

HURRICANE KATRINA VS THE BEAU RIVAGE

by Ed Bigley

Let me start this article by introducing myself. My name is Ed Bigley, CCGTCC Member R5083 from Orlando, FL. On any normal day I am a 911 Police/Fire/Medical Dispatcher for a local City here in Orlando. That is until a hurricane hits somewhere in our response area, and then I become Ed Bigley, Emergency Response Team Member. So when Hurricane Katrina decided to pay a visit on 8/29/05 at 0610am to the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, our Team was activated to assist in the relief efforts.

I am certain that all of us have seen the pictures that have come out of the area. I will spare you those, as this has been well documented. But what hasn't been reported on extensively is our beloved Gulf Coast casinos, and in particular my favorite of them all.....the Beau Rivage.

Before Katrina's arrival I was a regular visitor to Mississippi, spending many days and nights enjoying the southern hospitality of the Biloxi and Gulfport regions. I am an active member in the Deep South Chip Collecting Club, which always gave me an excuse to visit the area I had grown to love. Without a doubt, the Resort that was by far my favorite was the Beau Rivage. As a fan of Steve Wynn's work, "she" was the Bellagio by the Sea. Not only did the Beau become an interest in my collection, but also my web work. I built a fan site dedicated to the Beau

which can be found at <http://home.cfl.rr.com/bigley>

Arriving in the MS area it was well understood we had a mission to do. No question about it at all, but it was my hope that we would end up someplace close to the Beau so I could find out first hand how she had fared. As luck would have it, I got my wish. Our Department was assigned to the Biloxi Police Dept, and in doing so we would report to them daily for assignment. So when the day came when we were directed to handle crowd control for the 3500 Beau Rivage employees for their payday, I was pretty happy.

MGM-Mirage had set up an area across the street from the Beau in their employee parking lot as an Employee Relief Area. At this loca-

tion there employees could find bottled water, clothing, Red Cross, FEMA, and a hot meal prepared by the Beau Rivage chefs. Before Katrina hit, the chefs had lowered the freezers to their coldest settings. So each day they would defrost a specialty from one of the ten restaurants and prepare meals for everyone. We were there for two days; the first day was Steak and Lobster, and the second was Filet Mignon. And of course all the fixing you could imagine. You don't know how much a hot meal does for morale when you know you don't have to eat MRE's (Meals Ready to Eat). Hanging out with the Beau personnel was a bitter sweet experience. It was great to be with them, but we also got to see their pain first hand. The stories they told, the pictures they showed, you couldn't help but to become attached to



these people. We had the honor of meeting a lot of there upper echelon, who were happy that we were there to give them a hand. They were more then willing to go out of there way to provide any request for service we needed, so when I was asked I only had one request....an inside look at the Beau Rivage.

My tour was set up for the follow- ing day. Upon arriving and going thru extensive Security, my first glimpse as I drove the hill to the formal valet parking area was one of debris.

800 construction workers were already on site, all in full stride. My tour began by meeting Mr. Allen Green, the head structural engineer for the Beau Rivage at the main front entrance. Mr. Green is the man in charge of putting the Beau back together and returning her to her original glory. It was obvious that the News reports on the Beau had been somewhat misconstrued. Though the Beau is structurally sound, she is far from being free of damage. Mr Green explained that though the Beau Rivage stood 20 feet above the Gulf, they estimated the storm surge at 28 feet. The many days I had previously been inside the Beau had been one of



wonderful sites and smells....today that smell was of Mississippi muck and construction dust.

As we entered thru the main entrance to the lobby, sounds of demolition were in progress as two back- hoes where tearing up the floor.

As the lobby opens to the right, you can see where the Check In and Store Promenade stood.

Going straight thru the lobby and down the ramp, the buffet stood to the left.

Continuing down the ramp, the floor opens to the Casino area which span's 90,000 square feet. This is now one of debris from ruined carpeting to flooded slot machines.

Continuing towards the back of the facility on the Casino level, it was obvious where the water had risen too.

From the back of the Beau you can see the damage to the adjacent Hard Rock Casino which was slated for its Grand Opening the night Katrina arrived.

Towards the end of the tour, Mr. Green could tell that I was pretty bummed that the Casino I once knew was in such disarray. He was very assuring that the Beau Rivage would once again return to her former self. Since she was just recently built in 1998/99, they knew exactly what they needed supply wise and had already placed some orders. Estimate for re- opening are approximately one year. When it came to Beau Rivage chips, there was no question about it, they would re-rack. Though they have had no looting issues, in looking around you could see there chip's lying here and there. No records had been lost



or damage due to Katrina, so if someone came in with a \$1000 chip to cash in, it would be easy for them to track.

As Mr. Green walked us out, we thanked him for his valuable time, as he thanked us as well, as we took a few last pictures.



Though the Beau Rivage is battered and bloodied, she is far from being down for the count. As a phoenix rising from the ashes, we can expect her to do the same...stronger and more beautiful than before.

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(I personally would like to thank Captain Brett Railey and Officer Skip Short for the use of these pictures from the tour.)



The destruction caused by hurricane Katrina