



Savannah Alliance for Response Kick-off Forum

December 8, 2009

Jepson Center for the Arts, Savannah, Georgia

The recent Savannah Alliance for Response Forum offered an excellent program and resulted in a new coalition committed to protecting the area's extensive cultural heritage. Led by emergency management officials from Chatham County and the City of Savannah, participants agreed to an ambitious menu of cooperative disaster planning, training, and preparation.

The forum on December 8, 2009, at the Jepson Center for the Arts featured a call to action from Julia Marks Young, who coordinated response for Mississippi's historic resources following Hurricane Katrina. The forum brought together key representatives of heritage and emergency organizations in and around Savannah. Nearly 40 percent of the audience came from outside the cultural heritage field, representing emergency management, public safety, county courts, and other city agencies.

Savannah's wide array of cultural resources attracts more than 6 million visitors yearly, pumping nearly 2 billion dollars into the local economy and impacting 22,000 local jobs, according to figures presented by Joseph Marinelli, President of the Savannah Area Convention and Visitor's Bureau.

City and county government officials are well aware that heritage sites and collections are essential to the health and resilience of Savannah. Representatives of emergency management agencies and public safety departments reached out to the cultural community with specific proposals. Ben Morse, Chief of Operations for Savannah Fire and Emergency Services, encouraged forum participants to invite all three shifts from local fire stations to tour cultural facilities and become familiar with floor plans and priority collections.

Dennis Jones, Assistant Director of the Chatham Emergency Management Agency (CEMA), invited cultural heritage representatives to be involved in the development of CEMA's formal procedures for working with all levels of government to protect cultural and historic resources during disasters.

forum participants committed to forming a cooperative alliance. Jones offered to "lead the charge," with CEMA facilitating bi-monthly meetings. He tasked the cultural heritage community with getting organized and agreeing on top priorities. The new group will strive to represent a wide range of collections, facilities, and sites. Members will be encouraged to work on vulnerability assessments for their own institutions and take Incident Command System training. Goals for collaborative projects with emergency managers include training cultural resource advisors for county damage assessment teams and devising evacuation plans for priority collections.

The forum was planned by a diverse and energetic local committee led by Glenda Anderson, Director of the City of Savannah's Research Library and Municipal Archives and Lynette Stoudt, Senior Archivist at the Georgia Historical Society. The disaster recovery firm Munters sponsored lunch.