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AMERICANS FOR LIBRARIES COUNCIL ANNOUNCES GRANTS TO GULF COAST LIBRARIES

Grants Signal Importance of Libraries for Community Renewal

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New York, N.Y. July 16, 2007—Americans for Libraries Council (ALC) today announced the first grants awards to repair and rebuild public libraries damaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The specific commitments are: \$1.6 million for New Orleans Public Library (Louisiana); \$1.2 million for Jefferson Parish Library (Louisiana); \$600,000 for Hancock County Libraries (Mississippi); and \$600,000 for Harrison County Libraries (Mississippi). These grants are the first awards made by ALC with support from the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund as part of a larger package of support to renew libraries – and communities – in the Gulf Coast.

“An investment in a library represents a commitment to the future of the community,” said former President George H. W. Bush, when the fund for libraries was announced in August 2006. “The sooner libraries reopen their doors, the sooner Gulf Coast residents will feel they are getting back their lives.”

Overall, the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund committed \$5.0 million to help repair and rebuild libraries in Mississippi and Louisiana. Of this total, \$4.0 million was intended for “bricks & mortar” improvements, another \$400,000 was earmarked for collection-related activities, and some additional resources were designated for expert assistance to the libraries. The ALC, a national non-profit organization that supports innovation and investment in the nation’s libraries, was selected to organize and oversee the library selection and grantmaking process.

More than 141 libraries across the Gulf Coast were damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, with damage to libraries alone estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Despite massive damage to their buildings and collections, some libraries in the region provided critical services in the aftermath of the storm, including internet connections for contacting relatives and filing FEMA emergency forms; information on the whereabouts of family and friends; safety from looters and floodwaters; access to clean water and public toilets; staging areas for emergency crews; and access to health and safety information.

Today, relatively few libraries are back to full capacity. Some are still in ruins; others are operating in temporary facilities; still others have severe staff and collections shortages.

Throughout Louisiana and Mississippi, 48 libraries remain closed and the work to repair and rebuild continues. In Jefferson Parish, for instance, where only 2 of the library's 16 locations were undamaged by hurricane winds and flooding, several are far from being fully restored.

Meanwhile, the need for services remains high as Gulf Coast communities rebuild, displaced families return, and private internet connections remain a luxury—underscoring the need for public access computers, educational materials and reliable information on health, employment and safety.

In announcing the first grants ALC President Diantha Dow Schull stated: “After a year of working with state and local library and community leaders, we are pleased to announce these first grants. Each of the recipient library systems has overcome great challenges in putting together their rebuilding plan, and support from the BCKF will be critical in helping them to achieve their goals.”

The ALC grants will be announced at two local press events. On July 16 the grants to the Jefferson Parish Library as well as the New Orleans Public Library will be announced at the main branch of the Jefferson Parish system, in Metairie. Both systems will be using their grants to address major repairs at multiple locations.

On July 17 the grant to Mississippi's Hancock County Library will be announced at the town square of Waveland, Mississippi, near the site where the community's four-year-old library was demolished by Katrina. “In Waveland, the library and the police station will be the first two buildings rebuilt, an intentional decision on the part of the mayor and the city council to show that security and literacy are the town's two highest priorities, and both cornerstones of rebuilding,” said Bruce Astrein, ALC Executive Director. The ALC grant is one component of the funding package to build a new and enhanced library.

Over the next nine months, ALC will continue to oversee these grants as well as make some additional awards in these same library systems. “Equally important, we hope these grants will call attention to the remarkable work being done by people who are not giving up even when it seems others have given up on them,” commented Astrein. “We also hope to use these grants to attract more public and private dollars, since local libraries can help Gulf Coast communities address so many critical and ongoing needs.”

According to Astrein, who is overseeing ALC's Gulf Coast Libraries Renewal Program, “The work is not just about restoring what was lost, but about helping communities imagine and plan for libraries of the future. It is the key to our entire effort in the region. As Lon Dickerson, Director of the Jefferson Parish Library System understood and stated so well after Katrina: ‘It's not enough to simply rebuild our libraries; we must build back better.’ “

To learn more about the Gulf Coast library grants, see an interview with Bruce Astrein, ALC Executive Director: http://www.actforlibraries.org/success_gulfcoast_BAinterview.php

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Americans for Libraries Council

ALC is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing innovation and investment in the nation's libraries. It established the Gulf Coast Libraries Renewal Fund in 2005 to promote both the short and long term redevelopment of the coastal states' library infrastructure. This grant-making was extended through the BCKF grant, made in 2006. Over the past 12 months, ALC has worked

with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, SOLINET and others active in Gulf Coast redevelopment to identify communities for whom these initial grants will make a difference in their ongoing redevelopment work.

Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund

Former Presidents George H.W. Bush and William Jefferson Clinton established the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund [BCKF] in 2005 in response to Hurricane Katrina. Nearly 60,000 people throughout the nation and the world donated to the Fund in its first few months, raising more than \$100 million. The Fund was set up to provide grants for medium to long-term recovery needs in the affected areas. Presidents Bush and Clinton designated \$5 Million of the contributions to aid public libraries in the region and engaged Americans for Libraries Council (ALC) to oversee the grants.

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