

Rotarians complete library for New Orleans Mission

By Janis Young

Rotary International News – 22 May 2011



RI President Ray Klinginsmith officially opens the New Orleans Mission library, a project organized by past governors from U.S. districts 5710, 6040, 6060, 6080, and 6840. *Rotary Images/Alyce Henson*

Rotarians gathered at a mission in downtown New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, on 20 May to dedicate a library to RI President Ray Klinginsmith, a nod to his twin loves of reading and the city of New Orleans.

Rotarians from 24 clubs in five districts spent three days finishing and furnishing a 1,400-square-foot library and reading room at the New Orleans Mission as a preconvention service project. After the work was complete, Klinginsmith cut a yellow ribbon and declared the library open.

It was the culmination of a larger effort that, like many Rotarian endeavors, began with scribbles on a cocktail napkin -- in this case, at a zone institute in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where five 2008-09 district governors decided they wanted to work together on a project.

Hundreds of hours and \$30,000 in cash and in-kind donations later, a hurricane-devastated library was transformed into a bright, tranquil space filled with comfy furniture and hundreds of books.

The [New Orleans Mission](#), the largest private service provider for the city's homeless, houses 200 to 250 men and women, provides 12,000 to 15,000 hot meals a month, and helps its residents find work and ultimately housing, according to Executive Director Ron Gonzales. When Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, the mission was destroyed, and the city's homeless population more than tripled.

Rotarians contributed to the restoration by cleaning, doing roof and ceiling repairs, replacing lighting and windows, and collecting furniture, rugs, and hundreds of books. Then on 19 May, Rotarian volunteers from California, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, and Missouri converged on the mission to clean and paint the library, assemble bookcases, and organize the books.

Before the dedication, "we were frightened, very frightened" that everything wouldn't get done on time, says Elizabeth Usovicz, past governor of District 6040 and one of the project organizers. But the Rotarian can-do spirit triumphed, and everything was ready for the ribbon cutting.

"We want to encourage the residents to use the library instead of watching TV in the day room," Gonzales says.

With such an inviting space and so many books to choose from, that should be an easy goal to achieve.