

Statesville Record & Landmark (NC): Page 6

October 8, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Statesville, North Carolina Page: 6 OpenURL Link

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Annual Bluegrass on the Blackwater Concert: Caroline Owens & New Company

October 7, 2024 | BladenOnline.com (Elizabethtown, NC) Author: staff report| Section: Local News| 532 Words OpenURL Link

IMPORTANT UPDATE: This special annual event, which will take place at 7:00pm, Thursday October 17, has been converted into a fundraiser for relief efforts in Western North Carolina following Hurricane Helene.

Contributed

All proceeds from the evening will be donated to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund to help communities recover from Helene. United Way of North Carolina is the fiscal agent for the Fund. The Fund, with assistance from the United Way of North Carolina, will help provide for immediate unmet needs through reimbursements to nonprofits working with disaster survivors.

The Carolina Civic Center Historic Theater in downtown Lumberton continues its yearly "Bluegrass on the Blackwater" series with up-and-coming artist Carolina Owens and her band.

Caroline Owens is a two-time IBMA & SPBGMA nominated Bluegrass Vocalist, recording artist for Skyline Records, and publisher for Billy Blue Records, of Nashville, TN. She has performed alongside many of the music industry's most accomplished artists such as: Alison Krauss, Ricky Skaggs, Rhonda Vincent, Suzanne Cox, The Isaacs, Larry Gatlin, Larry Cordle, Carl Jackson, The Malpass Brothers, Darin & Brooke Aldridge and many others.

In addition to her undeniable vocal talent, Caroline made her mark in the songwriting industry when her debut single, Heartbreak Train, claimed the #1 Bluegrass song of 2023, on the Bluegrass Borderline Charts.

Caroline's vocal abilities, paired with her down-home southern charm, have received critical acclaim from some of the music industry's most accomplished performers, and have enabled her to become one of the most successful, young vocalists in the Bluegrass genre.

The band features musicians on mandolin, fiddle, bass, banjo and guitar.

Tickets are \$20 adults and \$15 students. This performance is partially underwritten by a grant from the Robeson County Arts Council.

Tickets for the Mainstage Series can be purchased on-line by going to our web site at www.carolinaciviccenter.com. Tickets also can be purchased in-person or with credit card or cash 1:00 to 5:30 pm Monday through Friday through our administrative offices in the theater's second floor (enter on Fourth Street side), or by calling the Civic Center at (910) 738-4339. When available, tickets can also be purchased at the door. Theater lobby box office opens for ticket sales one hour prior to performance.

The theater does not guarantee the authenticity of tickets purchased from any third-party reseller and recommends that tickets be purchased directly through its box office, etix.com or its website to ensure ticket authenticity and pricing.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Carolina Civic Center Historic Theater is a beautifully restored, 1928 treasure listed on the National Register of Historic Places that offers visitors a unique and visually stunning experience. The theater is located at 315 North Chestnut Street in the heart of downtown Lumberton. First opened as a vaudeville and silent film house, the theater offers a wide array of programming including live touring performances, original productions, art exhibits, films,

special events and rentals. For more information visit www.carolinaciviccenter.com

The Carolina Civic Center Historic Theater is located in historic downtown Lumberton at Fourth and Chestnut streets, just one block north of the downtown plaza. There is plenty of parking around the theater.

For a full schedule and to sign up for its e-newsletter visit: www.carolinaciviccenter.com

The post Annual Bluegrass on the Blackwater Concert: Caroline Owens & New Company appeared first on . Copyright (c) 2024, BladenOnline.com.

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USACE Installs First Generators

October 7, 2024 | BladenOnline.com (Elizabethtown, NC) Author: staff report| Section: Local News| 175 Words OpenURL Link

Contributed

WILMINGTON, N.C.- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Temporary Emergency Power team completed the first installations of generators across western North Carolina last Friday to assist communities with critical power needs.

Four generators were installed across the disaster-affected area, two of which were installed at the wastewater treatment facility in Hendersonville, North Carolina.

The Temporary Power Team consists of soldiers from the 249th Engineer Battalion, USACE personnel, and private contractors.

Personnel continue power assessments throughout the region. Assessments are inspections of existing connection points to determine serviceability and to expedite generator installations.

USACE personnel continue assessments of water/wastewater treatment facilities. Personnel are coordinating these actions with The Federal Emergency Management Agency, Environmental Protection Agency and the State of North Carolina, and NC.

USACE's National Activation, Regional Activations, Temporary Emergency Power, Infrastructure Assessment, and Debris Management/Oversight teams are supporting FEMA's mission and have been mission assigned to western North Carolina. USACE's number one priority continues to be the life, health, and safety of all who are affected by Tropical Storm Helene.

The post USACE Installs First Generators appeared first on .

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13 state parks closed in Western NC after Hurricane Helene. Estimated reopening timeline

October 7, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon, The Charlotte Observer | Section: north_carolina | 406 Words OpenURL Link

After the deadly destruction of Hurricane Helene, over a dozen of North Carolina's state parks will be shut down for several weeks.

As cleanup continues across the southeast, The North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation announced that all state parks west of I-77 are closed through at least Oct. 31, 2024, along with most programs at all state parks.

ncparks ig post helene state park closure map

The Division of Parks and Recreation is assisting with statewide emergency and rescue efforts in Western North Carolina in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene," the division announced on Oct. 2. "As a result, we are scaling back operations across the state to allow staff to continue to assist with critical deployments."

chimney rock ncparks ig post helene damage

According to the division, 13 of North Carolina's 39 state parks and recreation areas will be closed until at least the end of the month, including:

Chimney Rock State ParkCrowders Mountain State ParkElk Knob State ParkGorges State ParkGrandfather Mountain State ParkLake James State ParkLake Norman State ParkMount Jefferson State Natural AreaMount Mitchell State ParkNew River State ParkRendezvous MountainSouth Mountains State ParkStone Mountain State Park

Along with one third of North Carolina's state parks being closed, so are several other roads around the area, including the famous Blue Ridge Parkway.

parkway1.jpgA washed out section of the Blue Ridge Parkway at milepost 336.

