



# Gulf Coast | Business Council

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## **Gulf Coast Business Council and Harrah's Announce New Non-Profit and Civic Service Center**

GULFPORT, Miss., - Harrah's Entertainment, Inc., has agreed to sell its administrative building located on Seaway Road in Gulfport to the Gulf Coast Business Council for the purpose of establishing a multi-tenant non-profit center. The purchase will be completed by the end of October.

One of the earliest stated priorities for the Gulf Coast Business Council was to build or buy a facility that could provide affordable office space for the many non-profit and civic organizations whose facilities were destroyed during the storm.

"Through the generosity of Harrah's, Coast-area charitable and civic organizations will have a safe, affordable home at a very accessible location," said Anthony Topazi, chairman of Gulf Coast Business Council. "Reducing the burden of rising administrative costs will allow these groups to spend more of their resources on programs that help others and improve the quality of life on the Coast."

"I see great synergistic value in putting similar organizations together under one roof," said Gov. Haley Barbour who is directing relief funds to charitable organizations for the re-establishment of lost office space. "I applaud the effort to improve teamwork, cooperation, creativity and efficiency so that every charitable dollar spent will go farther in this community."

"Harrah's has a deep commitment to the redevelopment of the Mississippi Gulf Coast as evidenced by our recent announcement of the \$704 million dollar Margaritaville Casino Resort project," said John Payne, president, Central Division for Harrah's Entertainment. "The gift of this building enables our non-profit organizations to continue their important work of helping families, businesses and the community in its recovery. We

can be assured the Gulf Coast has the resources and common goals to again make this area a vibrant and successful destination."

Several contributing factors made the deal possible.

- Harrah's offered extremely generous terms on the 70,000-square-foot property to the Gulf Coast Business Council
- Commitment of \$2 million from the Governor's Relief Fund
- Commitment of \$1 million from the Southern Company Charitable Trust. Mississippi Power is a wholly owned subsidiary of Southern Company.

Remaining funding for the renovation of the property is expected to come from other private sources. "I am confident that we will be able to secure by the end of October all of the funds needed to pay for the building's purchase and remodeling, leaving us debt free," Topazi said.

Within weeks of the storm the building was used as an employee Information Center, providing over 3,000 Harrah's employees with basic necessities – including on-site medical care – and with resources to help them find housing, communicate with family members, and cope with the devastation they'd experienced.

Harrah's used the building for its Mississippi administrative operations prior to the storm. The building became available when Harrah's consolidated Coast operations in Biloxi.

For the past year Harrah's provided rent free, temporary office space to many non-profit and civic organizations including the United Way of South Mississippi, the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Gulf Coast, the Gulf Coast Community Foundation, the Gulf Coast Renaissance Corporation, the Coast Chamber of Commerce, the Tourism Commission and the Gulf Coast Business Council.

The purpose of the center is to not only provide permanent affordable office space to non-profits, but to achieve greater efficiencies made possible from the sharing of common facilities and resources.

The community at large will also realize the benefits of the center. Plans are underway to build a large meeting hall which will serve the needs of tenant organizations and also provide another venue for community forums and public meetings. The building will also serve as an operational base for these organizations after future disasters.

This transformational project will create a stronger, more effective, and more sustainable philanthropic community on the Mississippi Coast. By serving as a regional hub for charitable activities, the center will serve a growing population of 400,000 people in coastal Mississippi, and signify the importance and priority of non-profit and civic engagement in our community.

The Gulf Coast Business Council was established in March 2006 to be the united voice of business on public policy issues of importance to the Mississippi Gulf Coast Region. Over 190 members-strong, the Gulf Coast Business Council is a voluntary, non-profit alliance of the top leaders of the Chambers of Commerce, economic development organizations and businesses and industries of Hancock, Harrison and Jackson counties. The organization champions the common economic and business interests of the Mississippi Gulf Coast by identifying issues, convening resources, framing public policy, finding solution and working to improve and promote the economic growth and development in all of the counties on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. For more information, visit [www.msgcbc.org](http://www.msgcbc.org) or contact Brian Sanderson at 228-897-2020.

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