Relief fund opens new chapter for public school libraries affected by disasters

**Beyond Words™**
the Dollar General school library relief fund

**NEWS**
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**AASL, ALA, NEA team with Dollar General to provide $800,000 in grants**

(CHICAGO) Beginning today, $800,000 in grants will be available to rebuild and expand public school library media programs affected by disasters – including those that have opened their doors to significant numbers of new students displaced by last year’s hurricanes.

Discount retailer Dollar General will fund the grant program, and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), will administer it. The National Education Association (NEA) will work with AASL on the grant review committee and provide support materials to libraries.

“Beyond Words: The Dollar General School Library Relief Program” is the largest relief effort in the history of the ALA and NEA targeted specifically to public school libraries in the Gulf Coast and around the country. The funding for the initial grants is $800,000, with individual library awards ranging from $5,000 to $15,000. The funds will be used to purchase books, media, and/or library equipment that support learning in a school library environment.

“For many children, the school library is their first experience with a library and the help that a librarian can give them,” said ALA President Michael Gorman. “This is the place where children connect with a world of ideas, information and resources and embark on life long learning. School library media programs are critical to the learning experience.”

First priority for the grants will be given to school libraries impacted by hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma – either through direct loss or through an increase in enrollment due to displaced/evacuee
students. A certified school librarian at the campus, district or regional level will be involved in the selection of materials/equipment to be purchased.

“Supporting school libraries is crucial in order to restore the educational process in schools that have suffered a disaster.” said AASL President J. Linda Williams. “School library media centers are places of opportunity where students can strive for and achieve success, develop a love of reading and explore the world around them through print, electronic and other media.”

Nationally, students make 1.5 billion visits to school library media centers during the school year – to conduct research, check out books for leisure reading, use electronic resources and receive instruction on how to find, evaluate and use information from a variety of sources.

“Bringing books back to these schools and students who have lost so much due to natural disasters has been a top priority for the National Education Association,” said NEA President Reg Weaver. “Millions of children will rediscover the joy of reading when the shelves of their public school libraries are restocked through this program’s generous grants.”

Dollar General has more than 8,000 neighborhood stores in 33 states – including 2,381 in Texas, Florida and the Gulf Coast states.

“Beyond Words: The Dollar General School Library Relief Program is a natural extension of Dollar General’s daily efforts to promote literacy and education,” said David Perdue, Dollar General’s chairman and CEO. “Following recent disasters in our country, we recognized the need for support of school libraries impacted by these tragedies. Through this program, we want to ensure that children whose schools have been impacted by a disaster have the opportunity to learn and grow through reading. This is particularly important when many children only have access to books at their school library.”

To be eligible, the school library must:

1. Be located in a public school – PreK-12
2. Be located within 20 miles of a Dollar General store, distribution center or corporate office
3. Recently (within previous 18 months) have lost its building or incurred substantial damage or hardship due to a natural disaster (tornado, earthquake, hurricane, flood, avalanche, mudslide), fire or an act recognized by the federal government as terrorism, or
4. Have absorbed a significant number (more than 10 percent enrollment) of displaced/evacuee students.

A second phase of the disaster relief effort is to increase the capability of school library media specialists to prepare for a disaster. As a result, school library media specialists will be better able to raise awareness among teachers and parents about disaster preparedness.

To learn more about this program, please visit the AASL Web site at www.ala.org/aasl/disasterrelief. The program partners intend to begin awarding grants by June 2006.
About AASL and ALA
With more than 10,000 members, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) is one of the largest divisions of the American Library Association (ALA). It promotes the improvement and extension of library media services in elementary and secondary schools as a means of strengthening the total education program. The American Library Association (ALA) is the voice of America’s libraries. Its mission is to promote the highest quality library and information services and public access to information.

About NEA
The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional organization, representing 2.8 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers. More information is available at www.nea.org.

About Dollar General
Dollar General is a Fortune 500® discount retailer with 8,038 neighborhood stores in 33 states as of March 31, 2006. Dollar General stores offer convenience and value to customers by offering consumable basic items that are frequently used and replenished, such as food, snacks, health and beauty aids and cleaning supplies, as well as a selection of basic apparel, house wares and seasonal items at everyday low prices. The company has a longstanding tradition of supporting literacy and education in the U.S. In 2005, the company awarded more than 930 grants to nonprofit organizations that helped more than 81,000 individuals take their first steps toward literacy, a general education diploma or English proficiency. For more information about Dollar General, go to www.dollargeneral.com.