



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Through a monumental effort by hundreds of volunteers forming a human chain ...unique items in the library’s special collections were moved to upper levels, out of harm’s way, as were all the films, theses, dissertations, and irreplaceable books...”

-Nancy Baker, University Librarian, University of Iowa Main Library
(www.ala.org/ala/online/currentnews)

A new term has come to my attention recently. Or maybe it has been around for a while, but I never noticed it. “Cooling centers” have been the subject of emails, articles and conversations, as public entities are responding to the health threats of high temperatures and poor air quality.

The lobby at the Albany Library was designated a cooling center, as have been several libraries in California. In some areas, signs are posted when the library is functioning as a cooling center. According to Mark R. Parker, Director of Library Services, Placer County Library, the County OES (Office of Emergency Services) determines when the cooling centers are activated. Their activation criteria is “105 degrees or above during the day and 75 degrees or above during the night for three consecutive days or more.”

It is information like this that reminds us of the multiple uses of a public library. Even in areas where libraries are being

evacuated due to fires or storms, there are still some operating and doing their best to meet the needs of an area in crisis.

When I looked for information on public libraries and emergencies, one of the reports I found was on the California State Library blog (<http://blog.library.ca.gov>). On July 1, Rochelle Carr, Branch Librarian at the Paradise Branch of the Butte County Library, gave a vivid and moving description of the library’s ongoing activities related to the fire in their area:

“The Paradise Branch Library is under Precautionary Evacuations Orders...I continually post news bulletins, fire locations and the evacuation maps as I get them and tape them to a large easel for patrons to view and examine. I have the radio tuned to the local emergency information station for the latest news about precautionary evacuations as well...On another note, I was surprised at how many patrons came into

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the library. They were waiting at the door, many with face masks. All ages came in wanting books and trying to communicate with friends via email and to get news.”

Sometimes it isn't physical help that libraries offer but instead technical advice. David Beed of the Cummins Technical Center in Columbus gratefully comments on the “tons of great advice” he received from library discussion lists, after his center lost “50% of our in-house materials and all of our fixtures and furniture.” And, in a June 18 update on Iowa, Keck Memorial Library Director Llewann Bryant described feeling “like the Red Cross of libraries” as local evacuees came to the Library “trying to find information, see pictures of their flooded homes, check email.”

Another way libraries help is by providing information on their websites. The Iowa City Public Library has a page called “Iowa Flood of 2008.” Listed

under “Flood Recovery Information” are such items as the Small Business Flood Assistance Program, the telephone number and email address of the local American Red Cross, contact information for FEMA and even a downloadable information booklet called “Repairing Your Flooded Home.” The library is listed as the SBA Disaster Recovery Center and open hours are posted.

It is easy for librarians and library users to get caught up in the daily interactions of a library: asking and answering questions, looking for library materials, organizing and attending programs and more. However in natural disasters, libraries continue to demonstrate their value as the heart of a community by providing much needed information and even sanctuaries.