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Tuesday, May. 05, 2009

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Gaming Summit brings high rollers to the Gulf Coast

By MARY PEREZ - meperez@sunherald.com

BILOXI — Today, she will give her insights on the state of the casino industry at the opening of the Southern Gaming Summit.

Tonight, Virginia McDowell will pick up her award as 2009 Gaming Executive of the Year.

The summit continues Thursday at the Mississippi Coast Coliseum and Convention Center.



TIM ISBELL/SUN HERALD Vendors hope to hit the jackpot as the Southern Gaming Summit opens today in Biloxi.

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The president of Isle of Capri Casinos, McDowell will join John Payne, president of Harrah's Entertainment Central Division, and Tim Wilmott, president of Penn National Gaming, at today's general session. The moderator of the 11:30 a.m. State of the Industry session is Jon Lucas, president of IP Casino Resort in Biloxi.

Selected as the Gaming Executive of the year by Casino Journal magazine, McDowell has worked in the casino industry for more than 25 years and helped develop and implement the Isle of Capri's strategic plan.

"There are a lot of stellar executives in this industry, and every year this award presents us with some tough choices, but this year was easy," said Charles

Anderer, publisher of Casino Journal. "Virginia is not only one of the ablest and most respected executives we have, she also gives generously of her time and her skills on behalf of the community.

"And as the only woman to head a major publicly traded casino company, she's been a role model for so many people pursuing careers in gaming and in the business world at large."

This is the first time the award will be presented at the Southern Gaming Summit during the Taste of the South Reception.

Between spins of new slot machines and a preview of other hot casino products, this year's SGS will focus on the economy. The speakers include local and national casino operators and casino professors from Tulane University, the University of Southern Mississippi and the University of Nevada and other experts.

The educational sessions start today at 9 a.m. with a look at the New Politics of Gaming and Customer Service as a Marketing Tool and continue until 3 p.m.

A Financial Roundtable at 10 a.m. will bring financial leaders in the casino industry and top investment analysts together to give an outlook for economy, consumer spending and the prospects for growth.

The exhibit hall showcasing casino products and services is open today from 12:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.



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