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SPECIAL

The Pratt City Library immediately after storms went through the area on April 27. The library was wrecked, but most of its books were saved. The library will supplement its collection with books acquired through Project Turn the Page.

Storm-damaged libraries get help

By HANNAH WOLFSON
News staff writer

Mary Schellhammer, the school librarian at Alberta Elementary in Tuscaloosa, has a new visual aid when she lectures students about returning their library books.

It's a portion of a beginning reader book that was blown from the school building 60 miles to Adams-

ville in the April 27 tornadoes. The library's bar code and stamp were still intact, so someone brought it back.

Much of the rest of the library's collection wasn't so lucky, and the school itself was destroyed. The library is now temporarily housed at another school, and Schellhammer is working to rebuild her book collection for

See LIBRARIES | Page 5A

LIBRARIES: Grant gives help

From Page 1A

the fall and beyond.

About a dozen public and school libraries around the state were hit by the storms with varying degrees of damage. Some, like Birmingham's Pratt City branch, had their buildings wrecked but were able to save many of their books. Others, such as the Pell City Public Library, experienced lesser damage and have reopened.

To help damaged public and school libraries rebuild, the Alabama Humanities Foundation has gotten a \$30,000 federal emergency grant to provide free books. Project Turn the Page, which is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, will focus on Southern and Alabama history and fiction plus popular and award-winning books for young adults. It's putting together a list of books that librarians can choose from.

"I'm really optimistic that it will all come together," said Schellhammer, whose library will get \$2,000 worth of books through the grant.

The grant money will also go to public libraries in Pratt City, White Hall and Ragland and schools in Jefferson, Tuscaloosa, Franklin, Marion and DeKalb counties, according to Jennifer Dome of the Alabama Humanities Foundation.

Libraries are also turning to other resources — from state funds and insurance claims to volunteers and donations — to rebuild. Some of the hardest-hit are finding temporary locations so they can provide services in the meantime.

'Tremendous'

"I go into a store here in town and people say, 'When are you going to reopen? We need your books. We need your computers,'" said Patricia Poe, librarian and director of the Ragland Public Library. Her building was ruined by the storms, but volunteers helped pack out almost all of the books so they lost only about 1,600 items out of 15,000. However, the library's eight computers — which patrons rely on more than ever after the storm — were all destroyed.

Poe has been working at the St. Clair County Library in Ashville, but many of her patrons can't make the 25-minute drive. So she's

POSSIBLE BOOK CHOICES

- ▶ "Crazy in Alabama" by Mark Childress
- ▶ "Up From Slavery: An Autobiography" by Booker T. Washington
- ▶ "Breakfast at Tiffany's" by Truman Capote
- ▶ "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee
- ▶ "Forrest Gump" by Winston Groom
- ▶ "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe" by Fannie Flagg
- ▶ "All Over but the Shoutin'" by Rick Bragg
- ▶ "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" series by Jeff Kinney
- ▶ "Holes" by Louis Sachar
- ▶ "Animal Farm: Centennial Edition" by George Orwell
- ▶ "The Hunger Games" series by Suzanne Collins
- ▶ "The Skin I'm In" by Sharon Flake
- ▶ "Esperanza Rising" by Pam Munoz
- ▶ "Fever 1793" by Laurie R. King
- ▶ "Lily's Crossing" by Patricia Reilly Giff
- ▶ "A Year Down Yonder" by Richard Peck

reopening in temporary quarters next month and taking donations of used and new books; the state library association and individual librarians have offered shelves and furniture as well.

"People still miss their local libraries," said Judy Douglas, director of the St. Clair County Library System. She said small communities depend on libraries for Internet access and summer programs for children, but are also stepping up to help. "It's just absolutely tremendous how many people have offered their book collections and offered to volunteer."

In Birmingham, the Pratt City Library has temporarily relocated to the East Ensley Branch after the building was wrecked in the storm. Birmingham Public Library Director Irene Blacklock said most of the collection was saved and is in storage downtown. They'll supplement with books from the Turn the Page grant and are glad to at least have their summer children's programs up and running.

"We've been pretty blessed. We're encouraged by the idea that the city will try to save that branch and build there," she said. "The people in Pratt City are homesick for their library."

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