

Editor's Column: "In times of trouble..."

Megan Lowe, University of Louisiana at Monroe

Once again, I find myself ditching the column I planned in favor of a more current and terrible issue: Hurricane Harvey. Texas has been devastated by Harvey, and it appears that Louisiana once again will be pounded by a storm. Many parts of southern Louisiana were already experiencing flooding from Harvey's initial landfall, and now it faces the prospect of much more rain, just a day after the anniversary of Katrina's landfall in 2005. I am compulsively checking my newsfeed on my phone to track Harvey's progress, not to mention the Weather Channel, but I am also getting real-time updates from family in Lake Charles, LA, which is near the Louisiana-Texas border. Looking out the window of my office, the sky is darkening gray, and my inbox is filling with notices across the state consortium's main discussion list of academic libraries across the southern part of the state closing.

I am experiencing some *déjà vu*. I was working in the state when Katrina made landfall. I spent several tense hours trying to make contact with family and friends in southern Louisiana and across Mississippi; I am currently hoping to hear from friends in southern Texas, along the coast. The real-time news coverage was heartbreaking and hard to watch, and that's no different this time around. The notices of library closings are coming slower this time, but they are coming.

The December following Katrina and Rita, my family made a pilgrimage of sorts to New Orleans, as we did every year, to attend Celebration in the Oaks, but this year our pilgrimage took us to the Ninth Ward. We saw for ourselves where the levee had failed. We saw the ground zero of New Orleans' devastation, which had been beyond any of our

imaginings. My aunt and several members of her family stayed with my parents in Jackson, MS, for a couple of weeks. My cousin's husband and his father returned to LaPlace, LA, to get their boat and help evacuate people from New Orleans and surrounding areas.

Many major news outlets are reporting that the "Cajun Navy" has already "deployed" and is helping rescue people across affected areas. The Red Cross has already set up resources to help Harvey victims. Unfortunately, scams have also already emerged, taking advantage of people's desire to help in times of trouble. It is unfortunate, but it also represents a critical responsibility for librarians in times of trouble and any time: helping our users and patrons meaningfully evaluate resources and determine their trustworthiness. As librarians, we have a responsibility to evaluate resources and vet them and to direct our users and patrons towards those reliable resources.

I believe that librarians also have a social responsibility to help during times of trouble. That help can take many forms: donations to reliable charitable organizations like the Red Cross; volunteering at shelters; providing evacuees access to computers to make contact with family and friends as well as make arrangements for assistance; or just being a listening ear and a friendly face to evacuees who come in out of the rain (literally and metaphorically).

It is not clear yet what kind of devastation Louisiana can expect to suffer at the hands of Hurricane Harvey. Prior to Harvey's first landfall in Texas, Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards declared a state of emergency. It seemed to be a preemptive, preparative effort. Whether or not it will make a difference remains to be seen. It is therefore difficult to anticipate how academic libraries across the state will be affected.

In 2016, I co-authored with Lindsey Reno, Michael Matthews, and Michael Sartori a book chapter on our state's academic library consortium, LOUIS, and how it responded to the twin catastrophes of Katrina and Rita. The chapter details how academic libraries throughout the state were affected by the hurricanes and the ways in which LOUIS – the headquarters of which is located in Baton Rouge, a hard-hit area – assisted and supported and facilitated assistance and support to affected libraries. What emerged from that chapter was an academic library-centric view of the hurricane with recommendations for how libraries can prepare themselves for catastrophes like natural disasters and to not get too focused on the recovery process. An over-focus on the recovery process can lead to insufficient communication and preparation before and during the catastrophe itself.

A comprehensive disaster plan should also contain information for how a library can help partner libraries, because even if one's own library is not affected, one's partners may be, like some of the consortial members in LOUIS (Lowe, Matthews, Reno, & Sartori, 2016). Echete (2006) recommends that unaffected libraries can prioritize ILL requests, extend borrowing privileges to the patrons of affected libraries, and relax rules where appropriate and possible (such as using one's phone or lifting printing restrictions). If one's library has a disaster plan, it is important to review it regularly and make sure that staff know their responsibilities should a disaster occur. If a library does not have a disaster plan, it is important to develop one in order to preserve one's library as much as possible and to prepare for recovery, not to mention maintaining contact with library staff to ensure their safety and establishing communication for recovery efforts; furthermore, it should not assume a quick response (Lowe, Matthews, Reno, & Sartori, 2016).

So, what can we do about Harvey? There are many things we can do at this moment and going forward to help those affected by the hurricane. Libraries can consider the above recommendations regarding both their disaster plans and helping out partner libraries. Librarians as professionals can make such suggestions to their library and campus administration and encourage the relaxing of rules to make things easier for evacuees. They can direct people who want to help or who need assistance to legitimate resources and charitable organizations. Librarians as individuals can donate their time and/or resources to charitable organizations. We can do a lot as both organizations and individuals to help those affected by Hurricane Harvey.

- AABB [blood donation organization]
<http://www.aabb.org/press/Pages/pr170827.aspx>
- The American Red Cross: Hurricane Harvey
<https://www.redcross.org/donate/hurricane-harvey>
- Houston Humane Society
<http://www.houstonhumane.org>
- Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund
<https://ghcf.org/hurricane-relief/>
- The LGBTQ Disaster Relief Fund [through the Montrose Center]
<https://my.reason2race.com/DNicol/HurricaneHarveyLGBTQDisasterReliefFund2017>

References

Eschete, D. (2006, spring). Chaos and order. *Louisiana Libraries*, 68(4), 12-14.

Lowe, M., Matthews, M., Reno, L., & Sartori, M. (2016). The LOUIS Consortium and catastrophe. *Handbook of Research on Academic Library Partnerships and Collaborations* (pp. 126-166). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.