



3101 Beach Blvd. South, Suite 1

Gulfport, FL 33707

January 2016

Dear Gulfport Business Owner,

January marks our annual membership renewal and new membership drive for the upcoming year. Last year was an exciting year for the Gulfport Merchants Association(GMA) and for Gulfport as a community. In 2015 we set new records in both attendance and revenue at our events, the Tuesday Fresh Market, Gecko-World trio of events-the Pub Crawl, Ball, and of course, Gecko Fest. We celebrated the 22nd anniversary of Gulfport's Art Walk. Holiday Hoopla drives visitors into our businesses during the busy holiday shopping season. The GMA sponsored annual PAVA 2Cool Art Show brings thousands of Fine Art lovers to Gulfport each winter. In order to further establish Gulfport as a Fine Arts destination we are introducing the 1st Annual "Masters of Gulfport" Fine Arts Festival to be held in Veterans Park on February 20 and 21.

We also proudly organize and promote events where 100% of the revenue returns to the community-Gulfport's Get Rescued and our monthly Clothing Swap. Not only are these events widely recognized as popular and fun activities for everyone in Gulfport and the surrounding area, they support great causes.

All of these events are designed to attract visitors to Gulfport-driving street traffic to your businesses. For many of us these event days are our biggest revenue days but I constantly hear on the streets from new visitors or those who haven't been here for a while something like "I can't believe how cool Gulfport is-we need to come here more often" and then do and bring their friends and so on.

Membership dues and event revenue have fueled our ability to aggressively promote and advertise our waterfront district in print, broadcast and online media. In the past 2 years we have substantially increased our advertising budget spending approximately \$90,000. We feel these efforts have been substantially beneficial to the growth and sustenance of our businesses, targeting residents and visitors alike.

The GMA also recognizes the importance of giving back. In 2015 the GMA supported the work of four non-profit organizations: CASA (Community Action Stops Abuse), Circle of Friends of the Gulfport Public Library, Daystar Life Center, and the Sonia Plotnick Health Fund with over \$8000 in contributions.

Another great step forward is the new Welcome Center we have opened in partnership with the Chamber. I hope you all have had a chance to visit. It looks great and there are plans in place to make even further improvements.

We have just created a newsletter to keep members more informed on a regular basis and you can look forward to the first one shortly in your e-mail inbox. It will provide news and talk about ways that you can be more involved in our activities and direction as well as opportunities to get more exposure for your business.

Your GMA membership also affords your business exposure in our printed brochures, which had more than 20,000 copies distributed last year, as well as a page of your own on the web at our expanding visitor-oriented website [VisitGulfportFlorida.com](http://VisitGulfportFlorida.com).

We will unfortunately be raising dues this year from \$100 to \$125. This is a direct result of our insurance premiums for event coverage that have more than doubled. It is our opinion that this remains a great value for all that is accomplished. We would like to complete membership renewals by the end of February, and would appreciate receiving your dues payment of \$125 no later than Saturday, February 28th. Please mail your payment to the address noted above, or drop off your payment at the Welcome Center. Checks can be made payable to Gulfport Merchants Association, or simply "GMA." Please include this letter with the name of your business.

Monthly GMA meetings take place every first Monday of the month beginning at 6:30pm in various locations. We encourage you to designate a staff member to represent your business at GMA meetings and activities if you cannot attend yourself. Please make sure that we have your current e-mail address, and that of your designated GMA representative. Send any new, corrected, or additional e-mail address information to John Haugen, GMA new member coordinator, at [jhaugen@GulfportMA.com](mailto:jhaugen@GulfportMA.com). I would personally love to hear from any of you directly and can be reached at 773-425-1130 or [slinde@GulfportMA.com](mailto:slinde@GulfportMA.com)

Your participation and membership in the Gulfport Merchants Association is important to us. We look forward to another successful year. Thank you.

Respectfully,

*Scott Linde*

Scott Linde  
President, Gulfport Merchants Association