Helene ripped chunks of the Blue Ridge Parkway away. Avoid it, rangers urged Saturday.

parkway 401.jpgDamage along the Blue Ridge Parkway near milepost 401 south of Asheville.

"We continue to discourage unnecessary travel in and to Western North Carolina. Limiting travel helps prioritize sending lifesaving resources and repairing vital infrastructure repairs in the communities hit hardest by Helene. Many roads continue to be closed due to unsafe conditions," NCDPR's website says.

If you have any reservations made for any of the state parks west of I-77, including cabins, campsites and picnic shelters, full refunds will be distributed, according to the division.

You can find more information and updates on park closures online at ncparks.gov/closures.

Surviving after Helene: 'Just living is a challenge'The News & Observer's Travis Long was one of the first journalists on the ground when Helene's floodwaters roared through Western North Carolina. A veteran of more than 20 major storms, he shares his experiences and images after a week of covering the devastation the storm left behind.

Tropical Storm Helene closed the most famous road in Western North Carolina

NCDOT's list of roads needing repairs after Helene keeps growing. Here's current info

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Chyna Blackmon, The Charlotte Observer, '13 state parks closed in Western NC after Hurricane Helene. Estimated reopening timeline', *Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 7 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C1116E936915F0



Former governor: The story behind how North Carolina gets ready for disasters like Helene

October 7, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Jim Martin, The Charlotte Observer | Section: opinion | 637 Words OpenURL Link

North Carolina is reeling from its worst natural disaster since 1900. While forecasts were increasingly urgent as Helene raced northward, for North Carolina's resourceful mountainfolk it proved far more destructive than anyone dared imagine.

For a back story. I vividly remember my early introduction to emergency preparations as governor from 1985 through 1992. I still find it inspiring that thousands of state workers and volunteers from here and across America come dig us out, repair roads and utilities, and restore power, communications and commerce, as we do for them.

Effective response to a natural disaster is more complex than anyone could fully anticipate. Fortunately for us, North Carolina puts major emphasis on preparation. Early in my first year, I attended a special NC innovation: practicing for storms, forest fires and tornadoes.

The scene was a high school gym, with tables set up for coordinators of each type of responder in the region. There was a separate table for highway patrol, national guard, prison sheriffs, Red Cross, Salvation Army, ham radio operators (cellphones weren't invented!), school superintendents, clergy, electric utilities, NC Forest Service and many more. One table hosted NC's own home improvement retailer Lowe's, side-by-side with Home Depot, Ace Hardware and other competitors. They practiced as a team estimating special tools, like generators and chain saws, each would deliver.

They worked through a realistic rehearsal for a forest fire, for that season would soon begin. Similar maneuvers would rehearse appropriate steps months later to prepare for hurricane season. Each table would practice exactly what their duties would be and when and where to deploy, responding to various scenarios. They also would understand the tasks to be handled by every other table, all orchestrated in advance. Tactics might be improvised as real disasters unfolded, but the strategic assignment of responsibilities was settled.

During my eight-year watch, there were two major fires, three monster tornadoes, 13 hurricanes — and one freak red tide at Beaufort Inlet. My rookie year, there were 12 Atlantic hurricanes, and North Carolina caught eight of them. The next seven years, we had only five of 35. We believed practice sessions helped speed our response to a storm.

Hugo in 1989 was the worst hurricane for my administration. It went through North Carolina east of the mountains with heavy rainfall and 60 mph gale-force winds, occasionally gusting to 100. Hugo blew down trees and flooded low-lying spots — but showed little to guide our response to Helene.

Eastern North Carolina took a horrible loss from the vast flooding of coastal plains by Floyd in 1999. Across relatively flat terrain, many homes were flooded to the ceiling or higher. With little lateral flow, it took days for the high water to recede. Helene was more comparable to the infamous 1889 Johnstown Pennsylvania flood. An upstream dam collapsed, sending a torrent of water 30 feet deep crashing through the unsuspecting town at up to 40 mph. Caught entirely off guard, 2,209 lives were lost.

Few understood "flooding" would mean river tsunamis, sweeping everything downstream. Few expected that one or two feet of rain over 2-3 days on mountains would create cascading torrents of water scouring the flood plains where thousands of homesteads had stood for decades.

Looking ahead, some observers have considered Helene's likely disruption of the general election. While Asheville and Boone vote Democratic, the other 21 counties west of Hickory vote heavily Republican, normally with a net 120,000-vote advantage for Republicans. This far exceeds Trump's 74,483 margin carrying the state in 2020. While every effort will be made to assure the polls are ready for them, we cannot imagine the daily burdens they face just meeting their families' vital needs. These are hardy citizens, famous for their enduring spirit. I'm confident they will do what they can.

Jim Martin, a Republican, was N.C. governor from 1985-93. He is a regular contributor to our pages.

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Mecklenburg sewage spills add to pollution load Helene washed into Catawba River

October 7, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Gavin Off, The Charlotte Observer | Section: local | 925 Words OpenURL Link

Heavy rain from Helene caused more than a quarter million gallons of sewage to spill from Mecklenburg County's wastewater treatment system and into the Catawba River basin.

At least that's the official estimate the city gave the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality.

The real amount of waste was likely much bigger, said Rusty Rozzelle, water quality program manager for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services, a partnership between the city and county that oversees drainage and water quality.

The county's drinking water supply is safe. But the environment took a hit, and it will take some weeks to assess the toll, Rozzelle said.

And it is not just what leaked into the Catawba locally that Charlotte-area residents should be aware of, he said. They'll also have to grapple with any impacts from the debris, sewage and other contamination that washed into the river upstream, as far west as the Appalachian Mountains, that will eventually float to Charlotte.

"This is by far and away the most devastation our waterways have experienced in modern history — both from a water quality and water quantity perspective," Rozzelle said.

drone images 002.JPEGHelene flooded several homes along Lake and Riverside drives. The storm washed sewage, debris and other contaminants into the Catawba River basin as far west as the Blue Ridge Mountains.

When untreated sewage reaches a waterbody, bacteria, viruses, parasites, molds and fungi are released. Wading, swimming or ingesting contaminated water could lead to stomach cramps and diarrhea or even life-threatening ailments such as cholera and hepatitis, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Bacterial levels are usually highest immediately after contamination and when the rivers are running the fastest, said Mike O'Driscoll, a hydrologist and professor at East Carolina University.

