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Homeowner Assistance Program Tested In Ocean Springs

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OCEAN SPRINGS (WLOX) -- In 2007, the Gulf Coast Business Council created the Renaissance Corporation, a non-profit group charged with creating affordable housing options for south Mississippi hurricane victims. The Renaissance Corporation is about a month away from unveiling what it considers an ambitious affordable housing program.

Specific details about how two thousand south Mississippians could become new homeowners aren't being released to the public just yet. However, the non-profit group recently did a test case with an Ocean Springs woman. And, Denise Baker's moving into a new home because of the financial assistance she received from her boss and Reach Mississippi.

Last week, Baker got the keys to a house in Gulf Park Estates. She contacted a few friends, and got them to help her move in.

"It's been exciting," the new homeowner said. "Stressful. But exciting."

Home ownership became possible for the single mother when her bosses at the Andover Company urged Baker to be a test case for a Renaissance Corporation housing initiative.

"It was a win-win situation for both of us, for my employer and for myself," she thought.

Through a program soon to be called Reach Mississippi, Baker's employer put money for her down payment. And the Renaissance Corporation used private contributions to make a three for one match. Just like that, Baker had a house in close proximity to her office. And she had a mortgage she could afford.

"When you average what I was paying in gas plus my rent in Mobile to what I'm paying now in my mortgage, it's, I'm actually coming out ahead," she realized.

Baker spent about \$600 a month driving from her Mobile town home to her Ocean Springs office. The move allows her to put that money into her new home, and not her gas tank. Suddenly, she can provide her family comfort and stability.

"I'm happier than I've ever been," said Baker.

The new Ocean Springs resident knows she's the first person to buy a home through this program. She also knows that if she keeps her home for 30 years, she won't have to pay back any of the down payment money she received. That's why the contribution from her boss, and the financial match by the Renaissance Corporation are gifts she'll never forget.

"It gives me a renewed sense of commitment to my employer because they made that commitment to me," she said.

Next month, Renaissance Corporation backers hope to sign a contract with the state, so public money can be used for the three-to-one matching funds. Once that deal is finalized, the Renaissance group will roll out specific details of the Reach Mississippi program. At that point, employers and employees will learn what they need to do to qualify for the home ownership

program.

By [Brad Kessie](#)



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