

Relay of Voices Research Expedition Travels Length of Mississippi

Team Collects Story Data Every Step of the Way

MINNEAPOLIS, MN, UNITED STATES, July 9, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Relay of Voices \(Relay\)](#), a four-month long expedition from the Headwaters to the Mouth of the Mississippi River, launched today. Spearheaded by Victoria Bradford Styrbicki and with the assistance of a support team as well as regional volunteers, Relay embarks on a mission to collect individual stories across the Mississippi River region, seeking out the common voice of home and rootedness and disrupting the national narrative of disconnection. The entire endeavor will take place from July through November 2019.

Relay has identified [104 communities](#), 20 – 40 miles apart, to travel to daily downriver through Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana, finishing at the Mouth of the River at the Gulf of Mexico. Each stop along the way has been identified and vetted into an organized route to provide accurate representation of both the river and diversity of the communities surrounding. A primary reason for choosing the Mississippi River region was the dichotomy of rural and urban communities there, with many of them still making a living off the water and land. The river is home to a collection of small towns ranging between 200 and 60,000 in population anchored by 7 cities with populations over 100,000, serving as beacons of culture and urbanity along the water way.

“We want to support a culture of listening around the communities of the Mississippi River,” says Executive and Artistic Director, Victoria Bradford Styrbicki. “As we build a vocabulary drawn from these lives that are shaped around a volatile natural resource as well as a reliance on community relationships, a story that resonates beyond the river and connects all Americans will emerge. Through accumulation and just being present, we hope to be a catalyst for all the voices of the river while also providing insightful data for scientific purposes.”

Relay has partnered with the Water Institute of the Gulf to gather interview and geographic data from fieldwork which reveals the overwhelming need to understand how the “One River” affects the outcomes at its terminal. The Water Institute of the Gulf’s Human Dimensions Director and Social Geographer, Scott Hemmerling, will help shape the questions the Relay researchers ask in interviews with local residents along their route as well as provide GPS body cameras for the researchers to geolocate the information they gather. This data will then be processed by the Institute in order to be collated for future use in studies and continued fieldwork in Louisiana.

Relay's artistic process will be an endurance effort. The roughly marathon's distance between each town will be approached as a duathlon—a run out of town, cycling the longer stretch between, followed by a run into the next town. Styrbicki will “gather the landscape” making observations with her senses as well as with a GPS body camera mounted to her torso or bike. This landscape data will be used in mapping analysis by the Water Institute of the Gulf as well as shared at the storytelling event held in each town upon Relay's arrival. Many communities have planned a walking, running, or cycling escort in or out of town to share in the effort. Creative placemaking activities in towns consist of welcomes, two- to three-hour interactions with individual local residents, and a “relay of voices” community gathering in the evening. Interaction participants have been selected by the local partners, reaching deep into the community to address diversity of age, background, race/ethnicity, profession and relationship to the river.

Relay has partnered with 29 Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs), 19 Chambers of Commerce, 30 arts, culture and educational organizations, 45 city and county governments, as well as hundreds of individual volunteers local to each community to solidify programming and to assist with accommodation, transportation, event space and nourishment to support the expedition as it travels south.

Relay team members include director Victoria Bradford Styrbicki, project collaborator Tom Styrbicki, certified triathlon coach Nic King-Ruley, and project manager Dinah Bradford. Relay of Voices is a project of A House Unbuilt, a 501c3 nonprofit corporation based in Lake Charles, La. and Chicago, Ill.

For more information and photos, download the Relay [media kit here](#).

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