

AEGIS, UAH help Gulf's recovery

Economic partnership to assess challenges in south Alabama

By Budd McLaughlin

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A Huntsville high-tech firm and the University of Alabama in Huntsville are helping a state economic partnership develop an economic recovery strategy for Alabama's Gulf Coast.

The Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, a private, nonprofit group, has been awarded a \$593,500 grant from the Economic Development Administration to "assess the economic development and challenges and opportunities" in south Alabama, the EDPA said in a press release Monday.

The grant will be combined with \$400,000 from the Alabama Industry Competitiveness Foundation and the EDPA Foundation.

The work is to last one year when the EDPA will present the findings to the EDA, which will use the report to consider federal funding for the region.

Huntsville-based AEGIS Technologies is providing \$78,000 in in-kind services in modeling and simulation.

Using business and education resources, the project is to help improve the economies of the eight-county region - Baldwin, Mobile, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Escambia, Monroe and Washington counties - that was impacted by last year's oil spill.

"The oil spill affected countless Alabamians and business owners," Gov. Robert Bentley said in the statement. "And although the Gulf Coast counties were Ground Zero for the spill, the impact is felt statewide, which is of even more importance during already challenging economic times."

"The collaboration of the business community, government and universities represents the best of Alabama and this strategic approach to economic development is why Alabama will emerge from this crisis a stronger, more competitive state."

The EDPA assembled a partnership with state research universities - UAH, University of Alabama at Birmingham, University of South Alabama and Auburn - and the two-year college system in applying for the grant.

"The key is to integrate these assets - high technology companies, economic development partners and research universities - into collaborative teams dedicated to building strategic solutions for the economic development and well-being of our state," said Dr. John M. Horack, UAH vice president for research.