stereotypes that have plagued the state for many years through movies and being the butt of jokes.

The posters feature headlines such as, "Yes, we wear shoes. A few of us even wear cleats," which

touts the many legendary football players from the state, and "Meet a Few of Our New Good Ole Boys," which highlights the many African-American elected officials in the state, more than any other state in the country, as well as women and Native Americans in high positions.

Not unlike many other interesting ideas, the campaign was born about six years ago when Rick Looser, president and chief operating officer of The Cirlot Agency, had a chance conversation when he was seated next to a young boy from Connecticut on an airplane.

When the boy heard that Looser was from Mississippi, he immediately asked if he saw the Ku Klux Klan in his neighborhood and if he hated all black people. Coming not long after a similar discussion at a business writers' meeting about the state's image, the questions were both a slap in the face and a call to action.

Looser returned to work and immediately gained support from the agency's staff to tackle the issue the best way they knew how – through the creative process.

"The state has so much to offer here, but nobody knows about it," explains Looser, "so with the agency celebrating its 20th anniversary that year, we saw the campaign as our gift to the state, a thank-you for being a part of a place where you can do good business and raise a family."

After tossing around many ideas, Looser and his staff decided that the best approach would be to be both candid and informative: "We really thought that we had to address the 800-pound gorilla that was sitting in the room and that was all the stereo-



Rick Looser, President of
The Cirlot Agency



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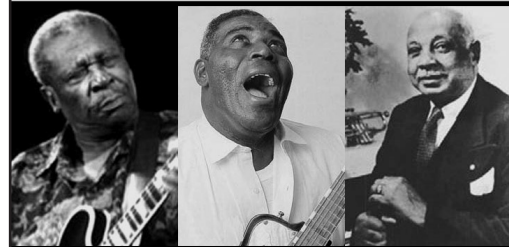


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But, Mississippi taught the world to see ... and

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Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Little Milton, B.B. King ... they a

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types. We decided to dispel each one
with intelligent ammunition.” He
estimates that the agency has spent
more than \$365,000 of its own time
and money on the 14 announce-
ments, which include three new ads
debuted late last year.

With a \$40,000 printing and
paper donation from Service Printers
of Flowood, the agency began in
2005 the process of distributing all
the posters to media outlets and
every school, college and university
throughout the state.

The posters were also sent to the

No White. e Blues.



Little Milton Bo Diddley Muddy Waters

s see varying shades of gray.
hear ... the Blues. Charlie
oker, Bo Diddley, Muddy
all travelled the most revered

MISSISSIPPI... *Believe It!*™

nation's top 100 daily newspapers, top consumer Web sites and news, travel, business and economic magazines. The reaction was almost immediate.

"AP (Associated Press) ran a story and pretty soon we were seeing the posters all over, from Tuscaloosa to Taiwan," Looser reports. The campaign was also featured on NBC's Today Show last spring, as well as in many other well-known newspapers, magazines and radio programs.

In addition to all the free publicity and generation of goodwill, another



Seated: Lori Green, Tosha Pennington, Missy Roberts, Christie Thomas
Standing: Laura West, Sarah Cooper, Allison Briscoe, Jennifer Taylor, Diane Brant, Liz Sanders, Janice Griffin, Jennifer Brown
Not Pictured: Jill Bailey - Owner

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Left to Right: Madison Lannon, Samantha Holden, Chantelle Brandon, Jill Bailey - Owner, Corey Welch, Angie Coleman, Adrienne Kelso, Mandy Profit

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Not Pictured: Bethany Denley & Angela McCaleb

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