



## NEWS

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**October 20, 2009**

### **Vital Records Recovery Task Force Departs for American Samoa**

SACRAMENTO--A task force dedicated to preserving vital records has departed for American Samoa in the wake of the devastating tsunami of September 29. Lynn Ann Davis, Head of the University of Hawaii at Manoa Library Preservation Department, left Hawaii on Wednesday, October 14<sup>th</sup> to lead a WESTPAS (Western States and Territories Preservation Assistance Service) recovery task force to the island chain. The task force will work with government agencies and libraries to recover documents and holdings damaged by salt water from the tsunami.

A year ago, Davis taught WESTPAS disaster preparedness workshops in Pago Pago to representatives from the American Samoa Fono (Legislature), High Court, Territorial Archives, Department of Education Libraries, and Historic Preservation Office, as well as Feleti Barstow Public Library and the American Samoa Community College Library. At the conclusion of the two-part workshop, participants completed disaster preparedness plans for each institution.

The importance of advanced training and planning was demonstrated by successful post-tsunami salvage efforts in Pago Pago, the de facto capital town of American Samoa. After the tsunami, Terry Fielding, clerk with the High Court of American Samoa, followed the court's disaster preparedness plan by freezing vital records to prevent further damage caused by growth of mold. Other agencies followed suit.

Restoring documents damaged by the tsunami will be a long process. The University of Hawaii at Manoa Library suffered a serious flash flood in 2004. Based on the experience of recovering maps and aerial photographs, Davis noted that "disaster recovery and follow-up treatment of unique materials can take years. It is nearly five years since the UHM Library disaster, and the Preservation Department still has hundreds of maps and thousands of aerial photographs that require conservation treatment."

The WESTPAS group is coordinating with the FEMA Region IX Environmental Office and Judy Mulitalo of Feleti Barstow Public Library, who leads American Samoa's disaster team for libraries and vital records. Jane Barnwell, Director of Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), has also joined the team. Barnwell's programs in the US-affiliated Pacific Islands focus on leadership initiatives for libraries, archives and museums.

WESTPAS efforts in American Samoa are funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities and by BELFOR Property Restoration, a disaster recovery company. Ongoing WESTPAS disaster preparedness workshops are co-sponsored by the California State Library and the California State Archives, as well as state library agencies in other western states.

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**About WESTPAS:**

Founded in 2007, WESTPAS (Western States and Territories Preservation Assistance Service) is a regional library and archives preservation service. Its initial goal is to deliver education and training workshops on disaster preparedness, response, and collection salvage to staff of libraries and archives in 14 participating states and territories including Alaska, American Samoa, California, Colorado, Guam, Hawai'i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Northern Marianas Islands, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. For more information, visit <http://www.westpas.org> or contact Julie Page, WESTPAS Co-Coordinator, at (760) 224-0419.

**About Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL):**

Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) is an independent, nonprofit corporation serving the educational community in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific, continental United States, and countries throughout the world. PREL provides services that range from curriculum development to assessment and evaluation. For more information, visit PREL at <http://www.prel.org>.

**About the California State Library:**

Founded in 1850, The California State Library is the main reference and research library for the Governor's office, legislature, state employees, and the general public. It supports California's public libraries by administering grants for programs in historical preservation, library construction, connectivity, civil liberties education, literacy and volunteering. Visit [www.library.ca.gov](http://www.library.ca.gov) for more information.

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