Galveston County Library System News

County Libraries Weather Hurricane Ike

The eight public libraries in Galveston County prepared for the arrival of Hurricane Ike by following individual hurricane preparation plans. Staff prepared each of the buildings for possible wind and rising water damage by covering equipment or materials with plastic, moving materials to higher shelves, backing up and bringing down computer systems, and distributing phone lists of emergency numbers for staff and for emergency management contacts. The Hitchcock Library served as a pickup point for residents needing evacuation assistance. With the storm more than 48 hours from landfall, each library closed to the public to allow staff and families adequate time to evacuate the area.

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Three members of the Rosenberg Library staff, including Librarian John Augelli, spent a sleepless night
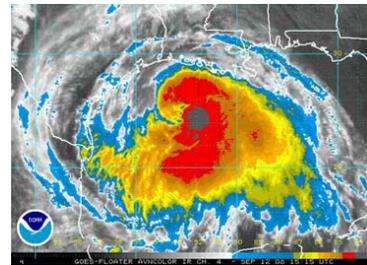

Image of Hurricane Ike by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration)

in the historic building, protecting the Galveston Library collection and attempting to mediate damage.

Damage Assessment

With the exception of Rosenberg Library, the public libraries of Galveston County received none or very minimal effects from the storm. The Galveston Library suffered extensive damage to its first floor because of the storm surge. According to the damage report posted on the Rosenberg Library website, "The flood waters completely wrecked all of the departments and library functions on the first floor, including the children's department, the Wortham Auditorium, the Randall meeting room, circulation department, technical services office, operations department, and the Friends sorting room and book shelf. The library building also sustained some damage to the roof and one of the hurricane panels. Probably the most devastating blow we received from Hurricane Ike was the

Moore Memorial staff members clean up after the storm.

destruction of building systems located on the first floor, including the loss of major electrical panels, the telephone system, Internet routing equipment, firemen's service, components of the HVAC system, storm protection panels and parts of the fire and smoke detection system."

The Rosenberg Library staff started recovery efforts on the day following the storm. As part of its recovery plan, the library has also embarked on a massive effort to relocate vital building systems to the upper floors of the building. Since the middle of October, the Rosenberg Library has been restoring services in stages including its website, extensions services and limited check-out & reference service at

the east entrance to the building. Plans are currently underway to provide a limited number of public access computers at the east entrance by the first week of December. The Rosenberg Library is also hoping to reopen the entire second floor and mezzanine floor of the building to the public by the middle of February. For more information on the restoration of library services, please visit the library's website at www.rosenberg-library.org. Two other libraries reported minor problems. Texas City reported some water seeping in through the walls of their children's department and wind damage to landscaping. La Marque had minor water

damage, but was without electricity throughout the next week. The other five libraries sustained no damage, other than power outages.

A note of appreciation to the Galveston County Commissioners Court:

Back to Work

Library staff reported to work, with or without electricity, and began planning to meet the needs of their users. Before the library opened to the public, Helen Hall in League City sent staff to work the city hall "call center" and to the convention center, where computers were set up for FEMA and insurance applications and claims. Texas City assigned staff projects of moving audiovisual collections and picking up debris from the grounds while closed to the public. Users and staff at Mae Bruce Public Library in Santa Fe rejoiced that Internet and power service were restored simultaneously. The Dickinson Library users were fortunate to have Internet restored the day after their power became available on the 22nd. All libraries on the mainland were able to open to the public as soon as electricity and Internet service were restored, with Friendswood opening first on Monday, September 15th and La Marque Library reopening on September 23rd.

Friendswood Public Library

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Assisting the Public

When power was restored, Moore Memorial revised their operating hours to be opened two Sunday afternoons . Friendswood Public Library added fourteen public computers to their network, thus providing twenty-six computers to meet demand. The library's meeting room was converted into a WiFi workroom for

WiFi workroom

personal laptops, while library programming was suspended. Helen Hall in League City made use of the newly installed computer lab with twelve additional computers for public use, and also provided additional table space and power cords for wireless laptop users. La Marque opened with Internet capabilities and WiFi.

Information Centers

Each library then served as a clearinghouse for community information on FEMA, Blue Roof, unemployment, food stamps, local shelters, POD sites, and the list of FEMA approved hotels. League City library staff set up a "Recovering from Ike" literature display and passed along storm information from the city's Public Affairs office. Friendswood also reported that one local business distributed paychecks for their employees at the library site, because their place of business had been destroyed. The importance of the Galveston County public libraries was especially evident as teams of FEMA representatives made use of the public computers to file their weekly reports.