

Prayer Fence serves as reminder of power of prayer

October 19, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Hendersonville Times-News | Section: News | 335 Words Page: A3 OpenURL Link

During this time of recovery from Tropical Storm Helene, Mills River Presbyterian Church invites community members to "send their prayers on the wind to God" by participating in the church's Prayer Fence.

Starting Oct. 17, the public can send the church their special prayers via email. The prayers will then be written on colorful ribbons and attached to fencing on the church property. People may also come to the church and write out their own messages and personally attach them to the Prayer Fence located at the rear of the church on 10 Presbyterian Church Road.

"In the midst of the horrible, our hope is that our community can find glimpses of the Holy with this Prayer Fence," said the Rev. Megan McMillan, Pastor at Mills River Presbyterian Church. "Folks are invited to offer prayers of peace, comfort, healing and thanksgiving; prayers for friends or loved ones that are suffering, prayers for recovery and relief for our region, prayers of thanksgiving for the line workers and rescue efforts happening all around us in the aftermath of the storm. We believe in the power of prayer, more than ever, in times of chaos such as this."

With hundreds of ribbons fluttering in the wind, the Prayer Fence will serve as a physical reminder of the power of prayer. For five weeks the ribbons will bear the prayers that flutter on the winds to reach heaven. To have a ribbon created and added to the fence, send your prayer requests to mrpc10@att.net.

Mills River Presbyterian Church held its first Prayer Fence in 2020 during COVID to offer support to the community. At that time dozens of ribbons adorned the church fence that were created by community members.

Mills River Presbyterian Church is located at 10 Presbyterian Church Road, accessible from Haywood Road or N.C. 280. The church hosts Sunday church services at 11 a.m. For more information, call (828) 891-7101.

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Surry declared eligible for FEMA Helene aid

October 19, 2024 | Tribune, The (Elkin, NC) Author: Tom Joyce tjoyce@mtairynews.com| Section: News | 431 Words OpenURL Link

Local residents trying to recover from Helene are getting a boost from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), according to an announcement Friday.

"Surry County is now eligible for FEMA Individual Assistance," agency spokeswoman BrianaSummer Fenton told The Mount Airy News.

This opens the door for homeowners and renters in the county who had uninsured damage or losses caused by Tropical Storm Helene to apply for FEMA disaster assistance.

FEMA might be able to help with serious needs, displacement, temporary lodging, basic home repair costs, personal property losses or other disaster-caused needs, according to information from Fenton.

Mount Airy Mayor Jon Cawley explained Friday that a requirement for Surry becoming eligible for the FEMA Individual Assistance was a local government disaster declaration.

This occurred on Sept. 27, the Friday when the storm hit.

"The county did it and that included the city of Mount Airy," the mayor said.

"So we would ask that our citizens be responsible to take advantage of this opportunity with integrity," he mentioned on behalf of city government.

In addition to Surry, residents of Yadkin, Forsyth, Cabarrus, Cherokee, Graham, Iredell, Lee, Nash, Rowan, Stanly and Union counties are included in the latest disaster assistance declaration.

Previously, Alleghany, Ashe, Wilkes, Watauga, Alexander, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania and Yancey counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians were authorized for assistance to households.

Instructions for residents

The quickest way to apply for the aid is to go online at DisasterAssistance.gov, according to details from Fenton.

Residents also can apply using the FEMA App for mobile devices or calling toll-free 800-621-3362.

The telephone line is open every day and help is available in most languages. Those using a relay service, such as Video Relay Service (VRS), captioned telephone or other service, should give FEMA their number for that service.

A video on how to participate also can be accessed by visiting "Three Ways to Apply for FEMA Disaster Assistance" via YouTube.

When applying, residents will need to provide a current phone number where they can be contacted, their address at the time of the disaster and the one where they are now staying, their Social Security number, a general list of damage and losses, banking information for those choosing direct deposit and, if insured, the policy number or agent and/or the company name.

Persons with homeowners, renters or flood insurance are advised to file a claim as soon as possible.

FEMA cannot duplicate benefits for losses covered by insurance. If a policy does not meet all of one's disaster expenses, he or she could be eligible for federal assistance.

