

Local Philanthropic Organization Administers State Recovery Fund

Contributed by the Gulfport CARRI Team

Governor Haley Barbour established the Mississippi Hurricane Recovery Fund days after Hurricane Katrina to serve as the state’s central clearinghouse for corporations, organizations, and individuals to make financial donations to assist Mississippians through the long-term recovery from Katrina and future hurricane-related disasters. Governor Barbour said his “intention in creating this special fund was to attract private monies to help victims of the hurricane with recovery costs that exceeded coverage from other sources, such as insurance, government grants, and immediate relief programs.” The money from the fund is used to purchase building materials to repair and rebuild homes and other brick and mortar projects, such as senior centers, damaged or destroyed by Katrina. The Recovery Fund office also accepts donations and offers of volunteers, in coordination with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to direct the resources to citizens and communities in need.

In August 2007, the Recovery Fund Board of Directors announced the selection of the Gulf Coast Community Foundation (GCCF), a nonprofit organization based in Gulfport, to administer the funds, which totaled more than \$34 million at the time. The foundation was originally established in 1989 to facilitate charitable giving by individuals, families, corporations, non-profit organizations, and private foundations to meet charitable objectives in the fields of education, arts and culture, historic preservation, neighborhood enrichment, and health and human services. The GCCF is governed by a board of directors whose membership is comprised of leaders from a variety of Gulf Coast businesses, organizations, and activities.

The selection of the GCCF to administer the Recovery Fund was an important decision because it enables board members who are community leaders with strong local relationships and knowledge of the ongoing recovery efforts to direct funds to impactful local-level recovery projects. For example, in



Responding to the desires of Gulfport, Mississippi, citizens to share their Hurricane Katrina experience with other communities, the CARRI Gulfport Team, including researchers at The University of Southern Mississippi–Gulf Coast, worked with community members to document their stories. The essay presented here, part of CARRI’s Gulfport Resilience series, captures a key lesson learned from the Gulfport community’s daunting experience with the hurricane.

spring 2008 GCCF awarded \$1.4 million in grants to local nonprofit organizations on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The largest award in that round was for \$500,000 to Habitat for Humanity of the Gulf Coast for the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project. Held in May 2008, the weeklong “building blitz” carried out by volunteers from around the world resulted in 100 homes built or repaired. Four families also received new homes through the grant. Another example is the process created jointly by GCCF and long-term recovery committees to fund repairs and rebuilds of the most vulnerable citizens’ homes. Approximately \$3 million dollars from the fund assisted over 1500 families in 18 months. At the close of the fund, GCCF and International Relief and Development US took the lead in applying directly for Katrina Community Development Block Grant monies to continue this work for the most vulnerable people on the Gulf Coast.

The relationships GCCF developed with many local faith-based organizations and long-term recovery and other recovery volunteer groups supported by the Recovery Fund contribute greatly to the communities’ resilience. Those types of relationships help keep GCCF

officers in tune with the needs of the communities they serve so that they can make wise decisions about how to manage and disburse the state’s Hurricane Recovery Fund.



For additional information, please visit the following web sites:

www.gulfcoastfoundation.org

www.mississippirelief.com

www.governorbarbour.com