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FIRST BANCSHARES INC /MS/  
Form 10KSB  
March 26, 2004

U.S. SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20549

FORM 10-KSB

ANNUAL REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934

For the fiscal year ended December 31, 2003

OR

TRANSITION REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934

For the transition period from \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_

Commission file no. 33-94288

THE FIRST BANCSHARES, INC.

-----  
(Name of Small Business Issuer in Its Charter)

Mississippi

64-0862173

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(State or Other Jurisdiction of  
Incorporation or Organization)

(I.R.S. Employer Identifica

6480 U.S. Hwy. 98 West  
Hattiesburg, Mississippi

39402

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(Address of principal executive offices)

(Zip Code)

Issuer's telephone number: (601) 268-8998

Securities registered under Section 12(b) of the Exchange Act:

Title of Each Class

Name of Each Exchange on  
Which Registered

None

None

Securities registered pursuant to section 12(g) of the Act:

Common Stock, \$1.00 par value

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(Title of Class)

Check whether the issuer (1) filed all reports required to be filed by Section 13 or 15 (Exchange Act during the past 12 months (or for such shorted period that the Registrant was required to file reports), and (2) has been subject to such filing requirements for the past 90 days.

Yes  No   
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Check if there is no disclosure of delinquent filers in response to Item 405 of Regulation S-K

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form, and no disclosure will be contained, to the best of registrant's knowledge, in definitive p information statements incorporated by reference in Part III of this Form 10-KSB or any amendment 10-KSB. [ ]

State issuer's revenues for its most recent fiscal year. \$12,257,671

The aggregate market value of the Common Stock held by non-affiliates of the Company on was \$14,796,250. This calculation is based upon an estimate of the fair market value of the Comm Company's Board of Directors of \$17.50 per share. There is not an active trading market for the C it is not possible to identify precisely the market value of the Common Stock.

State the number of shares outstanding of each of the issuer's classes of common equity, latest practicable date. 1,165,165 on March 25, 2004

DOCUMENTS INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE

Portions of the following documents are incorporated by reference to Parts II and III of report: Proxy Statement dated April 22, 2004, and the Annual Report to the Stockholders for the y December 31, 2003.

Transitional Small Business Disclosure Format. (Check one):

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ X \_\_\_\_\_

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## THE FIRST BANCSHARES, INC.

## FORM 10-KSB

## PART I

This Report contains statements which constitute forward-looking statements within the meaning of Section 27A of the Securities Act of 1933 and the Securities Exchange Act of 1934. These statements appear in a number of places in this Report and include all statements regarding the intent, belief or current expectations of the Company, its directors or its officers with respect to, among other things: (i) the Company's financing plans; (ii) trends affecting the Company's financial condition or results of operations; (iii) the Company's growth strategy and operating strategy; and (iv) the declaration and payment of dividends. Investors are cautioned that any such forward-looking statements are not guarantees of future performance and involve risks and uncertainties, and that actual results may differ materially from those projected in the forward-looking statements as a result of various factors discussed herein and those factors discussed in detail in the Company's filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

**ITEM 1. BUSINESS.****BUSINESS OF THE COMPANY****General**

The First Bancshares, Inc. (the Company) was incorporated on June 23, 1995 to serve as a holding company for The First National Bank of South Mississippi (The First) located in Hattiesburg, Mississippi and The First National Bank of the Pine Belt (Pine Belt), located in Laurel, Mississippi (collectively, the Banks). The First began operations on August 5, 1996 from its main office in the Oak Grove community, which was on the outskirts of Hattiesburg but now is included in the city of Hattiesburg. The First also operates two other branches in Hattiesburg, one in Purvis, Mississippi, and one in Picayune, Mississippi. Pine Belt began banking operations on January 19, 1999. Pine Belt has one office located in Laurel, Mississippi. The Company and its subsidiary banks engage in a general commercial and retail banking business characterized by personalized service and local decision-making, emphasizing the banking needs of small- to medium-sized businesses, professional concerns and individuals. The First and Pine Belt are wholly-owned subsidiary banks of the Company. In January, 2004, the two banks were consolidated to form one bank, The First, A National Banking Association.

**Location and Service Area**

*The First.* The First serves the cities of Hattiesburg, Purvis, Picayune, and the surrounding areas of Lamar, Forrest and Pearl River Counties, Mississippi. The First has a main office located in the city of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in Lamar County. The First also has a branch office located on Highway 589 in the city of Purvis, Mississippi, also in Lamar County, a third office located at the intersection of Lincoln Road and South 28th Avenue in Hattiesburg, a fourth location at 3318 Hardy Street in Hattiesburg, and a fifth location at Hwy 43 South in Picayune, Mississippi.

The main office primarily serves the area in and around the northern portion of Lamar County. The Purvis office primarily serves the area in and around Purvis, Mississippi, which is in the east central part of Lamar County and is the county seat. Lamar County is located in the southeastern section of Mississippi. Hattiesburg, one of the largest cities in Mississippi, is located in Forrest and Lamar Counties. The Picayune office primarily serves the area in and around Picayune, Mississippi, including areas of north Hancock County and Pearl River, LA and Slidell, LA. Picayune is located in the southern part of Pearl River County. Pearl River County is located in the southern section. Hattiesburg can be reached via U.S. Highways 98 and 49 and Interstate 59. Major employers located in the Lamar and Forrest County areas include Forrest General Hospital, the University of Southern Mississippi, the Methodist Hospital, Camp Shelby, the Hattiesburg Public Schools, the Hattiesburg Clinic, the City of Hattiesburg, and Marshall Durbin Poultry. The principal components of the economy of the Lamar and Forrest County areas include service industries, wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, and transportation and public utilities. Major employers in the Pearl River County area include Stennis Space Center, Chevron, Texaco, Arizona Chemical, American Crescent Elevator Co., City of Picayune, Crosby Memorial Hospital and the public schools. The principal components of the economy of the Pearl River County area include timer, service industries, wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, and transportation and public utilities.

