



Convention center debuts in July

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BILOXI, MS (WLOX) - The Coliseum's new convention center will open this summer. The \$57 million expansion will more than double the size of the convention center. It will also give the Harrison County Tourism Commission new office space. The project is being funded by a two percent hotel tax.

The vendors preparing for Wednesday's Southern Gaming Summit came to Biloxi knowing they had a limited amount of space to set up their displays.

"This is the space they've given us. This isn't Phoenix, Arizona," a vendor said to his crew.

Phoenix may have more exhibit space now. But by the end of July, Bill Holmes will be able to brag about the size of his new expo hall.

"This is a convention center that dances and sings," he exclaimed.

Phrases like state-of-the-art, and high tech are being used to describe the \$57 million addition that opens in less than three months. Its ceilings are higher. And its loading dock is bigger.

Paul April says that should be a huge advantage for future tenants.

"It will be easier to sell. Absolutely," she said. "And it will be bigger to sell, which means they can grow their shows. That's the most important thing."

Doubling the facility's convention space will allow events like the gaming summit to grow. Jon Lucas is the IP's General Manager. He's also the head of the Mississippi Casino Operators Association, the organization hosting the gaming summit.

"Since Katrina, the motto has been change is a good thing and for the better," he said. "I think going to a more state of the art, new facility is really going to be great."

The finishing touches in the convention center won't be done in time for this week's casino gala. However, the new lobby will be done in time for July's National Governors Association Conference. So will the smaller meeting rooms. They'll both be used during that conference, so

the Coliseum Commission can showcase itself to the nation.

"We will have a major diamond right here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast that's going to be an economic engine for years to come," said Holmes.

The convention center's new expo hall opens at the end of July. And by December, an east lobby will be added to the building. The final project is a parking garage on the coliseum grounds. That should be finished by January.

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