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## Isle founder is remembered

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Bernie Goldstein, the father of riverboat gambling and the founder of Isle of Capri Biloxi, died Sunday in Iowa. Services are today in Illinois.

When Goldstein, 80, opened the Isle on Aug. 1, 1992, it was the first dockside casino on the Coast and in the South. The Isle of Capri has grown to become one of the top casino companies in world, operating 17 regional casinos in Mississippi, Louisiana, Missouri, Iowa, Colorado and Florida.

He opened the nation's first riverboat casino in Iowa, on April 1, 1991 and had a monopoly for about 20 minutes until the President Casino opened, said Bill Kilduff, who served as Isle of Capri general manager. Iowa's restrictive laws prompted Goldstein to take his two casino riverboats, the Diamond Lady and the Emerald Lady, and head south once Mississippi legalized casinos. When they arrived on the Coast, an impromptu boat parade greeted them.



Goldstein

"This was the biggest thing that could ever have happened," said Rich Westfall, who rode in on the riverboats with Goldstein.

Biloxi Mayor A.J. Holloway said he never thought people would line up the way they did on a scorching hot day to be the first into the casino. He was pretty sure the city's financial troubles were over.

Julie Kilduff, who was chief financial officer for the Isle of Capri, said Goldstein had his choice of sites, being the first casino operator on the Coast. He was divided between where Beau Rivage Resort now stands and the Point Cadet site, which he chose because it was protected by Deer Island and he got a long-term lease from the city.

"That was one of the most exciting times of my life," said Tim Hinkley, former president of Isle of Capri Casinos.

From those two little riverboats in Biloxi, Goldstein would become a pioneer in the casino industry, said Lori Hutzler Eckert, who worked for him in public relations.

"He saw something in the Coast that I think a lot of people here didn't see. He looked at it and saw wide open opportunity."

For her and thousands of others, it provided jobs that

let them stay in South Mississippi.

"I think he had a vision for others to follow," said Coast developer and builder Roy Anderson III. One of the

things he most respected about the Isle of Capri was the way it got involved in the community.

“Our commitment to community was second to none, particularly in the first 10 years we were here.” said Westfall.

For Jamie Sablich Sr. of Sablich Enterprises in D'Iberville, Goldstein changed his life. Sablich didn't have money for a symposium where Goldstein was appearing, so he waited in the hall where he was introduced to Goldstein. They exchanged business cards and Sablich said, “We did business with him for many years.”

Les McMackin, former senior vice president of marketing, said Goldstein set an example that everyone else could live by, showing he could be a businessman and fit in a family life.

“Not many people get as much out of life as Bernie did,” Hinkley said.

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