



Creativity and community spirit
pave the road to recovery
for Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

art of dixie



Artist Joely Corban (above) works on a series of murals portraying the devastation in Ocean Springs after Hurricane Katrina and the community's rebirth. "We want to rebuild people and get them looking forward," she says. Top: A mural by Vincent Palmer shows Ruskin Oak, a local landmark that survived the storm.

while much of the Mississippi coast struggles to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Ocean Springs is thriving in the aftermath. The town's secret? Geography and art.

"We were blessed," says resident Terry Fountain. Because of the town's location on higher ground, much of its infrastructure survived the waters that surged from the bay. Homes, rather than businesses and services, saw the most damage. "I came back three days after Katrina and expected debris to be up to Highway 90, but

everyone was out riding their bikes," says Mickie Miller, owner of a pet boutique. "Store owners who could open, opened."

Ocean Springs, touted as an art colony more than 100 years ago, had another thing going for it. Art is everywhere here—from outdoor murals to the co-op Art House to downtown galleries nestled between lawyers' offices and antiques shops. One of the earliest post-Katrina cultural events, a concert by regional artists, honored and encouraged those who were rebuilding.

Home to painter and muralist Walter Anderson

TEXT BY GAYLE K. CHRISTOPHER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEAN ALLSOPP AND REX PERRY

“I like the speed of life here,” says Henry Schulten, a repeat visitor from Germany. “It is very different from home.”



and his brother Peter, a potter and founder of Shearwater Pottery, the town has a vibrant creative scene, with almost 300 members in the Ocean Springs Art Association. “We are an art-oriented community,” says Betty Magee, executive director of the Mary C. O’Keefe Cultural Center for Arts and Education. The Mary C serves as a base for performing and visual arts in the three-county coastal area. The WPA-era building, once a school, fell into disrepair before the arts community helped turn it into a cultural center. It houses a gallery, a theater, and rooms for meetings and classes. Original tile murals and reproductions of Walter Anderson’s paintings decorate the foyer and theater. “If this center goes where we think it is going to go, it will be a venue to change lives,” Betty says.

Katrina wiped out many studios in the area, including those of Shearwater Pottery. “Like most people, we suffered great loss,” says Marjorie Ashley, Peter’s daughter. More than 12 buildings, including the showroom and museum, were lost. After rebuilding, master

In all, nine members of the Anderson family participate in the Shearwater Pottery business. Only about 20 percent of Walter Anderson’s silk-screen frames (top, left) could be salvaged from the wreckage of the original Shearwater museum. Hurricane Katrina also destroyed the Andersons’ homes. Undeterred, master potter Jim Anderson still turns clay into masterpieces. Peter Wade (top, right), grandson of founder Peter Anderson, sets out pieces to dry. Bottom, right: Diners enjoy Italian fare at Al Fresco’s. The fresh-baked bread alone is worth the trip, and repeat visitors know to buy a bottle of house vinaigrette.

tap the springs

where to eat: Al Fresco's Italian Bistro; 228/818-9395. Bayview Gourmet; 228/875-4252. BB's Po-Boys; 228/875-2702. Manhattan Grill; 228/872-6480. Phoenicia Gourmet; 228/875-0603. TatoNut Shop; 228/872-2076.

where to shop: Hillyer House; 228/875-8065 or hillyerhouse.com. Ocean Springs Fresh Market; 800/683-4176 or oceanspringsfreshmarket.com. The Art House; 228/875-9285 or osarthouse.org. The Very Thing; 228/872-8862. Two Dogs Dancing; 228/875-0150 or twodogsdancing.com.

where to stay: Beau Rivage, just over the Bay Bridge in Biloxi; 228/386-7444 or beaurivage.com. Oak Shade Bed and Breakfast; 888/875-4711 or oakshade.net.

what to see and do: L&N Depot (pick up a map for the Live Oaks Bicycle Route); 228/875-4424. Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Center for Arts and Education; 228/818-2878 or themaryc.org. Shearwater Pottery; 228/875-7320. Walter Anderson Museum of Art; 228/872-3164 or walterandersonmuseum.org.

for more information: Call 228/875-4424 or visit oceanspringschamber.com.

potter Jim Anderson returned to his studio in an open-air building overlooking the harbor, where 80-year-old machinery is still used to mix the clay.

But Ocean Springs had more than art to pull it through. "It's a nice, quaint little town," says shop owner Sherry O'Brien. Visitors find park benches, but no parking meters. People walk or ride bikes downtown to restaurants featuring alfresco dining and live music. On a Saturday morning, locals linger over breakfast at Bayview Gourmet. Then

they walk across the street to the fresh market to sample local honey and specialty goat cheeses, and to enjoy performers. "I like the speed of life

here," says Henry Schulten, a repeat visitor from Germany. "It is very different from home."

This little Gulf Coast town plans to remain different, with art pointing the way toward a full recovery. "Ocean Springs is unique in its thinking," Betty says. "The art community here leads, and the others come to see what we are doing." 🌿