

# Director: Local Red Cross ready to respond

▶ Southeast Mississippi Chapter meets today

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Staff Reporter

On June 30, the Southeast Mississippi Chapter of the American Red Cross will reach the end of its 2009 fiscal year, and it has never been more prepared for disaster relief, according to chapter administrators.

"The year has been remarkable," said Paige Roberts, executive di-

rector of the chapter. She said she will report the same today at the chapter's annual end-of-year meeting at Scranton's restaurant in Pascagoula.

The yearly report covers "where the chapter sits financially and, more importantly, where we sit in our preparedness for disaster, both in what we do to be prepared and how we prepare the community," Roberts said.

Financially, the Southeast Mississippi Chapter is doing well, Roberts said. In 2009, the chapter operated with a \$700,000 budget,

whereas it usually costs about \$400,000 to operate in an average year, she said.

The chapter operates with eight employees, about 250 volunteers and employees funded nationally through a government hurricane recovery program, Roberts said.

Since July 1 of last year, the chapter has added a bevy of new equipment, including a new computer system at its headquarters in Pascagoula and a pair of 1-ton pickup trucks with fully stocked disaster supply trailers.

"Our new computer system con-

sists of laptops with docking stations, so we can evacuate with our computers, which are already hooked up to our server," Roberts said.

The funding for the computers and the mobile-response units came from two sources: the Wal-Mart Foundation and Chet Lott, son of former Sen. Trent Lott, she said.

Lott donated \$125,000 in December 2007, and the Wal-Mart Foundation gave \$34,741 this year.

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—Paige Roberts, executive director, Southeast Mississippi Chapter of the American Red Cross

## Local Red Cross ready for disaster, director says

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Lott's donation was invested in a certificate of deposit for one year, while the chapter decided how to spend the money, Roberts said.

"This is the first time this chapter has been able to be properly and appropriately equipped," Roberts said.

"We've been working hard for the last five years to be more ready and to get the community more prepared, but you can only do so much without a great deal of funding."

"That \$159,000 is a lot of dollars buying a lot of stuff."

Another purpose of the year-end meeting is to report on and honor the chapter's volunteers, who make up 95 percent of its operating personnel, Roberts said. Stand-out volunteers will receive the Above and Beyond award.

During fiscal year 2009, volunteers were deployed locally and regionally to disasters such as the Simpson County tornado in March and April's wildfires in South Carolina, Roberts said.

During that period, she said, chapter members responded to 10 disasters in six states and logged more than 4,500 hours volunteering. The chapter also trained more than 300 volunteers in disaster response classes, she said.

### By the Numbers

Southeast Mississippi Chapter of the American Red Cross in fiscal year 2009:

- \$700,000 budget
- 109 people deployed (10 disasters in six states)
- 49 families served in single-family disasters (home fires)
- 95 servicemen and women provided emergency communications
- 40 disaster response classes taught to 329 volunteers
- 166 CPR courses taught
- 15 water safety courses taught
- 4,706 volunteer hours logged

"I feel really good about the work being done out of this chapter in both Jackson and George counties," Roberts said. The Southeast Mississippi Chapter also maintains a satellite office in Lucedale.

"When it comes to disaster response, we are in the best shape we have ever been in the history of this chapter," she said.