SHREVEPORT (AP) — Turn an ear toward the past and you may hear the sound of a daring man who became a rock 'n' roll icon, another who defined country, the sound of gospel in Northwest Louisiana's churches and guitar in its bars, Cajun and zydeco on South Louisiana streets, jazz in the French Quarter and the blues in Baton Rouge.

Louisiana's heritage offers music for every ear, every heart, every soul, say tourism officials, and that could be the key to Louisiana's future.

For the second year, the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism — through contracted firms Peter A. Mayer Advertising in Baton Rouge and Williams Creative Group in Shreveport — has lured writers and photographers from around the world with the promise of a whirlwind journey through the state. In the process, officials hope to recruit the media in the campaign to spread the word of the state's varied musical heritage.

With scheduled stops in Baton Rouge, Lafayette and New Orleans, the Louisiana Music Train this year is carrying nearly 30 journalists on its four-day journey. The ride began in Shreveport Wednesday.

Some have all-expenses-paid trips. Others pick up their own tab. Either way, officials say the cost — about $35,000 was spent on last year's train; $70,000 was budgeted for this year's — is well worth the resulting publicity.

Last year, the music train carried 16 journalists and resulted in more than $300,000 worth of publicity, and officials say that estimate is conservative. The train is actually the Kansas City Southern "Southern Belle" used in Harry Truman's famous whistle-stop campaign tour: it's the car where the famous photograph of the newly elected president is seen holding the incorrect "Dewey Defeats Truman" newspaper headline.

After the 2000 music train, articles appeared in the Austin American-Statesman, Baton Rouge Advocate, Mexican publications El Universal and Reforma, Brazilian newspaper Gazeta Mercantil, and several Canadian publications, including the Ottawa Sun, Travelweek Bulletin Magazine and City Parent Magazine, according to Kristian Sonnier with Peter A. Mayer Advertising.

Peter A. Mayer Advertising and Williams Creative Group, representing the Office of Tourism, had a simple goal. Promote the state to journalists who, in turn, would write about their experiences for consumers who would then be persuaded to visit Louisiana, bringing their out-of-state dollars with them. Turn an ear to the future and you might hear the sound of singing cash registers.

"After word of mouth, written editorial is the most important factor people consider," said Phillip Jones, secretary of the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism. "The reality is people tend to believe what they read in an article."

The PR value of an article is determined by considering the cost to place an ad of the same size in that particular publication. Jones said the $70,000 budgeted for this year's train will result in at least 20 times that amount in publicity.

Jennifer Adams, associate vice president of communications for the Shreveport-Bossier Convention and Tourist Bureau, said the value goes beyond advertising costs. "The writer is able to put emotions and feelings into it and the consumer will see it through their eyes. I couldn't do that in an ad."

It's not unusual for convention and tourist bureaus to bring in journalists. Jones said more than 1,000 journalists visited the state last year, resulting in millions of dollars worth of coverage.

What makes this press junket different is its focus on music, not to mention the use of a historic train and an itinerary more crowded than Bourbon Street on Mardi Gras.