The extra water dilutes the pollutants, he said, but some contaminants, such as nutrients and heavy metals, could be in the water for months.

Sewage spilled many places into the river

More than 1 million gallons of sewage leaked from collection systems within the North Carolina portion of the Catawba River basin, The Observer data analysis shows.

Northeast of Charlotte, some 309,000 gallons spilled from the Newton Collection System. Ninety-two thousand gallons spilled across the Catawba River in Gaston County. Sewage flowed into the Catawba River basin upstream from Mecklenburg and at three Charlotte Water Collection System locations after Helene roared across the Carolinas, state records show.

Mecklenburg County's largest untreated discharge was more than 224,000 gallons into Lake Wylie, with no specific utility facility identified in the data. Another 11,000 gallons flowed into Sugar Creek, which runs through the center

of the city, and 1,500 gallons into Campbell Creek, on the city's west side, according to DEQ estimates.

Downstream from Mecklenburg County, Helene caused nearly 500,000 gallons of raw sewage to spill into Rock Hill, S.C. area waterways.

The exact cause of all spills is unclear. When it comes to Charlotte Water, the public utility, floating debris can run into and break wastewater pipes that span creeks. Lift stations, pumping systems that move wastewater from lower elevations to higher ones, can overflow. And erosion can undermine underground pipes, said Cam Cooley, a utility spokesperson.

For those not linked to the utility, an influx of water can cause septic tank waste to back up into homes or leach into the soil, said O'Driscoll of East Carolina University.

Rozzelle said it would be two or three weeks before local officials even test water along the Catawba River. There is no need to test it now, he said. Officials know bacteria counts are "really high."

drone images 006.PNGIn this drone image shows homes submerged in flood water from the Catawba River near Mountain Island Lake on Sept. 28.

Helene pollution extends beyond local spills

The Charlotte area has weathered much larger sewage spills than the at least 236,000 gallons reported to have escaped during Helene, a Charlotte Observer analysis of state data found.

Charlotte's largest sewage leak happened in 2018 when heavy rains caused 15 million gallons to leak into Long Creek off Oakdale Road, northwest of uptown, The Observer found. That same year, another 2.6 million gallons flowed into Taggard Creek, east of Charlotte Douglas International Airport.

But what makes Helene's toll on the river so terrible was all the contamination between the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains in McDowell County, where the river starts, and here, Rozzelle said.

drone images 003.JPEGRain from Helene floods homes along the Catawba River, south of Mountain Island Lake.

Much of that pollution will eventually make its way to Charlotte.

"There may have been larger spills in this county, but I think you have to look at everything upstream," he said.

Contaminants cause concern

Nancy Hiemstra's home overlooks Mountain Island Lake, where some of the area's worst flooding happened. She knows something changed after Helene. The lake smells, she said, and she's seen a film on its surface.

Since the storm, Hiemsrta, who is on city water, has filtered and boiled it before drinking, she told The Observer. Her home sits downstream of a number of spills, including the 309,000 gallons that spilled in Newton.

Treating water piped to homes by Charlotte Water is not necessary, Rozzelle said. The city is purifying that drinking water and, he stressed, it is safe to drink.

But the Catawba River is contaminated with sewage and other pollutants, Rozzelle acknowledged. In addition to sewage, manufacturing chemicals, gasoline, oil and heavy metals, some of which are carcinogenic, and even human remains were likely washed into it, he said.

The contamination shouldn't prevent residents from rebuilding. But it should prevent them from going into the water for now, he said.

"I would not be surprised if anything is floating in the water right now," Rozzelle said. "Some seen. Some unseen."

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'It threw us back': People living in public housing in Asheville cope in post-Helene life

October 7, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Ryan Oehrli, The Charlotte Observer Section: north_carolina 777 Words OpenURL Link

Since Helene struck, Kyesha Nelson and TJ Wilson have been making long walks across Asheville because her baby needs special milk.

To avoid the worst of Helene, they had left their home in the Fairview area to stay with Wilson's mother in Hillcrest, one of the city's public housing communities.

"I just have to get my baby somewhere I can walk around," Nelson remembered thinking. Her six-month-old, Tykwon, was born prematurely.

But Hillcrest has no power or running water, a common struggle for people in Asheville and Western North Carolina since the historic storm.

IMG_6730.jpgKyesha Nelson, standing Friday in Asheville with TJ Wilson, said Helene has made it especially difficult to get the special milk her 6-month-old baby needs.

They don't have a car. Without the city's bus system running, people without transportation — including those living in low-income housing like Hillcrest — are on foot in Asheville's winding, hilly roads.

"When you have smaller children, walking is not always the best thing you can do," Nelson said. "Or the safest."

A common issue

In a Sept. 28 notice, the city said buses had been redirected to relief efforts. ART — or Asheville Rides Transit — brought 578 people to shelters, that notice said.

"The service also continues to face power outages, road conditions, and staffing shortages," it said. All services are suspended "until further notice."

The city later announced that on Monday the bus system will "begin operating a modified schedule on select routes where road conditions have improved."

RHL_kimball_asheville_10424 (6)A child's bicycle lays near fallen tree branches at Pisgah View apartments in Asheville, NC on Thursday.

In West Asheville's Pisgah View Apartments, Cicely Rogers is dealing with "more stress" without a way to get around town, she said.

She has family in the area, but not nearby. Amboy Road flooded early, making it a challenge for them to get to her, she said. And she's not even sure what the roads are like where her sister lives in Buncombe County.

Water is the chief concern for many because many in the city are without fresh water. Asheville Mayor Esther Manheimer has warned that it will take some time, at least weeks, for it to return.

Pisgah View had power Thursday, drawing in family members, said Tykerria Robinson-Williams. Her focus was

stocking up as much water as she could, unsure how long necessities would be hard to come by.

She worried how far back the storm would set the people living in Pisgah View.

"We really can't afford to leave our homes behind. We weren't doing too good before, so now... it threw us back 10 more steps when we're trying to get 10 steps ahead," she said.

kimball_Helene_Hillcrest21_10424.jpgResidents of Hillcrest Apartments wait to get non-potable water Friday, Oct. 4, 2024 in Asheville, N.C.

