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Contact: Josh Bean | 251-327-0901 | josh@dcwins.com

Tourism veteran joins ALBBAA as marketing director

Award-winning tourism professional brings statewide experience to the Black Belt's outdoor recreation and cultural heritage brand

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (Oct. 16, 2026) — The Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association has named Candace Johnson its new marketing director to help tell the story of the Black Belt's regional tourism offerings to travelers nationwide.

Johnson, a Black Belt native, brings more than 20 years of experience in tourism, economic development and strategic communications. She joined ALBBAA earlier this month.

“Candace has dedicated her career to sharing the places, people and experiences that make rural Alabama special,” said ALBBAA Executive Director Pam Swanner. “Her knowledge of the region and strong relationships with our partners will help inspire more visitors to discover Alabama’s Black Belt. We’re delighted to welcome her on board.”

Johnson most recently served as director of tourism and community development at The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development, where she led statewide initiatives that linked universities, nonprofits, businesses and government agencies around shared economic goals. She directed destination development work that included the Alabama Birding Trails, managed grant-funded programs and represented the university with state tourism leaders. She joined the university in 2012 as a project manager, helping communities across Alabama with strategic planning, tourism development and grant administration.

In 2024, she founded Candace Johnson Consulting, advising tourism, nonprofit and economic development organizations on marketing strategy, communications and stakeholder engagement.

“I’m honored to join Alabama Black Belt Adventures and build on the incredible work being done to showcase this region’s unique assets, rich heritage and welcoming communities,” Johnson said. “I look forward to working alongside our partners to strengthen rural tourism, create new opportunities for economic growth, and share the stories that make Alabama’s Black Belt such a special place to visit.”

Johnson’s Black Belt roots run deep. Earlier in her career she served as Selma Dallas County Tourism Director and as a community relations representative for the Selma-Dallas County Chamber. She also interned in the marketing department at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in Montgomery in college.

Johnson’s work has earned statewide recognition, including the Alabama Tourism Partnership of the Year Award in 2023 and the Premier Rural Tourism Leadership Award in 2019. She has served on the boards of Alabama Main Street, the AL/MS/TN Rural Tourism Association, the Alabama Bass Trail and the Auburn University at Montgomery Alumni Board.

Johnson earned a bachelor's degree in mass communications from Auburn University at Montgomery. She is a Certified Tour Professional and a Travel Marketing Professional, with additional training in crisis communications, grantsmanship, facilitation and interpretive guiding.

“Candace brings the talent and expertise to expand our reach, grow visitation and deliver greater tourism benefits to communities across the Black Belt,” Swanner said.

The Black Belt includes the following 23 counties: Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Crenshaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lee, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Monroe, Montgomery, Perry, Pickens, Pike, Russell, Sumter, Tuscaloosa and Wilcox.

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The Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association *is committed to promoting and enhancing outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities in the Black Belt in a manner that provides economic and ecological benefits to the region and its citizens. For information, go to AlabamaBlackBeltAdventures.org.*