

Mississippi Gulf Resort Classic had \$8.5 million direct impact, study shows

The second annual Mississippi Gulf Resort Classic, a PGA Champions Tour event, generated a direct economic impact of more than \$8.4 million in sales, created 194 one-time jobs and \$3.1 million in employment income, according to an economic impact study conducted for the tournament by the University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast College of Business.

The tournament, held March 31-April 1 at Fallen Oak Golf Club, a Tom Fazio-designed course owned by Beau Rivage Resort and Casino, provided direct spending of about \$5.8 million by tournament organizers, participants and non-local spectators, according to the report. That direct spending produced indirect effects of \$1.3 million and induced another \$1.3 million impact.

The model does not include direct spending by Harrison County residents, using the logic that local money could have been spent in the local economy anyway, the report explains. If the local spending by Harrison County residents were included, there would be an additional \$900,000 added to the total economic impact.

Just as significant, the three-day tournament was aired on the Golf Channel, exposing the Mississippi Gulf Coast and its attractions to a national audience of golf enthusiasts.

"The value of the television coverage is substantial because it focuses national attention on the Mississippi Coast and it reaches

a unique consumer group with a specific psychographic profile: people who love the game of golf," said Dr. Beth LaFleur, interim associate dean of the College of Business and professor of marketing.

"While this television impact was not measured in our study, we all agree that the impact is substantial and provides targeted awareness to a market segment which also has a propensity to travel and to gamble," added Dr. Gregory Bradley, assistant professor in the USM College of Business.

LaFleur coauthored the study with Bradley and Dr. Cheri Becker, chair of USM's Department of Tourism Management. The College of Business partnered with the business community, specifically the tourism and sports management sectors, to compete the project, she said.

"Our study was significant because of the methods used to estimate spectator spending," LaFleur said. "In many economic studies, these daily spending figures are 'guesstimated' from other studies. In this case, we spent three days surveying spectators at the event, collecting detailed information from more than 500 attendees to determine where they lived, how many were in their party, and — for those who were documented as visitors — how much they spent across a variety of categories."

Other highlights from the study indicate more than one-third of the surveyed guests attended more than one day of the tournament; more than half were spending 2-3 nights on the Mississippi Coast, and half those nights were spent in a casino hotel. The study, which used the Mississippi IMPLAN economic modeling




Former British Open champion Tom Lehman (in white hat), winner of the 2011 Mississippi Gulf Resort Classic, is congratulated by tournament foundation chairman Duncan McKenzie

system, estimated almost \$2 million was spent during the week at local restaurants and bars and \$3.5 million was spent by out-of-county visitors on casino gaming.


A separate ROI assessment was conducted for the tournament by GodwinGroup and funded by BP America. The Golf Channel coverage, which included eight telecasts, drew an estimated total audience of 3.2 million viewers and an average of almost 600,000 households per telecast. The airtime devoted to the Mississippi Coast had an estimated value of more than \$700,000.

The third annual Mississippi Gulf Resort Classic will be held March 19-25 at Fallen Oak, announced tournament director Steve Nieman of Bruno Event Team.



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