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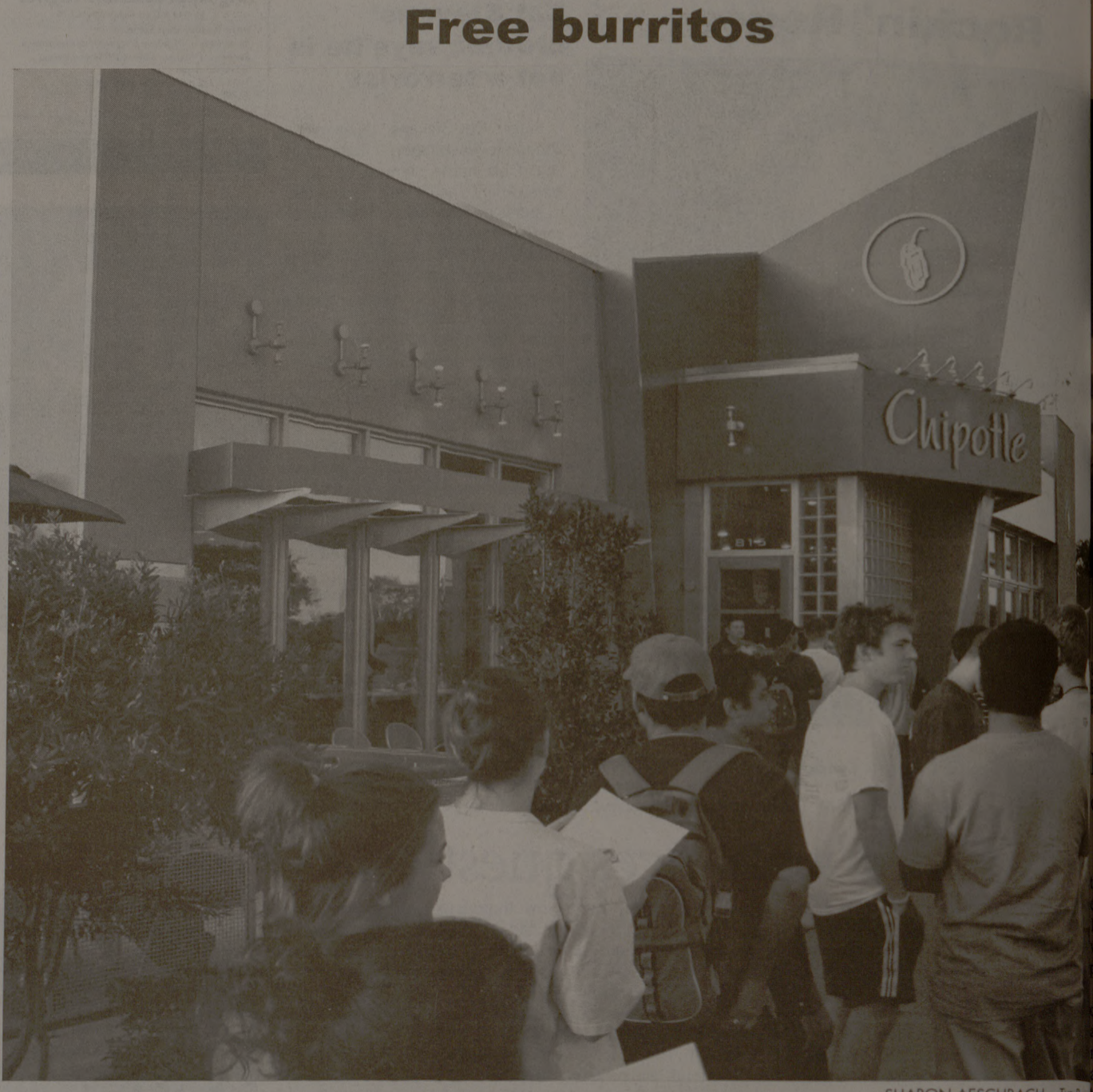
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800 dead from Tropical Storm Jeanne

By Amy Bracken
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GONAIVES, Haiti — U.N. peacekeepers fired into the air to keep a hungry crowd at bay Wednesday as aid workers handed out the first food in days for some in this city devastated by floods from Tropical Storm Jeanne. Meteorologists said the storm could strike the United States by this weekend.

