

Posted on Wed, Jul. 05, 2006

Mediator aims to aid communication

Project will begin training Coast leaders by October

By JAIMEE GOAD-BISHOP
SUN HERALD

When Laurel Kaufer was on the plane leaving Biloxi back in December, she felt compelled to do something that would help Mississippians rebuild. She owns two mediation companies in California, so a friend advised her to stick with what she knows - communication.

Kaufer has started the nonprofit organization called Mississippi Mediation Project. The organization is made of up of professionals from all over the United States who hope to start training community leaders in problem-solving and conflict resolution communication by as early as October. As the training would take 25-40 hours of people's time, Kaufer said the organization will pay a stipend.

"We would like interested community members to be able to choose to be trained in these skills without having to forfeit the income during the training hours," Kaufer said.

Kaufer teaches people how to communicate so others understand. It may sound simple, even ridiculous, but Kaufer said most people communicate without thinking about the way their message is being heard. Whenever a message is misunderstood, Kaufer said it's easier for a conflict to start and the real object of the conversation to be pushed aside.

For example, instead of telling a contractor, "You need to fix this in my house," Kaufer said the homeowner may say, "

'I need to have a working bathroom,' or 'It's summertime and I need to have functional air conditioning.'

"If you talk to the contractor about human or basic needs, rather than 'you have to build this for me' or 'you have to pay this to me', the person will be more likely respond the way you want them too," She said. "This helps people work better together."

Kaufer said good communication will help South Mississippi rebuild with less conflict, less frustration, and with results more people will be proud of.

"I've heard people say that building back Mississippi the way it was will be a failure, because the goal is to build it back better. This is one of those tools that can be used to build it back better."

Kaufer said the group will be having its first board meeting in Biloxi on July 15. That's when it will identify the church, civic, law enforcement, and governmental leaders who want this form of training.

For more information, contact Laurel Kaufer at 1-877-663-3428 or at info@mississippimmediationproject.org.