



## Economic and restoration efforts following Gulf oil spill honored at first Connecting Coastal Alabama Awards

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Kevin Wendt, Vice President of Content for the Alabama Media Group presents Byron Dunn, Southern Region Director for the Alabama Technology Network, with a Connecting Coastal Alabama Award Monday Oct. 22, 2012 during the Awards Breakfast in the Moonlight Ballroom at the Battle House Hotel in downtown Mobile, Ala. (Bill Starling/bstarling@al.com)

**MOBILE, Alabama** -- A lumber salesman that helped form the Coastal Alabama Leadership Council, a psychiatrist that helped address the mental health and needs of those impacted by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and an advocate for the Gulf Coast seafood industry.

Those were just some of the winners at the first annual Connecting Coastal Alabama Awards, held this morning at the Battle House Hotel in downtown Mobile.

Ten members of the community were honored at the ceremony, which seeks to recognize those who have championed the betterment of the coastal region following the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.

Mobile and Baldwin counties account for about 25 percent of Alabama's economy. The area's vast economic importance propelled industry leaders and citizens to apply their skills and talents to restore the coast to its original beauty after the spill. As a result, the community now shows signs of steady recovery. This award seeks to honor those efforts.

"The greatest silver lining from the oil spill is the relationships built during that time - between the cities, between us and the county and the state, between Mobile and Baldwin counties," said award winner Tony Kennon. "We have so much more in common than we don't."

The following community members received the first Connecting Coastal Alabama award:

Byron Dunn, the southern region director for the Alabama Technology Network, helped create Business Support Centers in Gulf Shores and Bayou La Batre. The centers were designed to help businesses and people endure the economic hardships caused by the spill. by offering free job training and counseling.

Bob Higgins, senior vice president of the Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance, led the Coastal Resiliency Coalition in helping address the needs of fledgling business owners across the Gulf Coast following the oil spill.

Sheila Hodges, chairman of the board of Meyer Real Estate in Gulf Shores, served on the executive committee of the

Coastal Recovery Commission and was active in creating a strategic plan for the area called "A Roadmap to Resilience: Towards a Healthier Environment, Society and Economy for South Alabama."

Robert Ingram, former president of the BCEDA, worked closely with local and regional leaders to help promote the economic rebound of South Alabama.

Orange Beach Mayor Tony Kennon.

René Massey, a social worker and director with the Department of Human Resources before retiring, led the human survival team for the Coastal Resiliency Coalition.

Gordon Moulton, president of the University of South Alabama, served as environmental chair of the Coastal Recovery Commission.

Chris Nelson, vice president of Bon Secour Fisheries, was part of the Coastal Recovery Commission of Alabama, where he chaired the seafood subcommittee. Nelson now serves on the Coastal Alabama Leadership Council and is a member of the newly formed Alabama Seafood Marketing Commission.

Richard Powers, a psychiatrist who served as the medical director for the Alabama Department of Mental Health, helped organize Project Rebound which helped address the mental health and psychosocial needs of those impacted by the spill. Powers also helped obtain and manage a \$12 million grant provided by BP.

Sandy Stimpson, vice president of Scotch & Gulf Lumber, served on the executive committee of the Coastal Recovery Commission and teamed up with other business executives and community leaders to form the Coastal Alabama Leadership Council.

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**Enlarge**

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Kevin Wendt, Vice President of Content for the Alabama Media Group (right) shakes hands with Robert Ingram as he presents Ingram with a Connecting Coastal Alabama Award Monday Oct. 22, 2012 during the Awards Breakfast in the Moonlight Ballroom at the Battle House Hotel in downtown Mobile, Ala. (Bill Starling/bstarling@al.com)

**Connecting Coast Alabama Awards: Oct. 22, 2012** gallery (19 photos)

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