



APRIL HAVENS/Mississippi Press

Karia Gusman, left, and Leonor Lopez Garcia took their 7-day-old son Omar Isidoro Gusman to the East Central High School shelter Sunday evening to escape Hurricane Gustav.

# Shelters provide many a safe haven

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MS. Press  
9/2/08

Jackson County shelters on Monday afternoon housed about 330 people, about 38 of whom were Louisiana evacuees, said Paige Roberts, executive director of Red Cross' Southeast Mississippi chapter, which covers Jackson and George counties.

At their peak, George and Jackson county shelters held 1,327 people, about half of the amount sheltered the night before Hurricane Katrina hit in August 2005, Roberts said.

All George County shelters were closed Monday, with the exception of the George County Senior Citizens Center, which held 26 people at that time.

Jackson County shelters, which included East Central High School, St. Martin East Elementary, Vancleave High School and special medical needs shelter East Central Community Center, are to remain open through Tuesday, Roberts said.

"But because the state of Mississippi has chosen to be a host state for Louisiana, the 38 from Louisiana will go into a longer-term sheltering program," Roberts said.

Those evacuees will either be housed in a local

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community center, or they will be sent to larger shelters in the Hattiesburg area, she said.

Jackson County Emergency Management Director Butch Loper said the shelters will probably close today, but he did not know an exact time.

At East Central High School, the shelter reached its full capacity — 628 people — only about two hours after opening Sunday afternoon, organizers said.

Other were sent to the George County High School shelter in Lucedale, Roberts said.

As of Monday evening, about 135 people remained, including Leonor Lopez Garcia, who snuggled closely to her 7-day-old infant son Omar Isidoro Gusman on an air mattress in one of the high school hallways.

Garcia evacuated a Pascagoula apartment with her newborn son and his father Karia Gusman Sunday evening. Gustav is the first hurricane Garcia has gone through, as she moved to Pascagoula from Illinois

three months ago, she said.

"I was scared because of the baby," she said, noting she would stay at the shelter as long as necessary to ride out the storm.

On the other side of the school, Mayra Garcia of Irvington, Ala., paced the hallway holding her pregnant stomach. Near full term, she said she was calm even though this was her first hurricane and her Irvington mobile home was under mandatory evacuation.

Her husband, two daughters and several friends lounged on blankets, slept and ate snacks waiting out the bad weather. "Everything is good, and I am calm," she said.

The Red Cross had already made arrangements in case Garcia, or either of the other two pregnant women at the shelter, went into labor, volunteers said.

Near the school's entrance, longtime friends Carolyn Garris and Gwen Stone, both of Pascagoula, laughed and made jokes to pass the time.

The two evacuated together, along with Garris' 90-year-old mother, Earnie Sutton, who was staying at the

East Central Community Center special medical needs shelter down the road.

"She is in very poor health, and she has never experienced a hurricane of any kind," Garris said. "She was very scared, and we thought it would be best to come to a shelter, although I think our apartment would have been safe."

Garris had evacuated to East Central High before Hurricane Katrina hit, she said, so she knew it was safe.

"We couldn't hear the rain or the wind blow during Katrina," she said. "Unless we looked out the window, we couldn't tell what was going on."

Stone, who was in Pascagoula's Belair subdivision as Katrina flooded her home, said she evacuated this time because she was scared the storm would turn east.

"And if we feel threatened again, we'll be coming to public shelters if we get any more storms this season," she said.

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