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MAINE SBDC STAFF JOIN HURRICANE RELIEF

PORTLAND, MAINE – Two Maine Small Business Development Center business counselors are spending 14 days in Mississippi, helping hurricane victims whose businesses were lost or damaged during Katrina. David Hill, certified business counselor and director of the Maine SBDC at Coastal Enterprises Inc. (CEI), and Janet Roderick, Maine SBDC business counselor who is part of the Women’s Business Center at its Augusta service center, also hosted by CEI, flew to Gulfport, Mississippi, on Sunday. From makeshift offices in Gulfport, the two Maine SBDC staff are helping small business owners reconstruct their financials, fill out SBA disaster loan packages, and strategize next steps for their destroyed or nearly destroyed businesses.

“We are pleased to be able to have these two business counselors take leave from their regular duties at CEI to help our small business counterparts in Mississippi,” said Maine SBDC State Director John Massaua, “Maine SBDC staff are among more than 100 business counselors to be dispatched to the ravaged Gulf Coast region from small business development centers across the country.”

Massaua, who was elected in September as the chair of the Association of Small Business Development Centers’ (ASBDC) national board, was among ASBDC board members who voted last month to organize the deployment of small business development center staff to Louisiana and Mississippi for two week assignments. The ASBDC vote also provided an advance on travel funds and initiated the collection of corporate donations. Massaua also appointed Scott Dougherty, State Director for the North Carolina Small Business & Technology Development Center, as the ASBDC disaster liaison.

The Maine Small Business Commission, which is the state oversight body for the Maine SBDC, authorized the Maine SBDC’s participation. In addition to Hill and Roderick, three other Maine SBDC business counselors are planning to each spend two weeks this fall in the Gulf Coast region. The value of the five counselor’s time is approximately \$15,000.

While in Mississippi, Hill and Roderick are staying in recreational vehicles temporarily set nearby their makeshift offices, located in what was once a hospital. The hospital complex had been sold and was empty when the hurricane hit. Hill and Roderick sit at folding tables with only their laptop computers, pencil and paper on top. Plywood still covers most of the windows in the otherwise empty room. Internet and wireless phone access are expected to be available “at least 80% of the time,” according to Roderick. The two may be transferred to other help centers at any time, depending on need.

Arriving separately, Hill and Roderick were met at the Gulfport airport by members of a “security team,” contracted by the Mississippi SBDC to provide transportation, RV maintenance, shopping and other support for relief workers. Meals are catered by local businesses and dropped off each morning.

“This area is in relatively good shape,” says Roderick of the neighborhood where she is staying, where most businesses are closed and “the majority of houses have blue tarp roofs and extensive damage.” She called the devastation just a few miles away “amazing.”

“People who have lived here for years get lost driving around because there is nothing left standing to tell them where they are,” says Roderick, “No houses, businesses, churches, street signs, trees, nothing. Even if something is standing, it is unrecognizable and may not even be in its original location. “

Roderick, from Rome, Maine, began working as a business counselor at CEI over ten years ago, and has been focusing on women business owners since 1997. Hill, who lives on Chebeague Island, has been a business counselor since 2001 and director of the Maine SBDC service center at CEI in Wiscasset since 2002.

CEI, host agency for the two counselors, is a private, nonprofit Community Development Corporation and Community Development Financial Institution, was founded in 1977 to develop job-creating natural resources and small business ventures in primarily rural regions of Maine. A pioneer in the CDC/CDFI field, CEI is one of the nation's premiere rural CDC/CDFIs. CEI serves all of Maine, its primary market, and areas of northern New England and upstate New York. ###

About Maine SBDC/SBTDC: *Maine SBDC/SBTDC is a partnership program of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) in association with the SBA/OSBDC, Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, the University of Southern Maine, and leading economic and/or community development hosting organizations, including the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments, Coastal Enterprises, Inc., Eastern Maine Development Corporation, and the Northern Maine Development Commission and with support from the Maine Technology Institute (MTI) and other contractors, allies and stakeholders. Accredited by the Association of Small Business Development Centers (ASBDC) and administered by USM's School of Business, Maine SBDC/SBTDC operates a network of service centers and outreach offices located conveniently throughout the state.*

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