Libraries still devastated by Hurricanes Rita & Katrina
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NEW ORLEANS (AP) - Eight of New Orleans' 13 libraries are still closed because of
damage from Hurricane Katrina, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency has
taken over one-quarter of the main library. Hurricane Rita flattened four of the libraries in
Cameron Parish, on the western end of the state.

They're just a few of the 25 public library systems damaged by the hurricanes in
Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. University and school libraries also suffered major
damage. Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma damaged or destroyed dozens of colleges
and universities and more than 1,100 schools.

Two of the schools -- the St. Bernard Unified School in Chalmette and Gorenflo
Elementary School in Biloxi, Miss. -- were to get money to rebuild their libraries
Wednesday from First Lady Laura Bush.

They are the first schools to get grants from the Gulf Coast School Library Recovery
Initiative set up by the Laura Bush Foundation for America's Libraries.

It costs at least $50,000 to restore an elementary school library, and double that for a
secondary school library, according to the foundation's Web site.

Another program to help public school libraries affected by the hurricanes and other
disasters -- including those which have taken in large numbers of displaced students --
offers grants of $5,000 to $15,000. The American Association of School Librarians will
administer it, with help reviewing grants and providing information from the National
Education Association. Discount retailer Dollar General is providing $800,000 for the
program, called Beyond Words.

The school librarians' group is part of the American Library Association, which has
signed up 750 volunteers to work on renovations at two New Orleans public libraries
during its convention, expected to bring 20,000 people to the city next month. Librarians
in 25 parishes and counties hit hard by the storms can get free registration.

The ALA also has raised $330,000 for Hurricane Katrina relief and given $100,000 each
last month to the Louisiana Library Association and the Rebuild Mississippi Libraries
Fund, while helping more than 300 libraries around the country "adopt" libraries to help
in the stricken area.

In Louisiana, Katrina and Rita destroyed 26 libraries in nine parishes and damaged 39
more in those and five other parishes. Another 45 libraries lost all or significant parts of
their collections. The storms did minor damage to libraries in an additional 11 parishes.
It would cost $63 million to rebuild Louisiana public libraries damaged by last year's hurricanes back to their condition before the storm, said Diane Brown, deputy state librarian.

"But many of our libraries were below standard," she added. "To rebuild back to standard would be about $203 million.

"Those are the latest estimates. They change daily."