

Lucedale native retires, returns home, starts new career

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Gulf Coast Neighbors Shirley Phillips

LUCEDALE — Shirley Phillips spent most of her adult life away from her hometown of Lucedale, but when it came time to retire, she came home with her husband, Willie.

Phillips retired as an administrative assistant in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Her husband had owned a newspaper and magazine distribution company.

She and her husband grew up in Lucedale, but Los Angeles was the place the couple called home until they returned here in 2005, just in time for Hurricane Katrina, she said.

And, it was Katrina that led to her second career as George County branch manager of the Southeast Mississippi Chapter of the Red Cross, she said.

Phillips graduated from Oak Grove High School in Lucedale when she was 18 years old, she said. She married and moved to California. The Phillips celebrated



their 50th wedding anniversary in June, she said.

In April, she said the 12 members of her high school class gathered in Lucedale for a 50th year reunion at the Senior Citizens Cen-

Hometown: Lucedale

Family: Husband, Willie; children, Dr. Gregory Phillips of Los Angeles, Willie Phillips Jr. of Los Angeles, and Miriam Phillips-Gill of Gilbert, Ariz.; 10 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren

Occupation: George County branch manager for the Southeast Mississippi Chapter of the Red Cross; and retired from the Los Angeles Unified School District as an administrative assistant

Activities: Member of First United Methodist Church in Lucedale and serves on the boards of the Gulf Coast Community Action Agency and Singing River Education Association

ter.

"It was a small community and you had close family ties. It was just a feeling of community where everybody knew everybody," she said of growing up in Lucedale.

Probably the most exciting thing as a youth in George County was to go to the movie theater after church on Sunday, she said. The family had a television, but there were only two channels.

Phillips attended college in Los Angeles and earned certification from the Los Angeles school district.

Her job as administrative assistant included supervising the office staff and teacher assistants, payroll and coordinating parent meetings and activities, she said.

One of the constant duties was earthquake preparedness, she said. "We always had to be ready in the event of an earthquake."

After moving home, Katrina struck and Phillips recalled listening to the radio and calls for volunteers from the Red Cross.

"I just showed up and started volunteering," she said.

She said she got involved with George County Disaster Recovery Services and interviewed people who needed help with home repairs.

During that time, a FEMA employee told her Red Cross needed a manager in George County and eventually she was hired for the part-time job, she said.

The job turned full-time in July, she said.

"I basically like everything. I like working with people. I like helping people. I enjoy doing a variety of things. Every day is different," she said of her Red Cross duties.

The job includes recruiting volunteers, responsibility for staffing six shelters in the county, scheduling health and safety classes, and providing emergency services, such as assistance after a fire or help with utility bills, she said.

Phillips said she was deployed to South Texas to help after flooding there and "people had lost everything."

The deployment gave her a good feeling, she said. "Most volunteers state that words can't express how it makes them feel."

To suggest someone for Gulf Coast Neighbors, call 228-934-1419 or send e-mail to msnews@themississippi-pres.com.