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The First opened a branch in a modular unit in Picayune, MS in Pearl River County in June, 2003. The permanent office is planned to open in March of 2004 at the same location. It will be a 3,800 square foot building near the intersection of Interstate Highway 59 and Highway 43 in Picayune and will serve the Pearl River County market.

Pine Belt. Pine Belt serves the city of Laurel and the surrounding area of Jones County, Mississippi. Pine Belt's main office is located at 1945 Highway 15 North, Laurel, Mississippi. Pine Belt expects to draw 75% of its retail business within a five mile radius of this location, with the remaining business coming from other areas of Jones County, as well as portions of Jasper County, Wayne County, Smith County, and Covington County that are within a 15 mile radius of Pine Belt.

### Banking Services

The Company strives to provide its customers with the breadth of products and services comparable to those offered by large regional banks, while maintaining the quick response and personal service of a locally owned and managed bank. In addition to offering a full range of deposit services and commercial and personal loans, The First offers products such as mortgage loan originations. The following is a description of the products and services offered or planned to be offered by the Hattiesburg and Laurel Banks.

- o Deposit Services. The Banks offer a full range of deposit services that are typically a banks and savings and loan associations, including checking accounts, NOW accounts, savings and other time deposits of various types, ranging from daily money market accounts to long term certificates of deposit. The transaction accounts and time certificates are tailored to the principal market area at rates competitive to those offered by other banks in the area. The Banks offer certain retirement account services, such as Individual Retirement Accounts. All deposit accounts are insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (the "FDIC") up to the amount allowed by law. The Banks solicit these accounts from individuals, businesses, and organizations, and governmental authorities.
- o Loan Products. The Banks offer a full range of commercial and personal loans. Commercial loans include both secured and unsecured loans for working capital (including loans secured by inventory and receivable), business expansion (including acquisition of real estate and improvements), equipment and machinery. Consumer loans include equity lines of credit and secured and unsecured loans for financing automobiles, home improvements, education, and personal investments. The Banks also offer real estate construction and acquisition loans. The Banks' lending activities are subject to the lending limits imposed by federal law. While differing limits apply in certain circumstances, the limits on the type of loan or the nature of the borrower (including the borrower's relationship with the Bank) in general the Banks are subject to a loans-to-one-borrower limit of an amount equal to 10% of the Bank's unimpaired capital and surplus. The Banks may not make any loans to any director, officer, or 10% shareholder unless the loan is approved by the Board of Directors of the Bank. Loans made on terms not more favorable to such a person than would be available to a person not related to the Banks.
- o Mortgage Loan Divisions. The Banks have mortgage loan divisions which originate loans to purchase existing or construct new homes and to refinance existing mortgages.

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- o Other Services. Other bank services include on-line Internet banking services, voice response, inquiry service, commercial sweep accounts, cash management services, safe deposit boxes, checks, direct deposit of payroll and social security checks, and automatic drafts for various accounts. The Banks are associated with the Money Belt, Gulfnet, and Plus networks of automatic teller machines that may be used by the Banks' customers throughout Mississippi and other regions. The Banks also offer VISA and MasterCard credit card services through a correspondent bank.

### Competition

The Banks generally compete with other financial institutions through the selection of banking products and services offered, the pricing of services, the level of service provided, the convenience and availability of services, and the degree of expertise and the personal manner in which services are offered. Mississippi law permits statewide branching by banks and savings institutions, and many financial institutions in the state have branch networks. Consequently, commercial banking in Mississippi is highly competitive. Many large banking organizations currently operate in the Company's market area, several of which are controlled by out-of-state ownership. In addition, competition between

commercial banks and thrift institutions (savings institutions and credit unions) has been intensified significantly by the elimination of many previous distinctions between the various types of financial institutions and the expanded powers and increased activity of thrift institutions in areas of banking which previously had been the sole domain of commercial banks. Recent legislation, together with other regulatory changes by the primary regulators of the various financial institutions, has resulted in the almost total elimination of practical distinctions between a commercial bank and a thrift institution. Consequently, competition among financial institutions of all types is largely unlimited with respect to legal ability and authority to provide most financial services.

The Company faces increased competition from both federally-chartered and state-chartered financial and thrift institutions, as well as credit unions, consumer finance companies, insurance companies, and other institutions in the Company's market area. Some of these competitors are not subject to the same degree of regulation and restriction imposed upon the Company. Many of these competitors also have broader geographic markets and substantially greater resources and lending limits than the Company and offer certain services such as trust banking that the Company does not currently provide. In addition, many of these competitors have numerous branch offices located throughout the extended market areas of the Company that may provide these competitors with an advantage in geographic convenience that the Company does not have at present.

Currently there are thirteen other commercial banks, two savings institutions, and three credit unions operating in The First's primary service area, and seven other commercial banks and two credit unions operating in Pine Belt's primary service area.

## Employees

As of March 5, 2004, the Company had 81 full-time employees and 12 part-time employees.

