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Drive begins to replace Hooper Bay books

FIRE: The only library was inside the school destroyed by the blaze.

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Anchorage Daily News
Staff

The losses from the fire in Hooper Bay are still being felt as the village picks up the pieces remaining from the Aug. 3 blaze. Among the destruction was the town's school -- and along with it, most of the community's books. "There are parents and grandparents trying to figure out how to keep their children busy when their school is gone, their gym is gone and all their belongings," first lady Nancy Murkowski said in a press release.

In an effort to replace the thousands of lost volumes, Murkowski is sponsoring Hooper Bay Book Days through Sept. 1.

"We've had an outpouring of generosity," said Dennis Gerke, assistant superintendent of the Lower Yukon School District. "The people of the village are trying to get back on their feet, and replacing the books we lost will mean a great deal to the kids."

Updates on village reconstruction are available at the Web site www.loweryukon.org. The drive seeks new and used books for children and teenagers as well as reference books and Alaskan titles. Donations are being accepted at all Anchorage municipal library locations as well as Title Wave Books and Cook Inlet Books. Both stores are displaying books selected by Hooper Bay teachers to represent the school's need to help participants choose titles. Title Wave customers also will have the option to donate unused store credit to a Hooper Bay school account, and Borders Books and Music is offering a 20 percent discount on purchases for the drive.

Alaska Center for the Book, Alaska's affiliate with the Library of Congress, is accepting tax-deductible financial contributions to offset purchase and shipping prices.

"Hooper Bay had no community library in place, and the town depended on the school's books," said Carol Sturgulewski, a member of the organization. "We're taking everything because we're rebuilding an entire library, and even if the school can't use it, we'll make sure it gets to a good home."

To Murkowski, who recently visited the area, the books and the effort behind the drive will be a symbol of hope for residents.

"When we visited, it was a gray day and a bit depressing. Kids were riding their bikes around the fire site, not really doing much," she said. "I met a woman who told me that she needed something to keep her grandchildren busy while the school was being rebuilt, and she suggested reading to them. I thought it was a wonderful idea." The suggestion sparked Hooper Bay Book Days.

Murkowski believes Alaska takes care of its own when called upon.

"Alaskans support each other and look out for one another. That's why we're number five in the nation for volunteering," she said. "This will be another example of that."

For more information about the Hooper Bay Book Days, call 336-1604. To make a tax-deductible donation, call the Alaska Center for the Book at 786-4379.

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FOR UPDATES on Hooper Bay reconstruction efforts, go to www.lower yukon.org

Illustration:

Graphic 1: Weblink BW_082306.eps

Graphic 2: 23HOOPERBAY_082306.eps

BOB HALLINEN / Anchorage Daily News

Cleanup and hosing down hot spots continued late Aug. 6 at the scene of a fire in Hooper Bay in western Alaska. The blaze began early Aug. 3 and burned two school buildings and several homes.

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