

# Closed roads, failed phones leave Maple Hill isolated

By **GARETH McGRATH**

*Staff Writer*

MAPLE HILL — Geographically, this town lies in northeastern Pender County.

But for the past week, it's been tough to tell.

Although the floodwaters around Maple Hill have begun receding in many places, the drenching rains have severed the eastern corner of the county from the rest of Pender.

Sandwiched between the Holly Shelter and Angola Bay gamelands, only two roadways link Maple Hill to the rest of the county.

N.C. 53 and Old Maple Hill Road were under water on Wednesday for most of the 10 miles between the Northeast Cape Fear River and Maple Hill.

That has meant a long, three-county detour for residents who need to get to Burgaw for work, court or shopping.

It also has resulted in the severe curtailment of some government and emergency services in the Maple Hill area, many of which originate from Burgaw, the county seat.

Wednesday morning the first mail truck in a week reached the Maple Hill post office.

---

The first mail truck in a week reached the Pender town Wednesday.

---

"This is the end of the line for that truck," said Debbie Lanier, a relief postmaster at the Maple Hill post office, "but for the past week Burgaw has been because of the floods."

Even so, trips to Burgaw by postal workers have kept the mail delay to an average of only one day.

Impassable roads also have forced Pender County Rescue to rely on Onslow County to provide emergency medical services to the area.

The isolation from the rest of the county has been compounded by the failure of the region's phone system.

That, in turn, has brought on new hardships.

No phone service means stores can't accept credit cards for payment, a major problem when the nearest money machines are in Holly Ridge and Jacksonville, each 17 miles away.

Residents who rely on shopping with their food stamps also are out of luck.

"Without phone service, they can't

use their food-stamp cards," said Ken Lanier, owner of Lanier's Grocery.

BellSouth spokesman Billy King said the phone problem is because all of the neighborhood's hubs are under water and could remain that way for quite a few more days.

Engineers and technicians are in the process building two microwave towers, one at Maple Hill and one on N.C. 53 just outside of Burgaw, as a temporary solution.

Mr. King said it's the first time the company has used microwave technology to restore power during an emergency. He said after the waters recede, the company will engineer a system to fix the problem, which might include raising the hubs.

As they wait for the waters to recede and phones to come back on, Maple Hill residents are learning to pull together.

While they understand county officials are doing the best under trying circumstances to provide supplies and services, Mr. Lanier, also a member of the Pender County Board of Education, said the community is leaning on each other for hope and strength.

"We're stuck, been completely left alone, but we're pulling together, getting on OK," said Ms. Lanier.