Friends, family and neighbors have been helping each other across the region.

"Really, I'm just counting on my friends to look out for me," said Reggie Moore, who lives in Deaverview, another public housing community that's close to Aston Park. He's worried about older people there, who can't get out.

"I think they need a bit more help than what they're getting," he said.

One such woman, who asked not to be named, said she relies on the bus system. Even if she walked downtown, she might not find an ATM with cash or a store that's stocked, she said.

'We all need to pull our part'

Buncombe County Manager Avril Pinder said the county has been working with community partners to distribute food to public housing communities.

"Community paramedics have been on the ground since this began, taking water to our housing authority areas," Pinder said.

Some residents told The Charlotte Observer about food and water being dropped off, and even a food truck cooking hot meals.

RHL_kimball_asheville_10424 (8)A resident of the Pisgah View apartments walks to his home near a fallen tree branch Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024 in Asheville, N.C.

Lolita Ray also rides the bus. She's lived in Hillcrest for about five years. Without it, she's relying on her daughter for rides to and from Sam's Club, where her daughter works.

Water cases rested at a neighbor's front door Friday. Ray put them there. And she spent her morning cleaning up trash on the streets in Hillcrest. The trash irked her.

"Right now, we all need to pull our part and come together," she said.

By the afternoon, there was some new and much-needed relief at Hillcrest. The community center filled with donations, and water stacked high outside. Residents carried out diapers, snacks, water and more.

Observer staff writer Jeff A. Chamer contributed.

IMG_6739.jpgMuch-needed food and supplies were replenished on Friday, Oct. 4, 2024, at the Hillcrest public housing community center in Asheville.

kimball_Helene_Hillcrest1_10424.jpgSarah Bollo, right, sits at the bus stop Friday at Oct. 4, 2024 at Hillcrest Apartments in Asheville, N.C.

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4 music stars to band together for NC hurricane relief show at BofA Stadium this month

October 7, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Théoden Janes, The Charlotte Observer | Section: music_news_reviews | 696 Words OpenURL Link

Three of the biggest music stars North Carolina has ever produced — Luke Combs, Eric Church and James Taylor — will headline a special benefit show for victims of Hurricane Helene on Saturday, Oct. 26 at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte.

"Concert for Carolina," announced Monday morning, also will feature bluegrass musician Billy Strings, a Michigan native, Sheryl Crow, Keith Urban and Bailey Zimmerman.

In a news release, Live Nation said: "The Tar Heel State is a profoundly special place for all four artists, as it is where Combs, Church and Taylor grew up and first discovered their musical interests, and where Strings has performed many, many times over his career and holds an extra special place in his heart."

Helene relief

Tickets will go on sale at 10 a.m. Thursday; details are at www.concertforcarolina.com. Prices were not immediately available. Ticketmaster lists 5 p.m. as the start time for the Oct. 26 show.

The release said additional featured artists will be announced in the coming days.

Where will Concert for Carolina funds go?

All proceeds from the event will be split evenly between Combs and Church's Chief Cares Foundation, to be distributed to organizations of their choosing in support of relief efforts across "the Carolina region."

The 34-year-old Combs — born in Huntersville and raised in Asheville — announced that his dedicated charities will be Samaritan's Purse, Manna Food Bank, Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest NC, and one more organization to be revealed soon.

Church's Chief Cares will help "established charities and organizations that are well managed, organized and can expedite aid directly to the families affected by Hurricane Helene."

Of the four men atop the bill, only Combs has headlined BofA stadium before. In July 2023, he sold it out on back-to-back nights.

Church, 47, just last week released a new song, "Darkest Hour," that the Granite Falls native said was dedicated to "the unsung heroes, the people who show up when the world's falling apart." He plans to donate all of his publishing royalties for the track to hurricane relief efforts.

In a separate statement on Monday morning, Church called North Carolina "my home."

"It's in every fiber of who I am," he said. "Our family members, friends, neighbors and communities are in dire need. I'm honored to share the stage with an incredible lineup in order to help meet those needs. Through the dark, light will shine."

Taylor, a 76-year-old Rock and Roll Hall of Famer, has a long association with Chapel Hill and has written many

songs influenced by his childhood experiences in North Carolina — most famously, "Carolina in My Mind."

Meanwhile, Strings is the baby of the group at 32, but has built an impressive resume over the past decade. His album "Home" won the Grammy Award for Best Bluegrass Album in 2021. Although he's not from the area, Monday's news release stated that "Strings' life and career has been deeply impacted by the state of North Carolina both personally and professionally, as it is home to some of his most passionate and supportive fans."

How Concert for Carolina came together

"Concert for Carolina" — presented by Explore Asheville and the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority — will be hosted by ESPN's Marty Smith and Barstool Sports' Caleb Pressley.

"This concert took so much planning, work, and coordination from so many people," Combs posted on X alongside the announcement. "I'm so thankful to everyone who helped make this a possibility on such short notice."

David Tepper (owner of the Carolina Panthers, Charlotte FC and Bank of America Stadium) and his wife, Nicole Tepper, said in a statement that it was Combs who first approached them about the idea for the event, adding, "We felt compelled to open the doors of Bank of America Stadium for this special moment."

"Every day," they said, "we are more inspired by the strength and resolve of our Carolina community, and we are grateful to join Luke, Eric and our fellow Carolinians as we embark on the road to recovery together."

The David and Nicole Tepper Foundation — along with the Teppers' two local sports organizations — already have distributed \$3.85 million to provide immediate assistance to those impacted by the deadly storm that swept through the Carolinas on Sept. 26 and 27.

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Up until the moment Helene took her life, this NC mom was watching out for her loved ones

October 7, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Théoden Janes, The Charlotte Observer | Section: north_carolina | 2381 Words OpenURL Link

The moment Jamie and Melissa Guinn laid eyes on the house — nestled on the edge of the tiny Avery County town of Minneapolis, N.C. — they adored it.

Two stories, about 1,900 square feet, built in the late '80s but with cedar siding in a style that made it look even older and more rustic. Almost like a cabin, they thought.