## SUPERVISION AND REGULATION

The Company and its banks are subject to state and federal banking laws and regulations which impose specific requirements or restrictions on and provide for general regulatory oversight with respect to virtually all aspects of operations. These laws and regulations are generally intended to protect depositors, not shareholders. To the extent that the following summary describes statutory or regulatory provisions, it is qualified in its entirety by reference to the particular statutory and regulatory provisions. Any change in applicable laws or regulations may have a material effect on the business and prospects of the Company. Beginning with the enactment of the Financial Institutions Reform, Recovery and Enforcement Act of 1989 ( FIRREA ) and following with Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Improvement Act of 1991 ( FDICIA ), numerous additional regulatory requirements have been placed on the banking industry in the past several years, and additional changes have been proposed. The operations of the Company and the Banks may be affected by legislative changes and the policies of various regulatory authorities. The Company is unable to predict the nature or the extent of the effect on its business and earnings that fiscal or monetary policies, economic control, or new federal or state legislation may have in the future.

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## The Company

Because it owns the outstanding capital stock of the Hattiesburg and Laurel Banks, the Company is a bank holding company within the meaning of the federal Bank Holding Company Act of 1956 (the BHCA ).

*The BHCA.* Under the BHCA, the Company is subject to periodic examination by the Federal Reserve and is required to file periodic reports of its operations and such additional information as the Federal Reserve may require. The Company's and the Banks' activities are limited to banking, managing or controlling banks, furnishing services to or performing services for its subsidiaries, and engaging in other activities that the Federal Reserve determines to be so closely related to banking or managing or controlling banks as to be a proper incident thereto.

*Investments, Control, and Activities.* With certain limited exceptions, the BHCA requires every bank holding company to obtain the prior approval of the Federal Reserve before (i) acquiring substantially all the assets of any bank, (ii) acquiring direct or indirect ownership or control of any voting shares of any bank if after such acquisition it would own or control more than 5% of the voting shares of such bank (unless it already owns or controls the majority of such shares), or (iii) merging or consolidating with another bank holding company.

In addition, and subject to certain exceptions, the BHCA and the Change in Bank Control Act, together with regulations thereunder, require Federal Reserve approval (or, depending on the circumstances, no notice of disapproval) prior to any person or company acquiring control of a bank holding company, such as the Company. Control is conclusively presumed to exist if an individual or company acquires 25% or more of any class of voting securities of the bank holding company. Control is rebuttably presumed to exist if a person acquires 10% or more but less than 25% of any class of voting securities and either the Company has registered securities under Section 12 of the Exchange Act (which the Company has done) or no other person owns a greater percentage of that class of voting securities immediately after the transaction. The

regulations provide a procedure for challenge of the rebuttable control presumption.

Under the BHCA, a bank holding company is generally prohibited from engaging in, or acquiring direct or indirect control of more than 5% of the voting shares of any company engaged in nonbanking activities, unless the Federal Reserve Board, by order or regulation, has found those activities to be so closely related to banking or managing or controlling banks as to be a proper incident thereto. Some of the activities that the Federal Reserve Board has determined by regulation to be proper incidents to the business of a bank holding company include making or servicing loans and certain types of leases, engaging in certain insurance and discount brokerage activities, performing certain data processing services, acting in certain circumstances as a fiduciary or investment or financial adviser, owning savings associations, and making investments in certain corporations or projects designed primarily to promote community welfare.

The Federal Reserve Board has imposed certain capital requirements on the Company under the BHCA, including a minimum leverage ratio and a minimum ratio of qualifying capital to risk-weighted assets. These requirements are described below under Capital Regulations. Subject to its capital requirements and certain other restrictions, the Company may borrow money to make a capital contribution to the Banks, and such loans may be repaid from dividends paid from the Banks to the Company (although the ability of the Banks to pay dividends is subject to regulatory restrictions as described below in The Banks - Dividends ). The Company is also able to raise capital for contribution to the Banks by issuing securities without having to receive regulatory approval, subject to compliance with federal and state securities laws.

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*Source of Strength; Cross-Guarantee.* In accordance with Federal Reserve Board policy, the Company is expected to act as a source of financial strength to the Banks and to commit resources to support the Banks in circumstances in which the Company might not otherwise do so. Under the BHCA, the Federal Reserve Board may require a bank holding company to terminate any activity or relinquish control of a nonbank subsidiary (other than a nonbank subsidiary of a bank) upon the Federal Reserve Board's determination that such activity or control constitutes a serious risk to the financial soundness or stability of any subsidiary depository institution of the bank holding company. Further, federal bank regulatory authorities have additional discretion to require a bank holding company to divest itself of any bank or nonbank subsidiary if the agency determines that divestiture may aid the depository institution's financial condition.

## **The Banks**

The Hattiesburg and Laurel Banks operate as national banking associations incorporated under the laws of the United States and subject to examination by the Office of Comptroller of the Currency ( OCC ). Deposits in the Banks are insured by the FDIC up to a maximum amount (generally \$100,000 per depositor, subject to aggregation rules). The OCC and the FDIC regulate or monitor virtually all areas of the Banks operations, including security devices and procedures, adequacy of capitalization and loan loss reserves, loans, investments, borrowings, deposits, mergers, issuances of securities, payment of dividends, interest rates payable on deposits, interest rates or fees chargeable on loans, establishment of branches, corporate reorganizations, maintenance of books and records, and adequacy of staff training to carry on safe lending and deposit gathering practices. The OCC requires the Banks to maintain certain capital ratios and imposes limitations on the Banks' aggregate investment in real estate, bank premises, and furniture and fixtures. The Banks are required by the OCC to prepare quarterly reports on their financial condition and to conduct an annual audit of their financial affairs in compliance with minimum standards and procedures prescribed by the OCC.

