

Disasters prompt us to give

Charitable contributions near record in 2005

BY VINNEE TONG | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK - The urgent needs created by three major natural disasters - the tsunami in Asia, earthquake in Pakistan and hurricanes Rita, Katrina and Wilma - drove American philanthropy to its highest level since the end of the technology boom, a new study says.

The report out today by the Giving USA foundation estimates that in 2005 Americans, gave \$260.28 billion, a rise of 6.1 percent, which approaches the inflation-adjusted high of \$260.53 billion that was reached in 2000.

About half of the overall increase of \$15 billion went directly to aid victims of the disasters. Meanwhile, the rest of the increase might still be traced to the disasters since they might have raised public awareness of other charities.

"When there is a very significant need, when people are clearly aware of that need, they will respond," the chairman of Giving USA, Richard Jolly, said.

The three natural disasters generated about \$7.37 billion, which was 2.8 percent of total giving. Of that amount, individuals contributed \$5.83 billion, or 79 percent; corporations, \$1.38 billion, or 19 percent.

Excluding disaster relief, the report indicates that there still would have been a rise in gifts. In the 51 years that Giving USA has tracked philanthropy, giving has increased with the wealth of the nation. Total contributions have been between 1.7 percent and 2.3 percent of gross domestic product. For 2005, it was estimated at 2.1 percent of GDP.

Giving USA said bequests was one area of gifts that declined in 2005. The report estimates that they fell by 5.5 percent, mainly attributed to a decline in the number of deaths in 2004 and an expected decline for 2005.

www.givingusa.org