the outer walls, highlighting the need for repairs and upgrades, he said.

Then, the Cajundome and Convention Center lost about $2.5 million by canceling events between September and December because of its service as a shelter.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency will not reimburse the facility for revenue lost while serving as evacuation shelters and won't ask to make repairs that were needed before Katrina, Davissaid.

FEMA money may return the Cajundome to pre-Katrina condition, but that's all, he said.

“Yes, there are a lot of things we want to do here, but it would be unethical to put that on our FEMA invoice,” he said. “We will be where we were: a 20-year-old facility in desperate need of reinvestment.”

Neither the state, which owns the Cajundome, nor the city of Lafayette, which operate it, had money for capital improvements prior to the tragedies of Katrina and Rita. With the fiscal crisis state and local governments are facing in the wake of the hurricanes, it’s unlikely either will have money in the near future.

Just as the state and city both contributed to building the Cajundome, they both will have to help fund improvements, said Dee Stanley, city-parish chief administrative officer.

“We cannot turn our back on the ‘Dome and let it decay, but we have other needs,” such as improvements to roads, the courthouse, recreation centers and fire stations, Stanley said.

Some call the government’s lack of reinvestment in the building short-sighted.

“Why are we going to step up and help the ‘Dome,” he said.

The Cajundome, just like similar arenas across the country, is not designed to generate money itself, but to attract people to spend money in the community — at restaurants, hotels and service stations, said Gerald Breaux, director of the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Center.

“Very few of these facilities meet their target,” said Bill Rucks, a former Cajundome Commission member. “They’re not designed to make money.

Local government always has been short-sighted when it comes to maintaining and repairing the Cajundome, Rucks said. The repairs need to be planned in advance, and the city has not done that, he said.

Dr. Paul Azar, a Cajundome commissioner, said the facility is a jewel, a community resource. Now is not a good time to ask for money, but if FEMA does not come through with reimbursements, “we could have some significant shortfalls in funding,” he said.

During city-parish budget hearings in August — prior to Katrina — Azar said the city’s $500,000 annual subsidy to the Cajundome is inadequate.

At the time, the council was considering cutting the $500,000 annual allocation. To do so, Davis said, would require him to make "substantial cuts in maintenance and staff — cuts that patrons would notice."

When Hurricane Katrina hit and the Cajundome took in thousands of New Orleans area evacuees, the council OK’d the Cajundome’s budget request.

City-Parish President Joey Durel understands the impact the Cajundome has on local government’s finances, Stanley said. At a budget hearing, Durel defended the Cajundome’s budget request.

But, asking for money from the state now may not be a good idea, Stanley said.

“Some will ask, ‘How can you be talking about spending money on sports arenas and quality-of-life facilities when people need schools and hospitals?’ ” Stanley said.

Davis is waiting for an estimate of the cost of cleaning and repairing the Cajundome and Convention Center. Work cannot begin until FEMA approves it, he said.

The entire building must be sanitized; escalators must be disassembled and cleaned; carpets must either be cleaned or replaced, Davis said.

“I wish we had somebody come in and magically fund all the improvements,” Azar said. “I think we’ve just got to fix what we can and move on.”

**BY THE NUMBERS:**

- 4,548 events hosted in 20 years.
- 206 concerts.
- 461 family shows.
- 925 sports events.
- $6 million in total expenses in 20 years.
- $52 million in revenues generated.
- $30.9 million in capital improvements over 20 years.

**SOURCES:** Cajundome staff