Under FDICIA, all insured institutions must undergo regular on-site examinations by their appropriate banking agency. The cost of examinations of insured depository institutions and any affiliates may be assessed by the appropriate agency against each institution or affiliate as it deems necessary or appropriate. Insured institutions are required to submit annual reports to the FDIC and the appropriate agency (and state supervisor when applicable). FDICIA also directs the FDIC to develop with other appropriate agencies a method for insured depository institutions to provide supplemental disclosure of the estimated fair market value of assets and liabilities, to the extent feasible and practicable, in any balance sheet, financial statement, report of condition, or any other report of any insured depository institution. FDICIA also requires the federal banking regulatory agencies to prescribe, by regulation, standards for all insured depository institutions and depository institution holding companies relating, among other things, to: (i) internal controls, information systems, and audit systems; (ii) loan documentation; (iii) credit underwriting; (iv) interest rate risk exposure; and (v) asset quality.

National banks and their holding companies which have been chartered or registered or undergone a change in control within the past two years or which have been deemed by the OCC or the Federal Reserve Board, respectively, to be troubled institutions must give the OCC or the Federal Reserve Board, respectively, thirty days prior notice of the appointment of any senior executive officer or director. Within the thirty day period, the OCC or the Federal Reserve Board, as the case may be, may approve or disapprove any such appointment.

*Deposit Insurance.* The FDIC establishes rates for the payment of premiums by federally insured banks and thrifts for deposit insurance. A separate Bank Insurance Fund ( BIF ) and Savings Association Insurance Fund ( SAIF ) are maintained for commercial banks and thrifts, respectively, with insurance premiums from the industry used to offset losses from insurance payouts when banks and thrifts fail. Since 1993, insured depository institutions like the Banks have paid for deposit insurance under a risk-based premium system.

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*Transactions With Affiliates and Insiders.* The Banks are subject to Section 23A of the Federal Reserve Act, which places limits on the amount of loans to, and certain other transactions with, affiliates, as well as on the amount of advances to third parties collateralized by the securities or obligations of affiliates. The aggregate of all covered transactions is limited in amount, as to any one affiliate, to 10% of the Bank's capital and surplus and, as to all affiliates combined, to 20% of the Bank's capital and surplus. Furthermore, within the foregoing limitations as to amount, each covered transaction must meet specified collateral requirements.

The Banks are also subject to Section 23B of the Federal Reserve Act, which prohibits an institution from engaging in certain transactions with affiliates unless the transactions are on terms substantially the same, or at least as favorable to such institution, as those prevailing at the time for comparable transactions with nonaffiliated companies. The Banks are subject to certain restrictions on extensions of credit to executive officers, directors, certain principal shareholders, and their related interests. Such extensions of credit (i) must be made on substantially the same terms, including interest rates and collateral, as those prevailing at the time for comparable transactions with third parties and (ii) must not involve more than the normal risk of repayment or present other unfavorable features.

*Dividends.* A national bank may not pay dividends from its capital. All dividends must be paid out of undivided profits then on hand, after deducting expenses, including reserves for losses and bad debts. In addition, a national bank is prohibited from declaring a dividend on its shares of common stock until its surplus equals its stated capital, unless the bank has transferred to surplus no less than one-tenth of its net profits of the preceding two consecutive half-year periods (in the case of an annual dividend). The approval of the OCC is required if the total of all dividends declared by a national bank in any calendar year exceeds the total of its net profits for that year combined with its retained net profits for the preceding two years, less any required transfers to surplus. In addition, under FDICIA, the banks may not pay a dividend if, after paying the dividend, the bank would be undercapitalized. See "Capital Regulations" below.

*Branching.* National banks are required by the National Bank Act to adhere to branch office banking laws applicable to state banks in the states in which they are located. Under current Mississippi law, the Banks may open branches throughout Mississippi with the prior approval of the OCC. In addition, with prior regulatory approval, the Banks are able to acquire existing banking operations in Mississippi. Furthermore, federal legislation has recently been passed which permits interstate branching. The new law permits out of state acquisitions by bank holding companies (subject to veto by new state law), interstate branching by banks if allowed by state law, interstate merging by banks, and de novo branching by national banks if allowed by state law. See "Recent Legislative Developments."

*Community Reinvestment Act.* The Community Reinvestment Act requires that, in connection with examinations of financial institutions within their respective jurisdictions, the Federal Reserve, the FDIC, the OCC, or the Office of Thrift Supervision shall evaluate the record of the financial institutions in meeting the credit needs of their local communities, including low and moderate income neighborhoods, consistent with the safe and sound operation of those institutions. These factors are also considered in evaluating mergers, acquisitions, and applications to open a branch or facility.

*Other Regulations.* Interest and certain other charges collected or contracted for by the Banks are subject to state usury laws and certain federal laws concerning interest rates. The Banks' loan operations are subject to certain federal laws applicable to credit transactions, such as the federal Truth-In-Lending Act, governing disclosures of credit terms to consumer borrowers; the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act of 1975, requiring financial institutions to provide information to enable the public and public officials to determine whether a financial institution is fulfilling its obligation to help meet the housing needs community it serves; the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of creed or other prohibited factors in extending credit; the Fair Credit Reporting Act of 1978, governing the use and provision of information to credit reporting agencies; the Fair Debt Collection Act, concerning the manner in which consumer debts may be collected by collection agencies; and the rules and regulations of the various federal agencies charged with the responsibility of implementing such federal laws. The deposit operations of the Banks also are subject to the Right to Financial Privacy Act, which imposes a duty to maintain confidentiality of consumer financial records and prescribes procedures for complying with administrative subpoenas of financial records, and the Electronic Funds Transfer Act and Regulation E issued by the Federal Reserve Board to implement that Act, which governs automatic deposits to and withdrawals from deposit accounts and customers' rights and liabilities arising from the use of automated teller machines and other electronic banking services.