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Pioneers roll past Cougars in first game since Hurricane Helene paused season

October 19, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Zach Colburn | Section: Sports | 560 Words OpenURL Link

TAYLORSVILLE — Maddox Greene did a little bit of everything for Watauga's football team during a 49-21 win over Alexander Central at Cougar Stadium Friday night.

The senior quarterback completed 11 passes for 162 yards and two touchdowns, rushed for 200 yards and two touchdowns and caught a pass at the receiver position.

And that was just on the offensive side of the ball, where Watauga piled up an impressive 595 yards to remain undefeated this season at 6-0.

"We really wanted to play good tonight because we've been off for 28 days," said Greene, who also recorded a trio of tackles on defense. "We just wanted to get back here on the field, as we're serving our community, and we felt like this would help our community grow closer together through football."

Greene's biggest contribution, which might've served as a momentum swing, came on the defensive side when the Pioneers led 14-0 early in the second quarter.

Alexander Central (3-4, 1-1 Northwestern 4A/3A) began building momentum, and Wade Queen, the Cougars quarterback, threw a pass intended for Garrison Millsaps — the team's six-foot-six tight end.

But Greene was able to out-jump Millsaps to intercept the pass, putting the Pioneers deep in Cougar territory with a chance to extend their lead.

"It felt good, just being able to be on the field on defense because the defense is the (most fun) part of the game, I feel like — it just felt good to be able to help the team out in that way," said Greene.

As Watauga moved the ball, it faced fourth-and-11 from the Cougar 31.

Everett Gryder managed to pick up just enough to earn the first down and two plays later, the junior rushed 14 yards into the end zone for the touchdown. The score was part of a 21-point second quarter as the Pioneers led 28-7 at halftime.

For Watauga head football coach Ryan Habich, Friday's conference-opening win served as a good change of pace for a community that needed a win after Hurricane Helene.

"We were able to get them behind the chains, offensively, that way you can get them off the field and then when we get the ball, you've go to take care of the ball and score touchdowns and that's how you beat Alexander," said Habich. "We're really proud of our football team, really very proud of our players, the way they responded for not playing for a month and barely practicing and our assistant coaches to get our kids ready, so (it's a) big win for us."

The Pioneers padded their lead out of halftime when Greene connected with Landon Smith on a 32-yard touchdown pass — the second time the two hooked up in the game.

After Sawyer Chapman-Hays cut the deficit to 35-14 with a 1-yard touchdown run, Watauga put the game well out of reach with fourth-quarter touchdown runs from Greene (13 yards) and Cade Keller (32 yards).

In addition to Greene, Keller added five carries for 95 yards to accompany the touchdown on the ground. Smith -

one of seven Pioneers to catch a pass on Friday — had two receptions for 79 yards, with both going for touchdowns. Evan Burroughs had a team-high five catches for 37 yards.

Trathan Gragg, Dillon Zaragoza and Luke Edmisten led Watauga, which hosts Hibriten next Friday, with six tackles apiece and Carson Gunnell-Beck added five.

Alexander Central will travel to South Caldwell on Friday.

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Pioneers come back from layoff, roll past Cougars

October 19, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Zach Colburn | Section: Sports | 567 Words OpenURL Link

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The senior quarterback completed 11 passes for 162 yards and two touchdowns, rushed for 200 yards and two touchdowns, and caught a pass at the receiver position.

And that was just on the offensive side of the ball where Watauga piled up an impressive 595 yards to remain undefeated this season at 6-0.

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Retailers expect holiday sales to grow more slowly - US retail trade group expects holiday season sales to grow more slowly

October 19, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: ANNE D'INNOCENZIO Associated Press| Section: B| 869 Words Page: 4 OpenURL Link

NEW YORK - The largest retail trade group in the United States says that it expects consumers to spend more during the upcoming holiday shopping season but that the growth in sales will be slower than last year due to concerns over persistent inflation and prices.

The National Retail Federation said its 2024 forecast indicates that shoppers will make \$979.5 billion to \$989 billion worth of purchases in November and December, which would represent a 2.5% to 3.5% increase over the same two-month period a year ago.

