

***Rhapsody of the Seas* Sailing from Galveston Island**

The Port of Galveston solidified its position as the number one cruise port in the western Gulf of Mexico with the first sailing of the *Rhapsody of the Seas* in April marking a new five-year agreement between the Port of Galveston and Royal Caribbean International (RCI).

"The Board and staff are pleased with Royal Caribbean's decision to call at Galveston Island for the next five years," stated Steven M. Cernak, Port Director. "This new piece of business not only positively impacts the Port of Galveston, but will also create a roll-over impact on the entire Galveston community through passenger purchases, visits to local attractions and restaurants, and pre- and post-cruise hotel accommodations."

The *Rhapsody of the Seas* sails from Galveston Island every Sunday on seven-night Western Caribbean sailings, with ports-of-calls at Key West, Florida; Georgetown, Cayman Islands; and Cozumel, Mexico. The Key West port calls include late-night departures that allow guests extra time to enjoy the Key West nightlife.

"We were very happy to return to Galveston," said Jack Williams, President and Chief Operating Officer of Royal Caribbean International. "We truly appreciate the warm Texas welcome we have received. We look forward to five years of successful sailings from Galveston."

Using an economic multiplier, developed for ports involved in cruise operations, RCI's year-round operation of the *Rhapsody of the Seas* could have a direct economic impact on the Galveston community of \$10 million and an indirect impact of \$15 million. In addition to this impact on the city and the surrounding area, Royal Caribbean's marketing efforts worldwide for their cruises from Galveston will more fully enhance Galveston's reputation in the travel industry.

"The vision of the Galveston Wharves Board of Trustees, the strong backing of the Galveston business community and the investment of the Galveston City Council combined to bring about cruise opportunities for Galveston Island and support continued growth," said Donald L. Schattel, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Port of Galveston. "Internationally successful cruise operations look for vision and leadership when they make commitments of this magnitude. Our successful cruise operations are proving very attractive to cruise lines."

This decision by RCI represents an additional payoff for the Port's \$11-million investment in the cruise terminal, further diversifying the Port's business base and continuing to provide a boon to the burgeoning Galveston tourism trade.

Local merchants are benefiting from the growing cruise trade. Galveston is unique among American cruising ports, with restaurants, shops and other tourist attractions located just one block from the cruise terminal along the waterfront and in the National Strand Historic Landmark District, a world-class vacation destination.

Cruise ships, and their crews, are big buyers, too. Galveston area businesses supplying everything from fuel to flowers are enjoying increased sales.

The *Rhapsody of the Seas* was built in France and celebrated her maiden voyage in 1997. She carries a Norwegian crew of 765 members. She is 915 feet long, 105.6 feet wide, requires 25 feet draft and cruises at 22 knots. She has 11 passenger decks; eight restaurants, bars and lounges; and a double occupancy of 2000 guests.