

CU helps map Katrina aid

ATLAS and Denver students track rebirth of Dillard

By Richard Valenty For the Camera
Friday, August 29, 2008

Check it out

To access Dillard University on Google Earth, first make sure that you have Google Earth 4.3 installed.

Go to Layers (on the left panel), 3D Buildings Photorealistic (click on the box by Photorealistic). Enter Dillard University in the Fly to: data entry box (left side, top).

Hurricane Katrina stuck New Orleans three years ago today, ravaging much of the city -- including the 55-acre Dillard University campus.

The aftermath of the storm left one building flooded with six to 10 feet of water, while another three buildings were torn down and three others were demolished in the reconstruction. Classes were moved to a nearby hotel.

Since then, the campus has been rebuilt, and the University of Colorado this week announced its role in creating 3-D models of that reconstruction -- images now available on Google Earth.

Students from North High School and Thomas Jefferson High School in Denver worked on the Google Earth project as part of the Digital CUrrents educational program. CU's Alliance for Technology, Learning and Society Institute and Denver Public Schools' Computer Magnet Program organized the program.

And while it might sound like the Google Earth effort would have been excessively "geeky," the project also had a great deal of social relevance, said Aaron Bach, a former ATLAS student.

Bach, who is now working on an MBA at the University of Denver, had a chance to

spend time in post-Katrina New Orleans to do digital documentation for the project. He said he instantly noticed a couple of general situations -- that a great deal of damage still remained unrepaired, and that areas with money tended to be better off than the poorer areas.

For example, Dillard is a private and historically black university, and CU said it raised more than \$280 million over the course of three years after the hurricane. Bach said Dillard and the wealthy Lakeview community had enough money for reconstruction efforts, while many ravaged areas in the poverty-stricken Ninth Ward were left largely untouched.

Bach also said the DPS students were able to add a dimension of cultural understanding to an otherwise technical project.

"They had a clearer idea of issues in the nation than I did at that age, and they understood the cultural impact of Katrina," Bach said. "I was struck by how intelligent and forward-thinking they were."

Bruce Henderson, ATLAS communications director, added that the Digital CUrrents program was aimed at helping minority high school students get experience in both technology and higher education. He said, for example, that some of the DPS students hadn't thought about attending college before they set foot on the CU campus.

According to CU, the DPS students received education on the complex history and culture of New Orleans, and the students incorporated the lessons into 3-D renderings of "reconstructive possibilities" for the Ninth Ward.

"Their job was to develop a plan for a vibrant community people would want to come and live in," said Robert Collins, a Dillard professor, in a news release. "It was important for them to understand how the community developed, and why previously they did not have access to basic services in the neighborhood such as grocery stores and pharmacies."

While no computer project could erase the pain of Katrina -- and reports warn that tropical storm Gustav could hit New Orleans on Monday -- Bach gave the Google Earth project a win-win rating for its cultural and educational accomplishments.

"It was an excellent project for the kids, and for us," Bach said.



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.