



Housing Initiative For South Mississippi's Work Force Unveiled

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GULFPORT, MS (WLOX) - Two to three thousand families will be moving into new homes, thanks to a program launched by the Gulf Coast Renaissance Corporation. The REACH MS program addresses two major problems in South Mississippi -- affordable housing and keeping work force employees in the area.

"The employer will put the first dollar of mortgage assistance on the table. We'll match it with three dollars, with the maximum benefit of the employee of about \$40,000," said Anthony Topazi, Chairman of the Gulf Coast Renaissance Corporation.

The money will be used for housing down payment and closing costs. Employers have the option to put up \$5,000 to \$10,000, money that will be tripled through the program.

Denise Baker is the first person to purchase a home through REACH Mississippi.

"My employer asked me if I'd be willing to participate in this program because I was commuting from Mobile and had been for a year and a half. And I said, 'Yeah, sure,'" Baker said.

Thanks to the REACH Mississippi Program, Denise and her three children now live only 10 minutes away from where she works in Ocean Springs. She says the program has saved her lots of time and money.

"It was very costly, two hours a day commuting and about \$800 a month in gas," Baker said.

In turn, Denise has made a five year commitment to her employer, Andover Construction. Each company will set its own guidelines for program participants to follow. Northrop Grumman is one of the first companies to sign on. Company leaders say it's a win-win situation for everyone involved.

"We feel that if someone has the opportunity to ground themselves, buying a home and being a first time home buyer, we have them in our community and they're much more likely to stay with us over the long term," said Steve Robinson, Director of Human Resources at Northrop Grumman.

The program is funded through \$40 million in community development block grant funds as part of the state's long term workforce housing program. For more information, you can call (228) 896-3386.