On top of that, the house's surroundings were heavenly: the North Toe River babbled up at the front deck from the other side of Highway 19E; on multiple sides there were dense thickets of lush, tall, green trees; and out back was a very steep, very tall hill, which made it seem as if the home was built right into the side of a mountain.

They weren't at first sure they would get approved to buy it. Jamie, a packing supervisor at Baxter Healthcare's manufacturing plant, and Melissa — then a sub-assembly operator, at Baxter — had four other mouths to feed and were at the time living in an apartment in Marion in neighboring McDowell County.

But upon falling in love with the house, the couple couldn't stop fantasizing about how they would make it their own if everything went smoothly with the offer.

And when everything did, when they were handed the keys, Jamie and Melissa felt like they had since the day they met.

They felt like the luckiest people in the world.

"We both said that we never thought we would have a house that nice in our life. She was so happy to have it," Jamie says, by phone, from a bed at Cannon Memorial Hospital in Linville, with members of Melissa's family gathered around him.

Then he briefly falls silent.

At the time of the conversation, on Thursday night, it's been not even a week since Hurricane Helene raged across the sky over Western North Carolina. Not even a week since the storm triggered a series of landslides and mudslides that knocked the couple's beloved home off its foundation. Not even a week since he suddenly, violently lost the 41-year-old woman of his dreams.

The father of their 8-year-old son River and stepfather to her older boys takes a deep, shaky breath. Takes a few seconds to compose himself. There are things he's open to sharing about the tragic way Melissa died.

First, however, he wants to talk about the beautiful ways she lived.

Enamored by everything about her

Melissa met Jamie at Baxter when she was still married to her first husband, with whom she'd had three sons.

After her divorce, Jamie was slow to make a move. So she had to make her own, marching up to him while he was sitting in the cafeteria during a power outage — and plopping right down in his lap. The ice broken, he was able to

work up the courage to walk her out at the end of that night. They started falling in love on the spot, as they chatted and flirted through the window of her silver Dodge Durango.

It escalated quickly.

He was enamored by everything about her. The intense love she had for her little boys, Brandon, Sebastian and Ethan. The ability to pull off camouflage clothes and mud-covered boots one minute, a fancy girly-girl dress the next. That fearlessness. That contagious laugh.

Those eyes, and the way they looked (as her younger sister Elizabeth describes them) like the color of honey in a jar when it's held up to the sunlight.

They spent years dating before he formally proposed ... but leading up to that day, he informally popped the question over and over — with Ring Pops, or little black-plastic spider rings (because she loved Halloween), or other assorted toy rings he'd pull out of vending machines near the fronts of stores they shopped at.

Jamie would drop to a knee while holding his 25-cent offering and wearing a silly grin; she'd just laugh and wave him off.

You have to find a better way to propose, Melissa would tell him, every time.

Finally, on Halloween in 2013, he did it for real, secretly taking the day off to carve "Will You Marry Me?" into a collection of pumpkins, finishing his project literally the second she walked through the front door of their apartment.

In the run-up to the big day, Jamie accidentally saw her in the first wedding dress she bought. Feeling superstitious, she sold it.

The second one was a traditional-looking stunner that she wore in their October 18, 2014 ceremony, which they held in a majestic field in Roan Mountain, Tennessee. Everything proceeded perfectly, from her older boys serving as groomsmen right down to the four-leaf clover Jamie found on the walk to where they posed for their wedding portraits.

IMG 4360.jpgMelissa Guinn and her husband Jamie on their wedding day in Roan Mountain, Tenn.

Two years later, they welcomed River, a redheaded bundle of joy that made their family of six complete.

And Melissa loved nothing more than spending time with them doing ... pretty much anything — whether that meant taking the boys for the hundredth time to traipse through Backyard Terrors Dinosaur Park just across the state line in Tennessee; or dressing up like superheroes with River; or just getting fast food from the drive-through with Jamie, parking next to the restaurant, and talking about life as they watched traffic go by.

The only thing that dissatisfied her in life was her job, and she solved that last year when she left it to start her own cleaning business, enabling her to spend more time with Jamie and the kids.

It seemed as if her life couldn't get much better. But then it started raining.

'The hill behind it was terrifying to us'

Melissa's younger sister, Elizabeth Hensley, had always felt extremely uneasy about Melissa's home.

On the couple of occasions when she and her fiancé Tony would come up from where they lived in the Linville Caverns area and spend the night at Jamie and Melissa's, Tony in particular would have trouble sleeping because, he'd say, of "that thing behind me."

Some people are claustrophobic. Some people are afraid of heights. Tony had always been spooked that something — maybe everything up above the house — could slide down that hill at any moment and wind up doing some serious damage. Ahead of Hurricane Helene, this fear gripped Elizabeth, too.

"The house was gorgeous," Elizabeth says, "but the hill behind it was terrifying to us.

"So you just sit here and you think and you wonder. ... I try to figure out, you know, if I would have just driven the 40 minutes up there, or if I pushed a little bit harder, or sent more messages, or —" she lets out a big sigh, then begins crying. "The guilt's just real right now."

But she just didn't think the storm was going to be that bad. Neither did Jamie and Melissa. No one did.

And other than a little buzzing about Helene approaching, Thursday was pretty typical for the Guinns. Jamie had a day off from work, so he went and helped Melissa on one of her cleaning jobs. When their work was done, they decided to drive over to the Tennessee town of Elizabethton, where they picked up miso soups from a Japanese place for them, and pizza and Crazy Bread at Little Caesars for River.

They brought it back home and after River went to bed, Jamie watched Investigation Discovery while Melissa perused TikTok, occasionally leaning over to show her husband a funny pet video.

Overnight, the sound of the rain hitting their roof woke them up a couple of times, but on Friday morning, they still had electricity.

Then, without warning, the situation took a fierce turn. The power went out. The wind whipped up. Stuff outside the house started getting blown around. One tree fell, then a second. Their cellphone signals cut out. Another tree toppled over, taking out a transformer near the road and pulling down a power line onto their driveway. The winds picked up even more speed.

Yet in the midst of it all, Melissa saw something beautiful — something she'd seen during other hard rainstorms: a little waterfall behind the house, running down that very steep, very tall hill.

