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Gulf of Mexico Program

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DR. MARK LaSalle WINS 2ND PLACE GULF GUARDIAN AWARD

STENNIS SPACE CENTER, Miss. – The Gulf of Mexico Program recently announced that, Dr. Mark LaSalle of Mississippi State University's Coastal Research and Extension Center will receive a second place Gulf Guardian Award for 2003 in the Individual Category. The award will be presented to him at the Southern States Environmental Conference and Exhibition scheduled Sept. 23-25, in Biloxi.

Four years ago the Gulf of Mexico Program developed the Gulf Guardian awards as a method of recognizing and honoring the businesses, community groups, individuals, and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive. The Gulf of Mexico Program began in 1988 to protect, restore, and maintain the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem in economically sustainable ways. Award entries were received from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. A first, second, and third place award are given each year in six categories – individual, business, youth and education, nonprofit organizations, government, and partnership efforts.

“Our oceans and coasts are precious resources,” said Jimmy Palmer, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator in Atlanta. “Coastal and marine waters provide some of the most diverse and biologically productive habitats on the planet,” he added. “This year's Gulf Guardian Award winners are doing their part to keep these valuable resources healthy and productive.”

“We humans have a seemingly inexhaustible ability to impact the world around us, yet we have within us an equal capacity to protect and preserve a balance with our environment,” said LaSalle. “It is not enough for us to simply be aware of our place in the world. It is our responsibility as good stewards to educate ourselves about our place within the landscape and to take active steps to seek a balance between our activities and the maintenance of healthy ecosystems,” he added.

Dr. Mark LaSalle serves as the chief facilitator of the South Mississippi Environmental and Agricultural Coordination Organization. Stakeholders from the spectrum of agro-environmental interests meet quarterly for information exchange, networking, and to strengthen existing programs through cooperation. Beginning in November of 2001, under Dr. LaSalle's unrelenting energy, the group undertook development of the South Mississippi Watershed Forum to promote watershed education, interagency and stakeholder watershed information exchange, and facilitated roundtable discussions on coastal watershed successes and needs. These efforts, under his leadership, are promoting environmental education and stewardship throughout the rapidly developing Coastal Mississippi area, while maintaining economical integrity and personal dignity.

Gulf of Mexico Program Office Acting Director Bryon O. Griffith said, "Our 2003 Gulf Guardian Award winners are to be commended for taking action to preserve and restore the Gulf of Mexico." "One out of every six jobs in the United States is marine-related, generating \$54 billion in goods and services annually. Protecting these waters makes sense economically, aesthetically, and environmentally. Acting as one community to protect our one and only Gulf of Mexico is essential to our way of life and our standard of living."

For a list of all the Gulf Guardian Award winners for 2003, visit the Gulf of Mexico Program web site at <http://www.epa.gov/gmpo> and click on the Gulf Guardian Award button on the left.

The Gulf of Mexico Program is underwritten by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is a non-regulatory, inclusive consortium of state and federal government agencies and representatives of the business and agricultural community, fishing industry, scientists, environmentalists, and community leaders from all five Gulf States. The Gulf Program seeks to improve the environmental health of the Gulf in concert with economic development.

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Editor's Note: For more information about the Gulf Guardian Awards and the Gulf of Mexico Program, call Terry Hines Smith at 228-688-1159. For more information about the award winner, call him at 228-388-4710.