

One Disaster after Another

GeoCo Times 9/4/08

By Royce Armstrong

A local American Red Cross volunteer was called away from work on one disaster to prepare for a possible second disaster at home last week.

"I can't believe it," Shirley Phillips, the George County Branch Manager of the Southeast Mississippi Chapter of the Red Cross, said last Wednesday after being told that she was being sent home to prepare for Hurricane Gustav.

Phillips was in Roma, Texas, where she had been working with flood victims for five days.

Torrential rains dumped 13 inches of rain across south Texas on August 18, less than a month after Hurricane Dolly saturated the area with heavy rainfall.

The extraordinary rainfall in the normally semi-arid region, spilling water three to four feet deep over the banks of Arroyo Quiote and into communities such as Roma is the worst flooding to ever hit the region.

Phillips said she wondered why she was being sent to Texas when the call came for her to help out.

"No one knew about this flood," Phillips said. "Most people I have spoken with didn't know about it. It wasn't on radio or TV. It was like

it wasn't even on the face of the earth."

Roma is a small town near the Mexican border.

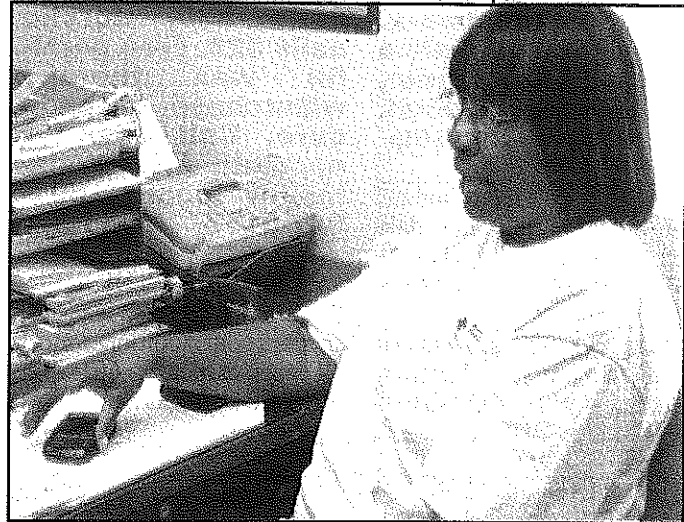
The flood, which occurred in the Rio Grande Valley, damaged at least 750 homes in Starr County.

Phillips and four Red Cross workers from Jackson County were called to the area, joining Red Cross volunteers from across the county. Phillips' job was to interview victims and explain how the emergency debit card program worked, she said.

She arrived in Texas on Friday and worked through the weekend and the early part of last week.

"We were watching the news and knew that Gustav was developing," Phillips said.

By Wednesday morning it was apparent that Gustav was going to be a major hurricane and would strike somewhere along the Gulf Coast.



...Phillips

Phillips and other volunteers from Mississippi and Louisiana were sent home to prepare their own areas for the storm. She arrived in Mobile late Wednesday evening and by the next day was on the phone calling local volunteers to help staff storm shelters in George County.

Phillips is only one of several Red Cross volunteers

who have been called out to work during disasters in other states this year. Volunteers have been called to Tennessee to work following a tornado in early March, and to Iowa to help flood victims in June.

Reporter Royce Armstrong may be reached at rarmstrong@hughes.net or by telephone at (601) 766-9624.