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*Capital Regulations.* The federal bank regulatory authorities have adopted risk-based capital guidelines for banks and bank holding companies that are designed to make regulatory capital requirements more sensitive to differences in risk profile among banks and bank holding companies,

account for off-balance sheet exposure, and minimize disincentives for holding liquid assets. The resulting capital ratios represent qualifying capital as a percentage of total risk-weighted assets and off-balance sheet items. The guidelines are minimums, and the federal regulators have noted that banks and bank holding companies contemplating significant expansion programs should not allow expansion to diminish their capital ratios and should maintain ratios well in excess of the minimums. The current guidelines require all bank holding companies and federally-regulated banks to maintain a minimum risk-based total capital ratio equal to 8%, of which at least 4% must be Tier 1 capital. Tier 1 capital includes common shareholders' equity, qualifying perpetual preferred stock, and minority interests in equity accounts of consolidated subsidiaries, but excludes goodwill and most other intangibles and excludes the allowance for loan and lease losses. Tier 2 capital includes the excess of any preferred stock not included in Tier 1 capital, mandatory convertible securities, hybrid capital instruments, subordinated debt and intermediate term-preferred stock, and general reserves for loan and lease losses up to 1.25% of risk-weighted assets.

Under the guidelines, banks' and bank holding companies' assets are given risk-weights of 0%, 20%, 50% and 100%. In addition, certain off-balance sheet items are given credit conversion factors to convert them to asset equivalent amounts to which an appropriate risk-weight will apply. These computations result in the total risk-weighted assets. Most loans are assigned to the 100% risk category, except for first mortgage loans fully secured by residential property and, under certain circumstances, residential construction loans, both of which carry a 50% rating. Most investment securities are assigned to the 20% category, except for municipal or state revenue bonds, which have a 50% rating, and direct obligations of or obligations guaranteed by the United States Treasury or United States Government agencies, which have a 0% rating.

The federal bank regulatory authorities have also implemented a leverage ratio, which is Tier 1 capital as a percentage of average total assets less intangibles, to be used as a supplement to the risk-based guidelines. The principal objective of the leverage ratio is to place a constraint on the maximum degree to which a bank holding company may leverage its equity capital base. The minimum required leverage ratio for top-rated institutions is 3%, but most institutions are required to maintain an additional cushion of at least 100 to 200 basis points.

FDICIA established a capital-based regulatory scheme designed to promote early intervention for troubled banks and requires the FDIC to choose the least expensive resolution of bank failures. The capital-based regulatory framework contains five categories of compliance with regulatory capital requirements, including well capitalized, adequately capitalized, undercapitalized, significantly undercapitalized, and critically undercapitalized. To qualify as a well capitalized institution, a bank must have a leverage ratio of no less than 5%, a Tier 1 risk-based ratio of no less than 6%, and a total risk-based capital ratio of no less than 10%, and the Bank must not be under any order or directive from the appropriate regulatory agency to meet and maintain a specific capital level. As of December 31, 2003, the Company, The First, and Pine Belt were qualified as well capitalized.

Under the FDICIA regulations, the applicable agency can treat an institution as if it were in the next lower category if the agency determines (after notice and an opportunity for hearing) that the institution is in an unsafe or unsound condition or is engaging in an unsafe or unsound practice. The degree of regulatory scrutiny of a financial institution will increase, and the permissible activities of the institution will decrease, as it moves downward through the capital categories. Institutions that fall into one of the three undercapitalized categories may be required to (i) submit a capital restoration plan; (ii) raise additional capital; (iii) restrict their growth, deposit interest rates, and other activities; (iv) improve their management; (v) eliminate management fees; or (vi) divest themselves of all or part of their operations. Bank holding companies controlling financial institutions can be called upon to boost the institutions' capital and to partially guarantee the institutions' performance under their capital restoration plans.

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These capital guidelines can affect the Company in several ways. If the Company continues to grow at a rapid pace, a premature squeeze on capital could occur making a capital infusion necessary. The requirements could impact the Company's ability to pay dividends. The Company's present capital levels are more than adequate; however, rapid growth, poor loan portfolio performance, or poor earnings performance could change the Company's capital position in a relatively short period of time.

Failure to meet these capital requirements would mean that a bank would be required to develop and file a plan with its primary federal banking regulator describing the means and a schedule for achieving the minimum capital requirements. In addition, such a bank would generally not receive regulatory approval of any application that requires the consideration of capital adequacy, such as a branch or merger application, unless the Bank could demonstrate a reasonable plan to meet the capital requirement within a reasonable period of time.

*Enforcement Powers.* FIRREA expanded and increased civil and criminal penalties available for use by the federal regulatory agencies against depository institutions and certain institution-affiliated parties (primarily including management, employees, and agents of a financial institution, independent contractors such as attorneys and accountants, and others who participate in the conduct of the financial institution's affairs). These practices can include the failure of an institution to timely file required reports; the filing of false or misleading information; or the submission of inaccurate reports. Civil penalties may be as high as \$1,000,000 a day for such violations. Criminal penalties for some financial institution crimes have been increased to twenty years. In addition, regulators are provided with greater flexibility to commence enforcement actions against institutions and institution-affiliated parties. Possible enforcement actions include the termination of deposit insurance. Furthermore, FIRREA expanded the appropriate banking agencies' power to issue cease and desist orders that may, among other things, require affirmative action to correct any harm resulting from a violation or practice, including restitution, reimbursement, indemnifications, or guarantees against



loss. A financial institution may also be ordered to restrict its growth, dispose of certain assets, rescind agreements or contracts, or take other actions as determined by the ordering agency to be appropriate.

