



# AFTER HURRICANE FRAN



## Odds and ends wash up, thanks to storm's flooding

By PHILIP HERVEY

Staff Writer

Missing a plastic mailbox? How about a sign that reads: "Warning, No Lifeguards, Dangerous Currents."

They are at Canaday's Yacht Basin on Pages Creek near the Intracoastal Waterway.

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The items made their way into the marina courtesy of the high winds and rising waters brought on by Hurricane Fran.

The Canadays aren't the only ones in possession of flotsam and jetsam: Almost everyone who got flooded during Fran wound up with other people's odds and ends on their property.

The Canadays came across the mailbox — which had two damp color photographs inside — as they were cleaning up the remains of their 80-slip marina, which was washed away by Fran.

'We found all kinds of stuff. I'm sure a lot of our things went somewhere else.'

Linda Canaday

"We found all kinds of stuff," said Linda Canaday, who speculates the mailbox floated across the Intracoastal Waterway from Figure Eight Island. "I'm sure a lot of our things went somewhere else."

The question is, what do you do with other people's things?

Most of it is junk — splintered pieces of wood, shingles, busted bicycles, soaked furniture. Much of that is getting stacked up by the curb, awaiting debris-removal crews.

Some people came across unusual discoveries. Dan Brunner was shoveling reeds out of an office

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Linda Canaday looks at parcels found in a mailbox that washed up at her Pages Creek home near the Intracoastal Waterway

## Flotsam

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on the Intracoastal Waterway when he spotted a small bottle with a message. The note, which had a September 1994 date, said a boat was disabled offshore for several days and was in need of help. He suspects it was written by a child who was just playing around.

One story has it that a man in Carolina Beach discovered an ice machine on his front porch after Fran and handed out bags of ice.

But some items of value washed ashore from the waterways, potentially pitting neighbor against neighbor over the question of rightful ownership.

Broken docks, in particular, are everywhere.

Near Wrightsville Beach, Fran pushed floating docks off their pilings, which then floated across Airlie Road into people's yards. With them came several recreational boats, some winding up on private property after coming ashore.

Picking up the pieces isn't easy when the property isn't easily identified.

But the marina across from Bruce Cartier's Airlie Road home was able to salvage all the broken pieces of floating dock that got away during Fran. The sections are stacked up next to Airlie, ready to be reinstalled. Mr. Cartier said one 20-by-25-foot section of the dock cost \$1,000 in materials alone.

With smaller items, a "finders keepers" attitude can result.

From his Airlie Road home, Edward Craft saw people pick up small debris that ended up in his yard, including rope and a boat equipment storage box. "Lots of people came by," he said.

In downtown Wilmington, a man was seen Friday morning pushing a grocery cart containing strips of aluminum apparently blown off a building.

The Sheriff's Department has

received several complaints from residents quarreling over wind-blown property. A Newkirk Road resident filed a report about a man hauling away washed-up pieces of his dock.

Claiming a boat, or a lost water scooter, may not pose too big a problem since most people have record of ownership. But the owner of items such as surfboards may have trouble verifying they own the property.

In general, if you find a piece of property, you can keep it. The owner may have rights to the property, but reclaiming it may be difficult if ownership can't be documented.

"True owners are still the true owners, but they may still have difficulties proving it's their surfboard, refrigerator or air-conditioning compressor," said Ron Link, a professor of law at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"How do you prove your true ownership? That's where it gets difficult. Normally, most of us prove our ownership by the fact of our possession."

Wrightsville Beach is counting on good neighborly relations as residents pick up Fran's mess.

Mayor Herb McKim said there wasn't a large volume of belongings that wound up on other property. But off North Lumina Avenue two days after the storm, one house had three surfboards in its front yard, apparently washed over by floodwaters. The town hasn't made any special arrangements yet for a "lost and found."

"All of the neighbors are walking up and down trying to find pieces of stuff that belong to them," said Mr. McKim, who found a section of a dock on his property. He expects people to willingly hand over property if it's claimed by the owner.

"That's the way this beach is. It's just one big community," he said. "Problem is the stuff that's washed over on the mainland that we'll never get back if it's claimed by people who don't care about us."