She took a video of it with her phone and brought it back to show Jamie. Look how pretty this is, she said to him.

Before long, the wind died down, and with no electricity and no TikTok or TV, Jamie, Melissa and River sat on their front porch and watched the river, which had swollen over its banks. The storm seemed to settle after that. They hoped the worst was over.

And then, right around 11 a.m. Friday, they heard a crash.

Landslide after landslide after landslide

They jumped up, ran through to other side of the house, and reacted in horror as they saw that a landslide had taken out their detached garage.

The messy pile of mud and debris was redirecting rainwater toward the main house and both Jamie and Melissa were frantically trying to move logs and vehicles to try to divert the flow of the water down the driveway. Jamie ran upstairs to get something — he now can't remember what — but while looking for it, there was another even louder crash, almost like an explosion.

Jamie felt himself being crushed as the house seemed to cave in on him. The house groaned and popped and snapped as it slid down the bank into the river. Jamie screamed for River, who called back in a way that implied to Jamie that his son was OK.

Although Jamie was bleeding from a gash in his head and his back was in searing pain (he'd later learn his spine was fractured), he was able to get clear of the wreckage and make his way halfway up the bank to where River was stuck in muddy water.

As Jamie was picking him up, he looked up and saw Melissa standing over the foundation where the house had been — just in time to hear her scream, "Babe, watch out!"

In the next moment, he shoved River up the riverbank and lunged after him. Then an instant later, there was another thunderous crashing sound as a third landslide pummeled their property.

When he looked up again, Melissa was no longer there.

Jamie raced up the hill as fast as he could, fighting against gravity, mud, serious injuries and panic. He got to where their house had stood just a few minutes earlier and saw nothing but a swath of empty land. He screamed for her again and again and again.

But she was gone.

IMG 4203.jpgThe Guinn residence in Minneapolis, N.C., after it was destroyed by Hurricane Helene.

'She's gonna be River's new superhero'

After a few minutes, Jamie realized that if there had been three vicious landslides, there could certainly be a fourth.

He realized he needed to get River to safety.

It would take hours before he was able to navigate over devastated hillsides and around raging rivers to reach a friend's house nearly two miles away; it would take several more before first responders on off-road vehicles were able to reach the house and transport him to Cannon Hospital.

But with communication lines cut off throughout Western North Carolina, it would take days before Melissa's family knew anything was wrong.

Her parents, Brian and Bernice Hensley of Marion, had driven to Hickory on the Sunday after the storm to get water to bring back. They were in Walmart when Jamie's sister finally was able to get a phone call through to Bernice — who started screaming and wailing right in the middle of the store.

Elizabeth, Melissa's younger sister, remembers initially thinking, OK, she's missing. But somebody's got her. She's fierce, she's a fighter, she's mean. Somebody's got her.

Last Monday, three days after being swept away, Melissa's body was recovered.

It was like a blade through the heart. But at the same time, the family was comforted by a couple of notions.

For one, "she's a hero," Bernice believes, "because she saved Jamie and River by warning them — for making him look up. She gave her life for theirs, because that's how much she loved them. ... She would want River and Jamie to be OK, and I know she would do it again. I know it. It's so hard to put into words, but she —

"I guess she's gonna be River's new superhero."

Even more so, they're just so grateful that they have her back. That they know. They can't imagine how they'd be feeling right now if she still was missing. If she'd been somehow lost forever out there. So they were glad, on Monday morning, to have found at least some small sense of peace.

Then later that day, they found something that gave Jamie yet a little bit more.

A memento from the best day of his life

Jamie was with Melissa's family, all of them in the throes of unimaginable grief. Talking about Melissa. Talking about that house. About how she was gone, and how it was gone, and how all the memories they'd made together were literally lying in ruins.

"I would do anything," he said at one point, "to have her wedding dress back."

The room stayed quiet for several seconds. Then Melissa's oldest son Brandon, 22, suddenly stood up. "Come on," he said to his brothers Sebastian, 21, and Ethan, 17. Melissa's father Brian joined them, too, as they got into a car and drove over to Minneapolis via the one road that still provided access to where Jamie and Melissa's house once stood.

Together, the boys managed to cut their way into the old downstairs master bedroom, which was wedged between some trees, and together they disappeared into the hole.

When they came out, Ethan was holding onto his mother's wedding dress.

IMG_0858.jpgMelissa Guinn's son Ethan carries her wedding dress out of the wreckage of their home.

"They come carrying it in, and it was completely caked in mud and soaking wet, but they found it," Jamie recalls, crying softly.

Asked why he'd wanted it back so badly, he gives the simplest and sweetest possible answer: "Cause it was the best day of my life, the day she married me."

The 10th anniversary of that day is Oct. 18, by the way — and if Helene had chosen another path, they almost certainly would have celebrated the occasion in the place they loved more than any other.

At home.

IMG_4456.jpgMelissa and Jamie Guinn.

A GoFundMe has been established to help Jamie Guinn and his sons: gofundme.com/f/help-jamie-and-his-sons-rebuild-their-lives

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Edenton churches collect supplies for Helene victims in western NC

October 7, 2024 | Chowan Herald, The (NC) Author: Vernon Fueston | Section: Local | 484 Words OpenURL Link

A steady stream of cars, sometimes several deep, lined up in the parking lot at Edenton Baptist Church on Oct. 3 to be unloaded

Each was loaded with non-perishable food items, toilet paper, first aid kits, bottled water, and anything else needed by victims of Tropical Storm's Helene's devastating floods in western North Carolina.

Pastor Stephen Hill of Macedonia Baptist Church was managing the unloading efforts. Items were then repackaged into boxes by type — food, toiletries and water — and loaded into a small truck. Large trucks are discouraged for making deliveries to areas devastated by Helene because of poor road conditions.

The project's goal is to send as many vehicles of supplies, driven by the men's group at Edenton Baptist, to the disaster area as possible by Thursday, Oct. 17.

According to The Associated Press, Helene dumped trillions of gallons of water across several states on Sept. 27, leaving a trail of destruction spanning hundreds of miles. More than 220 deaths have been confirmed from the storm, making it the deadliest to hit the mainland U.S. since Katrina in August 2005.