*Effect of Governmental Monetary Policies.* The earnings of the Banks are affected by domestic economic conditions and the monetary and fiscal policies of the United States government and its agencies. The Federal Reserve Board's monetary policies have had, and are likely to continue to have, an important impact on the operating results of commercial banks through its power to implement national monetary policy in order, among other things, to curb inflation or combat a recession. The monetary policies of the Federal Reserve Board have major effects upon the levels of bank loans, investments, and deposits through its open market operations in United States government securities and through its regulation of the discount rate on borrowings of member banks and the reserve requirements against member bank deposits. It is not possible to predict the nature or impact of future changes in monetary and fiscal policies.

*Recent Legislative Developments.* On September 29, 1994, the federal government enacted the Riegle-Neal Interstate Banking and Branching Efficiency Act of 1994 (the Interstate Banking Act). This Act became effective on September 29, 1995 and permits eligible bank holding companies in any state, with regulatory approval, to acquire banking organizations in any other state. Since June 1, 1997, the Interstate Banking Act has allowed banks with different home states to merge, unless a particular state opts out of the statute. In addition, beginning June 1, 1997, the Interstate Banking Act has permitted national and state banks to establish de novo branches in another state if there is a law in that state which applies equally to all banks and expressly permits all out-of-state banks to establish de novo branches.

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On November 12, 1999, President Clinton signed into law the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act of 1999 (the Financial Services Modernization Act). The Financial Services Modernization Act repeals the two affiliation provisions of the Glass-Steagall Act: Section 20, which restricted the affiliation of Federal Reserve Member Banks with firms engaged principally in specified securities activities; and Section 32, which restricts officer, director, or employee interlocks between a member bank and any company or person primarily engaged in specified securities activities. In addition, the Financial Services Modernization Act also contains provisions that expressly preempt any state law restricting the establishment of financial affiliations, primarily related to insurance. The general effect of the law is to establish a comprehensive framework to permit affiliations among commercial banks, insurance companies, securities firms, and other financial service providers by revising and expanding the BHCA framework to permit a holding company system to engage in a full range of financial activities through a new entity known as a Financial Holding Company. Financial activities is broadly defined to include not only banking, insurance, and securities activities, but also merchant banking and additional activities that the Federal Reserve, in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury, determines to be financial in nature, incidental to such financial activities, or complementary activities that do not pose a substantial risk to the safety and soundness of depository institutions or the financial system generally.

#### Generally, the Financial Services Modernization Act:

- o Repeals historical restrictions on, and eliminates many federal and state law b affiliations among banks, securities firms, insurance companies, and other fina providers;
- o Provides a uniform framework for the functional regulation of the activities of institutions, and their holding companies;
- o Broadens the activities that may be conducted by national banks, banking subsidi holding companies, and their financial subsidiaries;
- o Provides an enhanced framework for protecting the privacy of consumer informati
- o Adopts a number of provisions related to the capitalization, membership, corpor and other measures designed to modernize the Federal Home Loan Bank system;
- o Modifies the laws governing the implementation of the Community Reinvestment Ac
- o Addresses a variety of other legal and regulatory issues affecting both day-to- and long-term activities of financial institutions.

In order for a bank holding company to take advantage of the ability to affiliate with other financial services providers, that company must become a Financial Holding Company as permitted under an amendment to the BHCA. To become a Financial Holding Company, the company would file a declaration with the Federal Reserve, electing to engage in activities permissible for Financial Holding Companies and certifying that it is eligible to do so because all of its insured depository institution subsidiaries are well-capitalized and well-managed. In addition, the Federal Reserve must also determine that each insured depository institution subsidiary of the Company has at least a satisfactory CRA rating.

The Financial Services Modernization Act also permits national banks to engage in expanded activities through the formation of financial subsidiaries. A national bank may have a subsidiary engaged in any activity authorized for national banks directly or any financial activity, except for insurance underwriting, insurance investments, real estate investment or development, or merchant banking, which may only be conducted through a subsidiary of a Financial Holding Company. Financial activities include all activities permitted under new sections of the BHCA or permitted by regulation.

A national bank seeking to have a financial subsidiary, and each of its depository institution affiliates, must be well-capitalized and well-managed. The total assets of all financial subsidiaries may not exceed the lesser of 45% of a bank's total assets, or \$50 billion. A national bank must exclude from its assets and equity all equity investments, including retained earnings, in a financial subsidiary. The assets of the subsidiary may not be consolidated with the bank's assets. The bank must also have policies and procedures to assess financial subsidiary risk and protect the bank from such risks and potential liabilities.

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The Financial Services Modernization Act also includes a new section of the Federal Deposit Insurance Act governing subsidiaries of state banks that engage in activities as principal that would only be permissible for a national bank to conduct in a financial subsidiary. It expressly preserves the ability of a state bank to retain all existing subsidiaries. Because Mississippi permits commercial banks chartered by the state to engage in any activity permissible for national banks, the state bank competitors of The First and Pine Belt will be permitted to form subsidiaries to engage in the activities authorized by the Financial Services Modernization Act, to the same extent as The First and Pine Belt. In order to form a financial subsidiary, a state bank must be well-capitalized, and the state bank would be subject to the same capital deduction, risk management and affiliate transaction rules as applicable to national banks.