However, the \$955.6 billion spent during the 2023 holiday shopping season was 3.9% more than in 2022.

This year's predicted pace is consistent with the average increase of 3.6% from 2010 to 2019. During the coronavirus pandemic, Americans ramped up their spending. Holiday season sales rose 9% in 2020 from the year before, and they soared 12.4% in 2021, according to the National Retail Federation.

The trade group makes its calculations based on government figures. The numbers exclude sales at automobile dealers, gasoline stations and restaurants.

The forecast considers economic indicators such as employment, wages, consumer confidence, disposable income, consumer credit, previous retail sales and weather.

"Interest rates are still a little higher than they were in recent memory," National Retail Federation CEO and President Matt Shay said during a call with reporters. "Consumers do have those interest rates and the lingering inflation on their minds. So we expect that consumers will continue to be more price-conscious and pragmatic in their spending decisions."

The retail federation issued its look-ahead Tuesday as the data shows U.S. consumers continuing to spend, powered by sturdy hiring, low unemployment and healthy household finances.

Moreover, gas prices are coming down, leaving a little extra money for shoppers to spend on gifts. The national average price for a gallon of unleaded gasoline was \$3.20 on Tuesday; a year ago, it was \$3.60, according to auto club AAA.

But there are plenty of challenges this season, including a presidential election that could create a big distraction from shopping in November. NRF officials said it was nearly impossible to measure the election's impact on current or future spending.

With Thanksgiving falling on Nov. 28, there also will be six fewer days between the holiday and Christmas Day compared to last year. Other factors that could hurt holiday sales: the economic impact of hurricanes Helene and Milton, NRF officials said.

Walmart, the nation's largest retailer, plans to advertise savings on Thanksgiving meal products starting Oct. 14, about two weeks earlier than last year.

NRF's forecast was in line with the predictions of other analysts, which also point to a more restrained mood among

shoppers.

Management consulting firm Bain & December retail sales to rise by 3% as opposed to the 4.2% growth seen last year. AlixPartners, another consulting firm, expects sales for October through December to be up anywhere from 2% to 5%, lower than last year's 6% increase. Consulting and research firm Customer Growth Partners predicted sales to grow 4% during the holiday period, just slightly below its figure from last year.

Meanwhile, Adobe Analytics predicts online sales will surge 8.9%, marking the highest spending pace since 2021 when it was 8.6%. A year ago, online sales were up 4.9%, compared with the previous year. Vivek Pandya, lead analyst, Adobe Digital Insights, noted that shoppers' bigger interest in discounts will drive spending. Discounts should average about 30%, the same as a year ago, he said.

While the inflation rate is coming down, it's still a big pocketbook issue for shoppers as many food items still cost considerably more than they did a few years ago.

James Zahn, editor-in-chief of industry trade publication The Toy Book, thinks shoppers are even more price-conscious than they were last year when it comes to buying toys. Toys under \$20 are resonating with parents, he said.

Kohl's executives said last week that shoppers, particularly those in lower income brackets, will feel more squeezed than a year ago.

Christie Raymond, Kohl's chief marketing officer, said the cumulative impact of high prices on food and other essentials is eating into people's savings. As part of its holiday strategy, Kohl's plans to be aggressive with offering discounts. As for the presidential race, Kohl's executives said they were not sure if consumers will hold back their buying ahead of the Nov. 5 election but it's something they are monitoring.

"We're just trying to follow the consumer, and we know that they're going to feel squeezed once that Thanksgiving time frame hit," Raymond told reporters.

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Surry, Yadkin declared eligible for FEMA Helene aid

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In addition to Surry, residents of Yadkin, Forsyth, Cabarrus, Cherokee, Graham, Iredell, Lee, Nash, Rowan, Stanly and Union counties are included in the latest disaster assistance declaration.

Yadkin was also under a state of emergency order ahead of the storm said Yadkin EMS Director Keith Vestal. Vestal said there were several homes with reported damage from fallen trees due to the storm. He added that the FEMA benefits are for incidents not already covered by insurance.

Previously, Alleghany, Ashe, Wilkes, Watauga, Alexander, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania and Yancey counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians were authorized for assistance to households.

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