Western North Carolina was hit especially hard by the storm, as flooding wiped out homes, buildings, roads and utilities. Few were prepared for the breath of its destruction.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 136,000 people in the Southeastern U.S. were still without an operational water provider as of Oct. 3, and more than 1.8 million were living under a boil water advisory, the AP reported. Nearly 700,000 homes and businesses, most of them in Georgia and the Carolinas, were still without electricity on Oct. 4, the AP reported.

An as-yet unknown number of western North Carolina residents have no home to go back to — their residence have been destroyed by flooding or mudslides in the storm.

To help assist Helene's victims, Edenton Baptist Church, Edenton Methodist Church, Cornerstone, Access Point, and Saint Paul's churches organized the local relief project. Items being accepted include: first aid kits, bottled water, feminine products, diapers (infant and adult,) baby formula (ready to use, no powder,) baby spoons, paper plates and utensils, batteries, flashlights, charger packs, candies, lighters, non-electric can openers, non-perishable foods (granola bars, cereal, pop tarts, nabs, canned fruit and vegetables, canned meat, dog and pet food, and other supplies.

Crews are accepting donations from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. each day in the parking lot of Edenton Baptist Church at 200 N Granville Street.

Donations were brisk on Thursday, and the truck was half full by 5 p.m.

"This is people helping people, and I'm thankful for the heart of all these churches, not just our own church," Hill said. "We can do great things when God's people pull together and work together. We can change the world."

The collections actually had to stop on Thursday because the truck had exceeded its weight limit. Another was ordered for the following afternoon, and Hill said organizers will keep ordering trucks through Oct. 17.

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Tobias column: Kristofferson, Helene and the dance of the cosmos

October 7, 2024 | Chowan Herald, The (NC) Author: Jonathan Tobias Columnist | Section: Local | 1051 Words OpenURL Link

Why me Lord, what have I ever done

To deserve even one

Of the pleasures I've known? — "Why Me, Lord" by Kris Kristofferson

I was given this music by my All-County Chorus director for my senior concert. I had been in the process of setting myself apart from country music. So the last thing I wanted to sing for my swan song solo was a Merle Haggard number that sounded like it had been dragged out of a revival altar call.

"Just try it out," the director said. "It's perfect for your range. The sopranos and altos will come in in the last chorus as backup."

Well, that put a whole new shine on things. I memorized the lyrics, which, to be honest, was no great achievement. The All-County Concert arrived that spring of my senior year. The young ladies of the chorus came in shining in the last refrain. That first "Why me Lord?" reverberated in basement tones over the hall's sound system. The whole thing sounded straight from the Grand Ol' Opry.

It was, so to speak, satisfactory. Some of the girls were all teared up, what with their glistening faces. A few folks in the audience actually sang along. The applause was nice.

I put that memory in the steamer trunk and pushed it far back in the cobwebbed high school archives in the back of my head, and let it sit for decades. But it all came back Sunday night before last, when I heard of the passing of the greatest lyricist of American music of all time.

It was Kris Kristofferson who wrote that song, and for years, he would close out every one of his concerts with "Why Me, Lord?"

It took me a blue moon before it finally came to me that this song is genuinely a prayer. It's really a simple, childlike cry — a cry out of a heart that's been broken not a few times. But it's also a prayer out of a hard-won peace, a hope that is understood after stumbling through a long valley of hopelessness.

The weekend before last, when I watched the initial reports of apocalyptic devastation waged by Helene upon the Appalachians, I decided that I wanted to pray just like Kris Kristofferson — with an open, breakable heart … like a child who's not too grownup to run to his father and weep and laugh in his everlasting arms.

Obviously, these are not "thoughts and prayers" but childlike, openhearted trust, and needy requests and tears and work for restoration.

Prayer, to me, is a flow of all these things: joy at God being father, son and Holy Spirit, and reveling in His creation, and wonder. Happiness like a child at the utter giftedness of life. Sorrow at injustice, hatred, and the ruin of creation and human habitation.

Weeping at the banshee ravage of a monstrous hurricane over those beautiful mountains.

Sometimes that phrase, "thoughts and prayers," is thrown out as a superficiality, even as a hopeless expression of

resignation, with the full knowledge of one's own unwillingness to do anything about a tragedy.

But that's not real prayer. Real, true prayer that is borne up on the wings of the Spirit in the Trinity is prayer that thinks and feels and moves to action. The father's healing of the world that was inaugurated by the son is birthed in prayer and is actualized as "Thy will be done" through the body of that son — that is, us. After all, we are His hands, His feet. God works His will through the crown of His creation: and yes, that would be us.

So pray and weep and laugh. Do not worry in the least whether your prayers are for things too small or illogical. Pray for big issues and little ones, for yourself, your family, even your cats and dogs, your neighborhood, your town, your country and world.

I pray that the Lord will stop, as it says in Hosea 2:9, "the mouths of roaring lions and ravenous wolves," that He will "abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land" that He will establish instead righteousness and justice and peace.

God's will is only a good will. You can trust Him. He will never bring harm upon you: rid your heart of that hard burden. Just as no earthly father who is decent would ever harm his own child, so also is this true, Jesus said, of God the father. Only infinitely more.

It was never God's will that Hurricane Helene would wreak such death and destruction in her ruinous wake. Thinking so will hold you back from the great power and loveliness of prayer. And it will hold you back from working in the strength of the Spirit.

I'll tell you what God's will is, and it's not so hard to figure out. God wants life and beauty restored in the mountains. He wants rescue and provision, healing and rebuilding, shelter for "the beasts and the children" from the storm, for "they have no voice, they have no choice." He wants joy to come in the morning, even though weeping lasted through the night. Of course, He is the father. What other sort of will could there be?

Prayer to me is not some pious, holier-than-thou thing shut up in a Sunday School basement. Prayer is beautiful and wild. It is the liberation from psychic chains.

Prayer is a dance. It is the dance of the cosmos.

So "dance then wherever you may be." At times it is the slow threnody of tears for the Appalachians, and then generous work and giving for the comfort of the mountains. At other times, it is a pas de deux with your spouse or your friend.