During January 2001, the Company made application and was approved by the Federal Reserve Bank to become a financial holding company; however, the Company has no current plans to pursue expanded activities under the Financial Services Modernization Act. The Company's management has not determined at this time whether it will seek to form a financial subsidiary. The Company is examining its strategic business plan to determine whether, based on market conditions, the relative financial conditions of the Company and its subsidiaries, regulatory capital requirements, general economic conditions, and other factors, the Company desires to utilize any of its expanded powers provided in the Financial Services Modernization Act.

The Company and the Banks do not believe that the Financial Services Modernization Act will have a material adverse effect on operations in the near-term. However, to the extent that it permits banks, securities firms, and insurance companies to affiliate, the financial services industry may experience further consolidation. The Financial Services Modernization Act is intended to grant to community banks certain powers as a matter of right that larger institutions have accumulated on an ad hoc basis. Nevertheless, this act may have the result of increasing the amount of competition that the Company and the Banks face from larger institutions and other types of companies offering financial products, many of which may have substantially more financial resources than the Company and the Banks.

From time to time, various bills are introduced in the United States Congress with respect to the regulation of financial institutions. Certain of these proposals, if adopted, could significantly change the regulation of banks and the financial services industry. The Company cannot predict whether any of these proposals will be adopted or, if adopted, how these proposals would affect the Company.

## **ITEM 2. DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY.**

*The First.* The First has a main office located west of the city of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in Lamar County. The main office is located in a 13,000 square foot facility which the Company constructed and opened in January 1997 on a two acre plot of land at the southwest corner of U.S. Highway 98 and Old Highway 11. The First also has a branch office located on Highway 589 in the city of Purvis, Mississippi, also in Lamar County, a third office in a 3,300 square foot facility located at the intersection of Lincoln Road and South 28th Avenue in Hattiesburg, a fourth office located at 3318 Hardy Street in Hattiesburg, as well as a fifth office located on Hwy 43 South, Picayune, MS in a modular unit with a soon to be completed 3,800 sq.ft. permanent office at the same location.

*Pine Belt.* Pine Belt's main office is located in a 12,000 square foot building on a 1.3 acre parcel located at 1945 Highway 15 North, Laurel, Mississippi.

The Company believes that the Banks' facilities will adequately serve their needs.

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## **ITEM 3. LEGAL PROCEEDINGS.**

Neither the Company nor either bank is a party to, nor is any of their property the subject of, any material pending legal proceedings incidental to the business of the Company or the Banks.

**ITEM 4. SUBMISSION OF MATTERS TO A VOTE OF SECURITY HOLDERS.**

No matter was submitted to a vote of security holders during the fourth quarter of the fiscal year covered by this report.

**PART II**

**ITEM 5. MARKET FOR COMMON EQUITY AND RELATED SHAREHOLDER MATTERS.**

In response to this Item, the information contained on page 51 of the Company's Annual Report to Shareholders for the year ended December 31, 2003, is incorporated herein by reference.

**ITEM 6. MANAGEMENT'S DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OR PLAN OF OPERATION.**

In response to this Item, the information contained on pages 3 through 22 of the Company's Annual Report to Shareholders for the year ended December 31, 2003, is incorporated herein by reference.

**ITEM 7. FINANCIAL STATEMENTS.**

In response to this Item, the information contained on pages 23 through 56 of the Company's Annual Report to Shareholders for the year ended December 31, 2003, is incorporated herein by reference.

**ITEM 8. CHANGES IN AND DISAGREEMENTS WITH ACCOUNTANTS ON ACCOUNTING AND FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE.**

Not applicable.

**ITEM 8A. CONTROLS AND PROCEDURES**

(a) *Evaluation of Disclosure Controls and Procedures.* As defined by the Securities and Exchange Commission in Exchange Act Rules 13a-15(e) and 15d-15(e), a company's "disclosure controls and procedures" are controls and other procedures of an issuer that are designed to ensure that information required to be disclosed by the issuer in the reports that it files or submits under the Exchange Act is recorded, processed, summarized and reported, within the time periods specified in the Commission's rules and forms.

As of December 31, 2003 (the Evaluation Date), the Company's Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer have evaluated the effectiveness of the Company's disclosure controls and procedures as defined in the Exchange Act Rules. Based on their evaluation, the Company's Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer have concluded that the Company's disclosure controls and procedures are sufficiently effective to ensure that material information relating to the Company and required to be disclosed by the Company in the reports that it files or submits under the Exchange Act is recorded, processed, summarized and reported within the time periods specified in the Commission's rules and forms.

(b) *Changes in Internal Controls.* Subsequent to the Evaluation Date, there have been no significant changes in the Company's internal controls or in other factors that could significantly affect these controls.

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**PART III**

**ITEM 9. DIRECTORS, EXECUTIVE OFFICERS, PROMOTERS AND CONTROL PERSONS; COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 16(a) OF THE EXCHANGE ACT.**

In response to this Item, the information contained on or about pages 3 through 7 and pages 14 through 16 of the Company's Proxy Statement for the Annual Meeting of Shareholders to be held on May 27, 2004 is incorporated herein by reference.

*Code of Ethics*

The Company's Board of Directors has adopted a Code of Ethics that applies to the Company's principal executive officer, principal financial officer, principal accounting officer, or persons performing similar functions. A copy of this Code of Ethics can be found at the Company's internet website at www.thefirstbank.com. The Company intends to disclose any amendments to its Code of Ethics, and any waiver from a provision of the Code of Ethics granted to the Company's principal executive officer, principal financial officer, principal accounting officer, or persons performing similar functions, on the Company's internet website within five business days following such amendment or waiver. The information contained on or connected to the Company's internet website is not incorporated by reference into this Form 10-KSB and should not be considered part of this or any other report that we file with or furnish to the SEC.

