

Burke County businesses, owners pitch in

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After Hurricane Helene hit western North Carolina, Olde Hickory Brewery co-founder Stephen Lyerly knew he wanted to take action.

Lyerly said the brewery had about 100 cases of new cans that had not been filled. Volunteers at the brewery began filling those cans with water instead of beer on Tuesday.

More cans were donated by Tap Hopper out of Greensboro. Lyerly said Olde Hickory planned to can about 340 more cases of water Friday.

Co-founder Jason Yates said the group plans to provide about 10,000 cans of water. Enough, he said, for a 30-day supply for about 100 people.

Some of the water will go to a nursing home in the Asheville area and some will go with Hickory Wrecker Service to areas where the service is dispatched.

Asked why the brewery decided to help this way, Lyerly paused and thought for a moment before shrugging and saying confidently, "It's obvious."

While volunteer organizations from within and outside of North Carolina use Hickory Regional Airport as a staging area for rescue missions, businesses around Catawba County have also decided the need to help was obvious.

Local businesses have committed to donating a portion of sales to relief efforts. Some are collecting donations or providing meals to workers in the area helping to clean up after the storm.

Other businesses and business owners have taken a more direct approach, delivering supplies and meals to residents in nearby counties where infrastructure has been destroyed and communication is challenging.

Some business owners expressed the desire to help residents in distress in nearby counties.

These are not the only examples of businesses and residents aiding those affected by Helene, but provide a look at how some residents responded when fellow North Carolinians needed assistance.

Providing meals

Cranford Hospitality contracted with North Carolina to provide three meals per day to areas affected by Helene.

Zack Cranford said several of the business' restaurants are providing about 1,500 meals per day to areas around Hendersonville, Flat Rock and others.

He said Cranford Hospitality is providing 200 meals per day to Pardee Hospital in Hendersonville. Another 100 meals are going to a location in Flat Rock.

Some of the 1,500 meals are being distributed to volunteers assisting with search-and-rescue operations in the western part of the state. Meals also are being distributed to shelters.

Cranford said it took about two-and-a-half to three hours each way to travel to Hendersonville due to closures along Interstate 40 earlier after the storm.

Cranford said he expects to provide meals for the foreseeable future.

"We're just trying to help our community more than anything," Cranford said. "We're thankful for the opportunity and to be in a position to step up."

'A bunch of 12-year-olds should not be having to do this'

Garrett Osborne went to work on Monday but it didn't feel right.

"I just thought, 'This feels weird,'" Osborne said. "I've been seeing all these

videos and pictures and all this kind of stuff, and it just feels weird. We lived through ... all these natural disasters that are hours away and even in other countries and it's unique, it hits a little bit different when 30 minutes away from my house there are people that literally lost everything they own."

Osborne, owner of Osborne Real Estate Group, connected with colleagues and friends to provide help to western North Carolina.

With a convoy of pickup trucks, many towing trailers, Osborne and others traveled to Canton, West Asheville and Black Mountain on Tuesday to deliver about 100,000 pounds of supplies, food and water.

Osborne said his eagerness to help caused him to learn some lessons from that first day about coordinating with churches or other officials in areas impacted by the storm. Some places did not have the ability to accept donations, but he did donate in Canton and found a church in Black Mountain also willing to accept donations.

"The churches in those areas are inundated," Osborne said. "They're inundated with supplies and they're overwhelmed. They're not meant to be distribution hubs. They're meant to be churches."

Osborne said a youth group at the church in Black Mountain was managing the incoming donations.

"It's cool to see because it's the power of what people can do when they come together and there's love and support," Osborne said. "But a youth group, a bunch of 12-year-olds, should not be having to do this."

Wednesday, he coordinated with a fire station in Spruce Pine with help from the city of Hickory. When he got there, Osborne said the town did not have power or water.

"It's unclear how soon those areas will get infrastructure back," Osborne said. "You've got an entire town that's operating with no power, no water."

Osborne said he's developed a way for people to request welfare checks on friends and family. He and others in Hickory are coordinating with Baptists on Mission in Spruce Pine, who send individuals out to conduct welfare checks.

Thursday, Osborne said welfare checks were conducted on 20 people. Thursday night, he said requests for checks were received on 70 new addresses.

He said the list for requests for welfare checks and missing persons is in the thousands.

