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Volume 4, Number 7
Circulation 5,000

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The Long Beach Breeze is published on the 20th of every month in Long Beach, Mississippi.

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Harrison County achieves Work Ready Community certification

Special to Long Beach Breeze

Harrison County recently achieved the ACT Work Ready Community certification designation—a two-year process completed in six months and the 55th county in Mississippi to reach certification. The county’s Work Ready Initiative was approved through a resolution in late summer of 2018 by the Harrison County Board of Supervisors (BOS) and is a collaborative effort between the BOS, Harrison County Development Commission, Port of Gulfport, Gulfport School District, and community and business leaders.

Harrison County Supervisor Kent Jones, District Four, says, “The ACT Work Ready Initiative was precisely what this county needed to advance our future economic growth. The Board of Supervisors is grateful to the Harrison County Development Commission and all those who assisted for their dedication to our workforce.”

Now that Harrison County has obtained the work ready designation, all three coastal counties are considered ACT Work Ready certified, which is critical to marketing the region to economic developers.

Brandi Hough, Harrison County Development Commission’s Director of Business Development, is emphatic about the importance of the certified

designation and said, “Certification would not have been achieved as expeditiously without the support of 106 employers who recognized or recommended the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC). Everyone wins now that Harrison County is Work Ready certified—businesses, job-seekers, educators, our county and ultimately, all the Mississippi Gulf Coast.”

An essential certification requirement included ACT WorkKeys testing, which was administered to individuals who are considered emerging workforce (high, school, college, recent graduates), transitioning workforce (job-seekers, adult education, recent veterans), and the current workforce.

Currently 2,892 Harrison county residents have become ACT Work Ready certified, with seventy-two percent being at the Silver or higher level.

Being certified is significant, as it indicates “Harrison County is Workforce Ready” and establishes that the county has a skilled, quality workforce. Data will be utilized in recruiting new business and industry expansion, while educators can close the skill gap with a measuring tool for students and individuals to use when searching for a job.

According to the Port of Gulfport’s Director of Workforce Development Mel Arsenault, “Nationally recognized

credentials like the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) are even more important in these times as we work towards rebuilding our economy. Job-seekers have a verified credential to prove their actual skills to employers, and employers now have a tool to assist them in hiring the most skilled applicants to fill their current job openings.”

Furthermore, workforce development is a top priority for the state, and the philosophy extends to Governor Tate Reeves.

“I believe in Mississippi. We need to work to promote a culture of work and to enable Mississippi’s workforce to compete with anyone anywhere in the country, and in fact anyone anywhere in the world,” said Reeves.

The Harrison County Work Ready Community next steps will be to complete the next level of the certification process, which includes continuing to assist more Harrison County residents with obtaining their NCRC certification. In addition, Harrison County will collaborate with the ACT Work Ready teams in Hancock and Jackson counties to support the Mississippi “One Coast” approach.

For more information, visit the Harrison County ACT Work Ready Communities page at www.WorkReady-Communities.org/MS/047.

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