*Audit Committee*

The information contained on page 14 of the Company's Proxy Statement for the Annual Meeting of Shareholders to be held on May 27, 2004, is incorporated herein by reference. The Board of Directors has determined that there is at least one independent audit committee financial expert, J. Douglas Seidenburg, serving on the Audit Committee, as the terms independent and audit committee financial expert are used in pertinent Securities and Exchange Commission laws and regulations.

**ITEM 10. EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION.**

In response to this Item, the information contained on pages 7 through 10 of the Company's Proxy Statement for the Annual Meeting of Shareholders to be held on May 27, 2004, is incorporated herein by reference.

**ITEM 11. SECURITY OWNERSHIP OF CERTAIN BENEFICIAL OWNERS AND MANAGEMENT.**

In response to this Item, the information contained on pages 11 through 14 of the Company's Proxy Statement for the Annual Meeting of Shareholders to be held on May 27, 2004, is incorporated herein by reference.

**ITEM 12. CERTAIN RELATIONSHIPS AND RELATED TRANSACTIONS.**

In response to this Item, the information contained on page 16 of the Company's Proxy Statement for the Annual Meeting of Shareholders to be held on May 27, 2004, is incorporated herein by reference.

**ITEM 13. EXHIBITS AND REPORTS ON FORM 8-K.**

(a) The following exhibits are furnished (or incorporated by reference):

Exhibit Number -----	Description -----
3.1	Amended and Restated Articles of Incorporation (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.1 to the Company's Registration Statement No. 33-94288 on Form S-1).
3.2	Bylaws (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.2 to the Company's Registration Statement No. 33-94288 on Form S-1).
4.1	Provisions in the Company's Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws defining the rights of holders of the Company's Common Stock (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.1 to the Company's Registration Statement No. 33-94288 on Form S-1).
4.2	Form of Certificate of Common Stock (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.2 to the Company's Registration Statement No. 33-94288 on Form S-1).
10.5	Amended and restated employment agreement dated November 20, 1995, by

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- David E. Johnson and the Company (incorporated by reference to Exhibit Company's Form 10-KSB for the fiscal year ended December 31, 1995, File No. 33-94288).
- 10.6 Employment Agreement dated June 10, 1998 by and between the Company and National Bank of the Pine Belt and William M. Renovich, Jr. (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.1 to the Company's Current Report on Form 8-K filed June 10, 1998).
- 10.7 Bank Development Agreement dated June 19, 1998 by and among the Company and organizers of The First National Bank of the Pine Belt (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.2 to the Company's Current Report on Form 8-K filed June 25, 1998).
- 10.8 First Bancshares, Inc. 1997 Stock Option Plan as of March 18, 1997 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.7 of the Company's Form 10-KSB for the fiscal year ended December 31, 1996, File No. 33-94288).
- 10.9 Agreement to Repurchase Stock by and among The First Bancshares, Inc., David Johnson (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.9 to the Company's Registration Statement No. 333-102908 on Form S-2).
- 13 The Company's 2003 Annual Report
- 21.1 Subsidiaries of the Company (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 21.1 to the Company's Form 10-KSB filed March 31, 1999).
- 31 Rule 13a-14(a)/15d-14(a) Certifications
- 32 Section 1350 Certifications

(b) Reports on Form 8-K

No reports on Form 8-K were filed during the fourth quarter of the year ended December 31, 2003.

**ITEM 14. PRINCIPAL ACCOUNTANT FEES AND SERVICES.**

In response to this Item, the information contained on page 17 of the Company's Proxy Statement for the Annual Meeting of Shareholders to be held on May 27, 2004, is incorporated herein by reference.

**SIGNATURES**

In accordance with Section 13 or 15(d) of the Exchange Act, the registrant caused this report to be signed on its behalf by the undersigned, thereunto duly authorized.

THE FIRST BANCSHARES, INC.

Date: March 19, 2004  
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By: /s/ David E. Johnson  
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David E. Johnson  
President and Chief Executive  
(Principal Executive Officer)

Date: March 19, 2004  
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By: /s/ David O. Thoms, Jr.  
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David O. Thoms, Jr.  
(Principal Financial and Principal Accounting Officer)

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Accounting Officer)

In accordance with the Exchange Act, this report has been signed below by the following persons on behalf of the registrant and in the capacities and on the dates indicated.

<u>SIGNATURES</u>	<u>CAPACITIES</u>	<u>DATE</u>
/s/ Trent A. Mulloy -----	Director	March 19 , 200 -----
/s/ E. Ricky Gibson -----	Director	March 19 , 200 -----
/s/ J. Douglas Seidenburg -----	Director	March 19 , 200 -----
/s/ Ted E. Parker -----	Director	March 19 , 200 -----
/s/ Gregory H. Mitchell -----	Director	March 19 , 200 -----
/s/ Gerald C. Patch -----	Director	March 19 , 200 -----
/s/ Dennis L. Pierce -----	Director	March 19 , 200 -----
/s/ Ralph T. Simmons -----	Director	March 19 , 200 -----
/s/ M. Ray Cole, Jr. -----	Director	March 19 , 200 -----
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/s/ David W. Bomboy -----	Director	, 200 -----
-----	Director	, 200 -----
-----	Director	, 200 -----
/s/ David E. Johnson -----	President, CEO, and Director (Principal Executive Officer)	March 19 , 20 -----
/s/ David O. Thoms, Jr. -----	(Principal Financial and Accounting Officer)	March 19 , 200 -----

