

Biloxi Sun-Herald
Posted on Sat, Sep. 17, 2005

No mystery: Grishams' fund

By: Pam Firmin
Pfirmin@sunherald.com

GULFPORT - Holding hands, John and Renee Grisham of Oxford stepped to the podium Friday at a press conference at the National Guard headquarters to announce their private Rebuild the Coast fund, which the couple started with \$5 million of their own money.

Because they always give their gifts privately, he said, "it is very uncomfortable to give so publicly."

The purpose, though, is to elicit donations.

Grisham announced that Hattiesburg businessman Warren A. Hood Jr. and his wife, Carolyn, had just increased the fund by a \$3 million pledge, bringing it to \$8 million.

Introduced by Rep. Bobby Moak of Bogue Chitto as "a real Mississippian," Grisham is the author of numerous best-selling legal mysteries, many that are set in this state and one of them, "The Runaway Jury," in Biloxi. His adviser on that was longtime friend Will Denton of Biloxi, who died last year.

"When I was a trial lawyer, I wanted to be like Will Denton," Grisham wrote in another book, "The Rainmaker."

The site of the Denton home, which was destroyed in Katrina, was one of the places the Grishams intended to visit after the press conference. Lucy Denton, Will's widow, is staying with them in Oxford.

"This is our first trip here to look around," Renee Grisham said. "Probably, we're not prepared for what we're about to see. But we want to see it anyway."

Grisham said he wanted to see what is left of the Biloxi library because 16 years ago, when he traveled the state selling his first book, "A Time To Kill," out of the trunk of his car, he visited there and "Biloxi was a good stop." Years later, after the blockbuster success of his next book, "The Firm," people who had bought those first editions of "A Time To Kill" owned valuable property.

The Grishams' goal is to spend the next few months collecting money and, he said, "hopefully, start giving it away. This is not going to be an ongoing charity."

They are being cautious with the fund's development and intend to have hands-on management of it. They hope to hire someone in this area to represent it, preferably a person without a job because of Katrina.

"We'd like to bridge the gap between insurance and people," Renee Grisham said. "We want to take it very slowly and help a lot of people. We'll distribute it."

The fund will operate out of Tupelo where their attorney, Gene McDade, is headquartered.

"We'll let him count the money," John Grisham said, drawing laughter. "We trust him."

Applications and details about the fund are available at www.RebuildtheCoastFund.org Renee Grisham said they are also working to provide computers with Internet access at a central location, so that people can have access to the Web site.