SDSC Data Scientists Lend A Hand To Help Find Hurricane Katrina Victims

Center leverages data know-how to create amalgamated survivor list

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Data experts at the San Diego Supercomputer Center are collaborating with the American Red Cross and other rescue organizations to make it easier for persons to locate missing loved ones in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. SDSC is creating an amalgamated list containing thousands of names from a number of individual data searches that have sprung up since the disaster occurred including The Family Links Registry available through www.redcross.org. This amalgamated database is available at www.katrinasafe.com.

Many of those affected have turned to the Web to try and establish contact with family and friends who have been left homeless because of the storm. SDSC, a National Science Foundation sponsored supercomputer center, leveraged its data leadership to create this unique solution that retrieves name, age, current location and home address information from existing databases and places it into one easy to use list. The list is updated to show new names that are entered and missing individuals that are reunited with their families.

"SDSC provides a comprehensive set of data storage and analysis tools and technologies for the science and engineering research and education communities," said Dr. Francine Berman, SDSC Director, "All of the staff at SDSC want to help, and we are delighted that we can use our data tools and technologies to facilitate the difficult and important job of helping identify and reconnect Katrina's survivors."

The SDSC Katrina team, led by Dr. Chaitan Baru, a renowned data scientist at SDSC, includes specialists in data management, data storage, high performance computing and Web development. Jerry Rowley, Lab Director, Advanced Database Projects Lab, has been coordinating the daily activities at SDSC, working closely with database expert, Vishu Nandigam, who is responsible for the daily data loads and data dissemination from SDSC.

"This is a perfect example of blending SDSC's high-tech data tools and expertise with traditional methods of disaster relief," said Baru. "We hope to take this opportunity to use what we have learned to construct a database system to be in place even before the next disaster hits."

In addition, Baru's team is working with a San Diego State University group to combine survivor list information with interactive maps to further speed the process of victim location.

"The special partnership of SDSC and SDSU through telecommunications and real-time mapping provides the unique tools that will both save lives and many millions of dollars," said Eric Frost, co-director, San Diego State University Visualization Center. "This is a powerful example of cyberinfrastructure and the marriage of telecommunications and computing have a huge impact on our world for good."

These efforts and other individual contributors across the nation were networked into a collegial whole by the National Institute for Urban Search & Rescue, a non-profit organization who numbers among its members, many of the researchers who joined in this ad hoc network. Said Lois Clark McCoy, President of NIUSR, "The joining

of two world class educational universities in this humanitarian effort during the catastrophic events of Katrina is "people helping people" at its best."

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