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## A Decade Later, Katrina Evokes Strong Memories

**UM recalls deadly storm, the response and lessons learned**

 AUGUST 25, 2015 BY **CHRISTINA STELJE**

**FaTvLiErCcSMPrSt**



A team from Ole Miss helps clean up and rebuild after Hurricane Katrina at Lynn Meadows Discovery Center in Gulfport. Photo by Robert Jordan

OXFORD, Miss. – On Aug. 29, 2005, Mississippi was changed forever as Hurricane Katrina, the worst natural disaster in United States history, ravaged the Gulf Coast, killing hundreds of people in the state and displacing thousands.

When the storm passed through, recovery efforts began immediately. Emergency agencies and personnel partnered with research institutions to get many forms of aid to the damaged area as soon as possible. **The University of Mississippi**, far enough north of the storm's landfall to avoid significant damage,

was able to respond in a variety of ways, as students collected and sent relief supplies to shattered communities and faculty members and students helped counsel evacuees and provide vital information to rescuers.

Almost immediately after the storm passed through the state, a team from the **UM School of Engineering** headed south to help in preparing maps and images for emergency response personnel and decision makers using Geographic Information Systems, or GIS. Gregory Easson, director of the **UM Geoinformatics Center** and professor of geology and geological engineering, took several graduate students and their equipment to Jackson to help develop a variety of maps needed by personnel in the emergency response center and in the field.

"There were a lot of people who just wanted to help," Easson said.

Just two days following the storm, Easson and five graduate students, along with other university partners and government agencies, were set up at an emergency operations center in Jackson to make maps of everything from locations of food and ice distribution sites to cell tower coverage.

Another important service provided by the GIS support volunteers was geocoding addresses of Mississippians in need of medical help or evacuation. These maps were critical because most landmarks and street signs were destroyed in the storm, making it difficult for rescue workers to find people who needed help. Whenever the National Guard received a call with an address, the GIS team converted that address to geographic coordinates that could be used to find the person in need.

Other maps showing damage on the Mississippi Gulf Coast were used by the **Mississippi Emergency Management Agency** for personnel briefings, and maps created to illustrate the progress in restoring electrical power provided a good indicator of the recovery progress. The maps were distributed via the media, used in press briefings and by decision makers at MEMA and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"The students were getting to use what they learned in their coursework in a vital, real-life situation," Easson said. "It was an incredibly gratifying experience to see the amount of people that stepped up to help any way they could."

Due to the mass outage of electricity and cell towers, many Gulf Coast-area students attending Ole Miss were unable to contact family members, said Sparky Reardon, who was the university's dean of students at the time.

"After the storm, a father from San Antonio called me because he couldn't get in touch with his daughter," Reardon said. "She had a Coast telephone number and since the towers were out, nothing would go through. Someone suggested to try texting her. Shortly after that, she found a landline and called us in tears, excited that we were able to put her through to her father. That was great to be able to help with."

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## Campus Briefs

### Donations Sought for 25th Annual Books and Bears Program

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children's play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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### Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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## Ole Miss In the News

### Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith's Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith's enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith's 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school's first African-American student.

The **Office of the Dean of Students** offered practical advice for students traveling to help their parents in the damaged area, including road damage information, and helped coordinate with instructors about class absences, Reardon said.

"The amount of issues we were dealing with was incredible," he said.

He took the efforts a step further that October, leading a team of students to the Gulf Coast to assemble furniture for a Long Beach public school so that classes could resume.

Student groups organized collection drives on campus that netted two truckloads of bottled water, canned food and paper goods that were sent to agencies coordinating relief efforts along the Gulf Coast.

The university also established a fund for Ole Miss students displaced by the storm. Alumni, students, football fans and other donors contributed more than \$250,000 to the fund, which provided direct financial assistance to more than 400 students affected by the hurricane.

On Oct. 1, 2005, the university also hosted a star-studded telethon to raise money for Gulf Coast recovery efforts. "Mississippi Rising," a three-hour program broadcast live on MSNBC from Tad Smith Coliseum, was organized by Ole Miss alumnus and former Hollywood agent Sam Haskell. The event, which featured more than three dozen celebrities, raised more than \$15 million for the Mississippi Hurricane Recovery Fund.

Stefan Schulenberg, a UM associate professor of **psychology**, and a multidisciplinary team of researchers have conducted research on the long-term psychological impact of the storm, in one study examining the relationship between self-efficacy and symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

Schulenberg was also involved in the mental health response to Katrina. Following the storm, evacuees began to head north, many coming to Oxford, where an American Red Cross Resource Center was established at the university's Jackson Avenue Center. Evacuees were provided with a variety of aid, including food, water and mental health assistance.

While the primary focus was on helping survivors of the storm, these efforts also gave UM graduate students a way to train in clinical disaster psychology in a real-life, critical scenario.

These research and service experiences laid the groundwork for Schulenberg and his team to study the psychological impact of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill among Gulf Coast communities. Both Hurricane Katrina and the oil spill were integral to the development of the university's **Clinical-Disaster Research Center** in 2012. Schulenberg serves as director of the center, which is dedicated to research, training and service work in the area of disaster mental health.

"Through the center, we hope to train our graduate students in clinical psychology how best to assist mental health efforts during a time of disaster," Schulenberg said. "Disaster preparedness, mitigation and response should be key focal areas for the state of Mississippi in preparation for the next disaster."

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"James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier," a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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