And sometimes, it is the aerial dance of hope and joy after the long dark and tempestuous night. As Isaiah 40-31 tells us, "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

I close just like Kristofferson did. Cue the chorus (and the backup singers):

Lord help me Jesus, I've wasted it

So help me Jesus, I know what I am

Now that I know that I've needed you

So Help me Jesus, my soul's in Your hand.

Pray, weep, work, then dance. Like Kris. For all of us, and for these mountains.

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Martin column: Generations will look back at the Great Flood of 2024

October 7, 2024 | Chowan Herald, The (NC) Author: D.G. Martin Columnist| Section: News| 720 Words OpenURL Link

One of Miss Letitia Currie's favorite topics in her history class in the 1950s at Davidson Junior High School was the Great Flood of 1916.

Miss Currie was the daughter of a Davidson College professor. Many of her students also knew what she was talking about because their parents had experienced that 1916 flood and talked about it whenever rain poured down hard.

Today, many of Miss Currie's students, their parents and grandparents, great grandparents, and their children and grandchildren are having a similar experience dealing with the flooding that followed Hurricane Helene.

And they will be talking about it for the rest of their lives, calling it "The great flood of 2024."

"News of Davidson," the news outlet in my hometown, published the following account by Gatewood Payne Campbell, granddaughter of Davidson professor Gatey Workman and niece of the late, great opera singer William Workman. Gatewood and her husband Johnny live near Black Mountain.

"Life has stopped. We don't know dates or times. Sirens are 24 hours a day. It's relentless. Helicopters invade our sky. Chainsaws sound nonstop and we run outside in hopes it's in our neighborhood. ...

"Let me back up. We awoke around 6 Friday morning without power. The storm was loud and pounding but we didn't know where we were in the storm. We could not get updates. Around 8:30 we lost internet across cell lines. I called a friend and got her to look at radar and let me know an ETA on rain ending. That was the last call I was able to make. By 9:30 ALL cell signal was completely lost. The rain was increasing. We could see the creek rising. Johnny stepped outside under the porch and was soaked from head to toe after 30 seconds.

"Around 11 we felt like we could go out and survey the neighborhood. We began to feel the weight of the destruction, yet we had NO clue. The creek had turned into a river greater than 50 yards wide. The noise of water heaters, propane tanks, bikes, grills, construction supplies and yard equipment banging on the rails of our bridge to Black Mountain was deafening. We saw two neighbors with trees on their homes and knew they were taking on water."

Meanwhile in Asheville, Bryan King and his wife Angela Koh are assessing the damage to their 12 Bones Smokehouse on Foundry Street in the River Arts District. As I wrote in my book, "North Carolina's Eateries," "Even if 12 Bones had not been made famous by Barack Obama's visits there, it would be a 'must-do' in Asheville."

When I first visited 12 Bones several years ago, it was located closer to the French Broad River. Had Bryan and Angela not moved the restaurant few blocks up the hill it would have been completely washed away. At its current location they may be able to repair and survive.

Angela's sister writes, "As the floodwaters recede, we see catastrophic damage to homes and businesses, including the River Arts District, where 12 Bones was founded. Entire livelihoods have been lost. In nearly every direction you look, everything is caked in mud and scattered debris. Broken wood and mangled wiring now stand where intersections once existed."

Coincidentally, on Oct. 15, the publisher Blair is releasing "River Road," a book of poems by mountain author Wayne Caldwell. His fine poetry describes the power of the flooding waters on the French Broad as shown in the following excerpt:

"The French Broad, being a river, floods.

How many times over the millennia has it left its banks

and moved whatever was swept up in it

To some far away (and sometimes ridiculous) place?

Perhaps thousands. And each time it returned to its placid face.

The worst (in the last century) was in July 1916.

Asheville's Riverside Park was washed away.

Parts of which one could have seen rushing by my house

Had it been there then. (Even this relatively high ground

Would have been inundated for several days.)

Only a half dozen people died in Asheville,

Which I'd consider a small miracle. Thanks to the telephone,

Warning came to Marshall, and only two or three drowned,

Even though the courthouse was about the only thing left

On Main Street. Fifty-Three houses disappeared.

From high ground one could have seen rushing by

Bales of cotton, houses, mules, gas tanks,

Vehicles, sheds, chickens, roosting on pieces of roof,

Tires, fences, trees, pigs, dogs, cats,

Anything not tied down —and many things that were."

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Harris and Trump visit NC, discuss federal response to Hurricane Helene

October 7, 2024 | Chronicle, The (Duke University) (Durham, NC) Author: Winston Qian | Section: News | 341 Words OpenURL Link

The two major presidential candidates visited North Carolina to discuss the federal government's response to Hurricane Helene following President Joe Biden's Wednesday visit to observe the damage to the state.

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump held a town hall in Fayetteville's Crown Arena on Friday afternoon, while Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris landed in Charlotte on Saturday, marking her second visit in four days to regions affected by Helene.

During his town hall, Trump heavily criticized the Biden administration's response to Hurricane Helene.

"They are doing the worst job on a hurricane that any administration has ever done," Trump said, comparing the federal response to that of Hurricane Katrina.

In particular, he criticized the resource distribution efforts by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, claiming that "illegal immigrants" are being housed in hotels and "walk[ing] by veterans who are sleeping on the street."

Florida Congresswoman Anna Paulina Luna, who moderated the event, also believed that the government has "intentionally ... not helped out [North Carolina] residents because it's red communities that are impacted."

CNN deemed both claims to be false. On Thursday, FEMA released a statement that no funds were being used for efforts other than disaster response and recovery.

The rest of the town hall featured topics including immigration, the military and renaming Fort Liberty to Fort Bragg. Notably, Trump once again did not mention Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson.

Vice President Harris attended a FEMA briefing in which state officials discussed damage caused by the hurricane and relief operations.

"FEMA has been on the ground with us from the very beginning of this," she said.

Additionally, Harris visited a resource distribution center, during which she spoke to volunteers and affected civilians.

"I think that these moments of crisis bring out some of the best of who we could be and who we are," she said.

Winston Qian | Health/Science Editor

Winston Qian is a Pratt sophomore and health/science editor for the news department.

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