

Red Cross reports new purchases, training

By LYNN LOFTON
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In the past year donations to the Southeast Mississippi Chapter of the American Red Cross have been used to purchase equipment and supplies, and the amount of community education has increased.

Executive Director Paige Roberts says the chapter, which serves Jackson and George counties, is the best it has been in its 91 years of existence. The group recently held its annual meeting.

"The chapter is very strong," she said. "Through donations and training for volunteers we have been able to improve our capacity to serve the community in disaster preparation, prevention and service."

In 2007, the organization received a \$125,000 donation from Chet Lott through a music project and a \$34,700 grant from the Wal-Mart Foundation. While the chapter deliberated how to best use the funds, the money earned interest.

"We wanted to be the best stewards we could be with the funds," Roberts said. "We got it because people trust we'll do the right things with it and be there in this community's time of need."

The group bought two supply trailers, two one-ton trucks, new computer systems, an ice machine, office furniture, food containers, comfort kits and shelter kits.

The chapter conducted 17 community disaster-education events that included 22 presentations to 1,036 people and the distribution of 25,200 preparedness brochures.

Volunteers were trained to be prepared for a range of responses.

"The more training we have, the better we're able to respond," Roberts said. "We have about 400 trained volunteers who work 365 days a year making plans and responding to everything from family disasters such as fires to tornadoes, ice storms, floods and wildfires. It's not just about hurricanes. During the past twelve months, 109 chapter volunteers were deployed to ten disasters. That says a lot for our community."

New board members introduced at the annual meeting are Sam Allsgood, Jr., Northrop-Grumman; Jill Bockenstette, Gulf LNG Energy project; Walt Massy, Walt Massey Chevrolet; Terri Nyman, George County School District; Al Reaves, Jr., Mississippi Power; and Mark Spicer, Jackson County District Attorney's office.