Helping neighbors

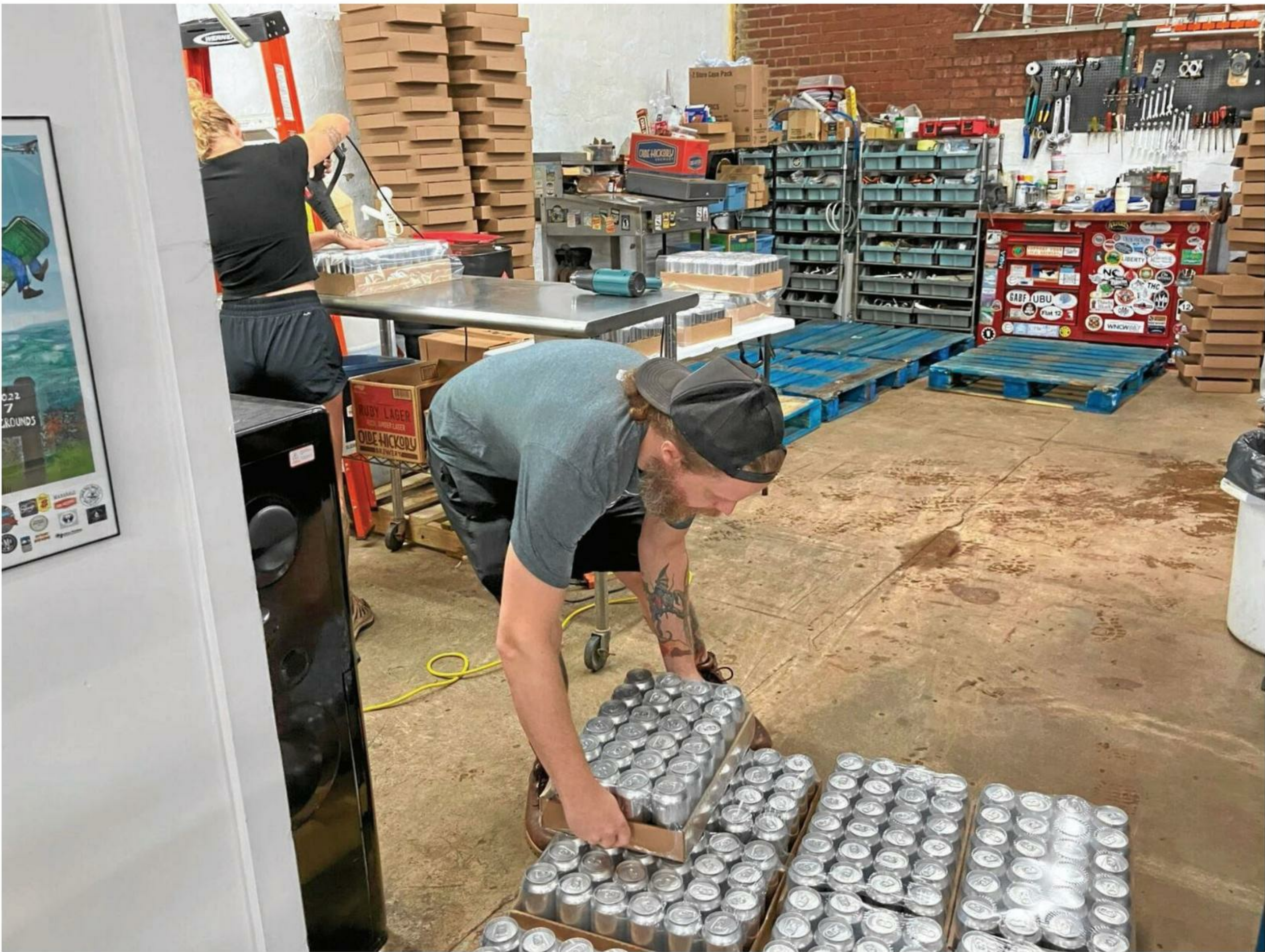
Isaac Crouch, owner of Simply Green Recycling in Morganton, said while not able to collect recycling due to inaccessible roads, he wanted to keep doing what his business does: "Pick stuff up and take it somewhere else."

"As of Friday, we couldn't do that (collect recycling)," Crouch said. "We pretty much transitioned to using all of our operations for the relief efforts."

Crouch and Simply Green employees started assisting Saturday.

On Friday, the city of Morganton said it lost power to its water treatment plant. The city said it would take several days to restore operations at the water treatment facility.

"When we started to learn about how destructive (the storm) was, we had no idea how long it would be before we got power and drinkable water," Crouch said. "We started to put the word out on our personal social media pages and our business social media for people to reach out to anyone and



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Jesup Pruitt places a case of water on a pallet at Olde Hickory Brewery on Friday morning. The water will be distributed to areas in western North Carolina affected by the remnants of Hurricane Helene.

everyone they knew outside of the disaster area that could get us enough water to pick up in our box truck."

Saturday, Crouch traveled with four SUVs and a trailer to meet friends and family around Statesville. There, water was collected to bring back to Burke County.

Crouch said they took water to Broughton Hospital and distributed some from the Simply Green parking lot in Morganton. "Those first few days, there was a lot of hope and people helping each other, people willing to do anything and everything to get their neighbors what they need," Crouch said.

On Monday, 5,500 pounds — 140 cases — of bottled water was collected. Simply Green collected another 8,000 pounds of bottled water Tuesday and Wednesday.

Employees Ben Pannenbacker and Jon Gromm also delivered needed supplies Tuesday in a 20-foot box truck to the Jonas Ridge community in northern Burke County.

Wednesday morning, the city of Morganton reported the city was no longer under a boil water advisory and water operations were returning to normal.

Crouch will return to business operations now that areas around Morganton have drinkable water. He plans to continue to collect donations and take them where they are needed.

On Friday, Crouch picked up another 12,000 pounds of bottled water and 35 empty fuel cans to be filled and distributed in western North Carolina.

Crouch, who lives in Burke County and was also affected by Helene, said driving to collect, organize and distribute supplies was emotionally taxing. Seeing an area he grew up in, people he knows, devastated by flooding and mudslides caused him to have two emotional breakdowns.

He knows there is much work to be done but is hopeful that resilient communities in the region can continue to band together.

"Our ancient mountains have lost entire towns, and we are a long way from knowing how many have perished," Crouch said by email Thursday. "Those of us that continue on have also lost the lives we had before this. Give yourself grace and be kind to your neighbors."

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BILLY CHAPMAN, RECORD

Cans are filled with water at Olde Hickory Brewery in downtown Hickory. Volunteers Debbie Moscone and Bob Sinclair volunteer by placing filled cans in a cardboard box.



A volunteer unloads water out of a Simply Green Recycling truck in Morganton. COURTESY OF ISAAC CROUCH



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