

Gaming leaders celebrate 30 years of dockside gambling

Written by Administrator
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BILOXI, Miss. (WLOX) - Gaming leaders from across the Southeast gathered at the Beau Rivage Thursday to celebrate 30 years of dockside gambling. Nearly 500 guests filled the ballroom, with some coming from as far as Japan.

Thirty years ago, Harrison County voters changed South Mississippi forever by approving a dockside gaming referendum. That change shifted the culture of the coast by increasing jobs, revenue, and tourism.

But there would be another big change on the horizon thanks to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Before the massive storm, gaming operations in Mississippi, by law, had to be over water. It started with riverboats, and became more sophisticated throughout the '90s and early 2000s.

According to the President of M2 Media, Michael Suderman, the state legislature's response to Katrina's destruction was a turning point for gaming in Mississippi.

"Had they not decided to rebuild after Katrina, had they not passed the gaming act, which allowed them to build on land, I feel that half of the casinos would have taken an insurance check, skipped town and wiped out our Mississippi Gulf Coast tourism," said Sunderman. "Anytime you can build on land, you can invest more money on land. They've built mega hotels, they've built attractions and that attracted more people to our casinos."

The Isle of Capri riverboat started it all in 1992 as the Mississippi Gulf Coast's first dockside casino.

Allan Solomon was behind the casino's new development. That's why he's being inducted into the Mississippi Gaming Hall of Fame. Joining him are Virginia McDowell, Craig H. Neilsen, Kagemasa Kozuki and John Hairston.

"We look for people who have influence, people who are sort of the founding mothers and fathers of the gaming industry, big time investors that took a risk on Mississippi, gaming

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manufacturers and regulators.” Said Sunderman.

Larry Gregory, Executive Director of the Mississippi Gaming and Hospitality Association, is proud to say that 30 years later casinos on the coast are still dominating and bringing dollars.

“The Mississippi Gulf Coast had \$1.6 billion gross gaming revenue year. That’s the biggest number on record since gaming started here. Now we have 15,000 employees. So, since the 1990s this industry has grown in Mississippi as the most reputable gaming jurisdiction in the country,” said Sunderman.

Gregory said gaming has brought the state \$3.3 million in revenue.

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