It was too soon to tell where or if Jeanne would hit, but the National Hurricane Center in Miami warned people in the northwest and central Bahamas and along the southeast U.S. coast to beware of dangerous surf and rip currents kicked up by Jeanne in the coming days.

At 5 p.m., Jeanne was centered about 500 miles east of the Bahamian island of Great Abaco. It was moving west-southwest and was expected to strengthen and turn toward the west in the next 24 hours. Hurricane-force winds extended 45 miles and tropical-storm force winds another 140 miles.

In Haiti, mass burials for the more than 800 victims, with bodies piled outside morgues raising fears about health, were expected to start after delays forced by public opposition. Many Haitians believe that unless a body is respectfully buried, the spirit may wander, commit evil and harm family members.

In Gonaives, the country's hardest-hit and third-largest city, some 1,000 people have been declared missing and authorities say they expect the death toll to rise.

Rescuers pulled bodies from mud and rubble — some still under water five days after Jeanne lashed the area with torrential rains for some 30 hours — then added them to the pile in bodybags that lay in mud and grime in front of three morgues.

Red Cross, government officials and aid workers met Wednesday to discuss how to dispose of the flyblown and decomposing corpses.

On Wednesday, government adviser Carl Murat-Cantave revealed they had come up against opposition when Red Cross workers took a truckload of bodies to the Bois Marchand cemetery on Monday and were stoned by residents.

He said police had negotiated with residents about the health hazards of leaving the corpses unburied, and persuaded them to agree. Aid workers said the cemetery is the only one in the city not submerged by floodwaters.

Graveyard manager Bony Jedy said 78 people have been buried at Bois Marchand, some in mass graves, since Monday.

"They come from all over, mostly on wooden carts. Adults, children and babies. They were brought in by friends, families and strangers," he said of the bodies.

Dieufort Deslorges, spokesman for Haiti's civil protection agency, said about 100 more bodies were found in Gonaives on Wednesday, raising the nation's death toll to 792.

"That's the exact number but for certain it is more than 800 deaths, with more than 700 in Gonaives alone, and it will go up," he told The Associated Press.

He said there still were dozens of unrecovered bodies. "There are bodies in the water, in the mud, in collapsed houses and floating in houses that were absolutely covered by the floods."

Last week, Jeanne also killed seven people in Puerto Rico and 19 in Dominican Republic. The overall death toll for the Caribbean was at least 817.

On Wednesday, carcasses of pigs, goats and dogs still were being carried by streams of water in Gonaives, also threatening survivors' health.

Martine Vice-Aimee, an 18-year-old mother of two whose home was destroyed and who lined up with dozens of others outside Gonaives' Roman Catholic cathedral, said people already are getting ill.

"People are getting sick from the water, they're walking in it, their skin is getting

“The situation is not getting better because people have been without food or water for three or four days.”

itchy and rashes. The water they're drinking is giving them stomachaches."

She said she and two daughters were drinking "Creole water" — from wells that is dirty since the floods.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said contaminated water raised concerns about outbreaks of water-related diseases.

"The situation is not getting better because people have been without food or water for three or four days," said the federation's representative in Haiti, Hans Havik.

Vice-Aimee said she didn't know where she was waiting for outside the cathedral, hours earlier workers from the international aid agency CARE had handed out loaves of bread and nearly been mobbed. She was afraid to fight her way through the crowd, which was brought under control by U.N. peacekeepers who fired into the air when one was hurt.

Havik's federation launched a worldwide appeal Wednesday for \$3.3 million to fund relief operations to 40,000 Haitian victims and several nations were sending aid.

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