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## **Nation's leading professionals offer aid in Gulf Coast rebuilding**

**By Kevin Fee and Andres Viglucci  
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GULFPORT, Miss. - The challenge of rebuilding Mississippi's Gulf Coast is attracting some of the nation's leading professionals in architectural planning, engineering and management, who have offered to help at reduced or no cost, state officials say.

"These folks are offering their services anywhere from totally free to partially free," said Leland Speed, executive director of the Mississippi Development Authority. "We also have offers from third parties that are interested in funding planning activities."

Among those whose name has surfaced: Andres Duany, the Miami-based planning guru best known for designing the traditional town of Seaside in the Florida Panhandle.

Duany met with Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour earlier this week to talk about rebuilding communities such as Biloxi, Gulfport and Pascagoula.

Duany heads the planning and design firm Duany Plater-Zyberk and Co. along with his wife, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. The firm is widely recognized as a leader of New Urbanism, an international movement that among other things seeks to revitalize urban areas and end suburban sprawl.

Duany said the need for rapid reconstruction along the Gulf Coast presents an unprecedented opportunity to improve the quality of housing and planning by applying the tenets of New Urbanism.

New Urbanists tout traditional town planning, with its compact towns and neighborhoods and pedestrian-friendly streets, as an alternative to car-dependent suburban sprawl. The pattern of subdivisions and strip malls, they say, waste energy and land, ravage the environment and strip established communities of their sense of place.

"In Mississippi it's about getting it done right, having it better than it was before. This is a tremendous opportunity to do that," Duany said. "We want to create areas that are more diverse, less auto dependent, more environmentally friendly and more secure from hurricanes."

While stressing that nothing has been finalized, Duany said he hopes to recruit as many as 50 national and international firms and pair up their planners and designers with local officials on projects of varying scale - from broad redevelopment plans or new zoning codes for stricken municipalities to streamlining the permitting of new buildings.

"Everything is optional. Nothing will be imposed. They will create the tools that people can adopt or not as they choose," Duany said. Most of the firms would work for cost, or about a third to a quarter of their usual fees, Duany said. "These firms are not looking for work."

Duany's firm has experience with post-disaster reconstruction. It drew up a plan for the reconstruction of Florida City, including its city hall, after Hurricane Andrew flattened much of the rural town south of Miami in 1992.

Another company involved in rebuilding talks with Mississippi officials is McKinsey & Company, one of the nation's best-known management consulting firms with offices throughout the country, but not in Mississippi or Louisiana.

Speed said the work of the big names would complement that of local officials and planners.

"Whatever is going to be done is going to have to be done with the total input of the local professionals and elected public officials," he said. "Nothing is going forward that they don't agree on."

Speed said he isn't ready to reveal the names of all the companies that have offered services. He said he's met with public officials along the coast in communities affected by Katrina.