

Catawba, Burke County businesses, owners pitch in to help western NC hurricane relief efforts

October 7, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC)

Author: Billy Chapman wchapman@hickoryrecord.comBilly Chapman wchapman@hickoryrecord.com| Section: News| 1330 Words OpenURL Link

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 Oct. 1.

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

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 Sept. 30, 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 Oct. 2 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."

On Oct. 2, 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.

On Oct. 3, Osborne said welfare checks were conducted on 20 people. That night, he said requests for checks were received on 70 new addresses.

He said the list for requests for welfare checks and missing persons reached 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 (Sept. 27), 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 Sept. 28.

On Friday, Sept. 27, 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 everyone they knew outside of the disaster area that could get us enough water to pick up in our box truck."

On that 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, Sept. 30, 5,500 pounds — 140 cases — of bottled water was collected. Simply Green collected another 8,000 pounds of bottled water that Tuesday and Wednesday.

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

On the morning of Oct. 2, 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. "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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Hurricane update: 14 still missing in McDowell County

October 7, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: From Staff Reports | Section: Government Politics | 248 Words OpenURL Link

A total of 14 people are still listed as missing in McDowell County as of Monday afternoon, according to a report from the McDowell County Emergency Operations Center.

"We are working tirelessly to ensure each report is investigated thoroughly," the update said. "Every report is handled individually until we can confidently determine whether the person has been found, referred to another county, or confirmed as a duplicate.

Town of Old Fort

In Old Fort, 91% of water services and 80% of sewer collection systems have been restored. The town is still under a boil water advisory. Residents are advised to boil all water used for drinking, cooking, and brushing teeth for at least one minute until the water system is deemed safe for consumption through proper testing.

In addition to the ongoing restoration efforts, the town of Old Fort remains under a curfew from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m. until further notice, with exceptions for those traveling to work or in emergency situations. Law enforcement officers from across the state are actively patrolling the town to maintain order and enforce all applicable laws and ordinances.

FEMA registration intake centers now open

Locations & Hours: FEMA representatives will be at the following locations, current hours are 9:30 a.m. until 4 p.m. Additional locations will be forthcoming:

McDowell Senior Center upper level only, 100 Spaulding Road, Marion.

Glenwood Baptist, 155 Glenwood Baptist Church Road. Marion.

Online registration is available at disasterassistance.gov

Want to know more?

For up-to-date information, visit www.mcdowellcares.org or call the McDowell County Helene Hotline at (828) 652-3241.

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Marion eases water restrictions: You can wash your car now

October 7, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Mike Conley | Section: Government Politics | 252 Words OpenURL Link

The city of Marion said water levels in the city's water system improved significantly over the weekend.

"As a result, we are now able to ease some of the previously imposed water restrictions," the city said in a Facebook post Monday. "Residents may resume typical water use for daily needs; however, restrictions on unnecessary outdoor watering, and any other form of excessive water consumption remain in effect."

The city's water system was without power after the remnants of Hurricane Helene hit McDowell County on Sept. 27. The water intake lost power after the storm.

"While this marks an important step toward normalizing water usage, we still require some level of conservation to ensure that water levels continue to improve," the city said. "We remain optimistic that full water usage will be restored soon, but your continued cooperation is essential in helping us achieve that goal. Thank you for your ongoing efforts and understanding."

In a Facebook comment, the city said customers can wash their vehicles now.

"Restrictions are currently set at no unnecessary outdoor watering such as irrigation of lawns via sprinklers or automatic irrigation systems," the city said in a release. "We are making progress, but if an influx of extreme water use occurs, then tighter restrictions may have to be re-implemented until all water intakes are back to operating at full capacity."

Rapid assessments

Workers with the McDowell County building inspections department and the North Carolina Office of State Fire Marshal were out Monday doing rapid damage assessments of businesses, McDowell County said in a release.

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Robert "Bob" Eugene Burns Jr.

October 7, 2024 | Montgomery Herald (NC) Author: Staff Writer| Section: Obituaries| 163 Words OpenURL Link

Robert "Bob" Eugene Burns Jr., 69, of Robbins, passed away Thursday, October 3, 2024, at his residence.

A memorial service was held Saturday, October 5, 2024, 2 p.m., at Bumgarner Family Funeral Service Chapel in Troy, officiated by Rev. Ralph Clayton. The family received friends one hour prior to the service in the chapel.

Born November 9, 1954, in Montgomery County, he is a son of Joy Lee Clayton Burns and the late Robert Eugene Burns Sr. Bob was an avid reader, outgoing and never met a stranger. He loved the outdoors, and he was a very smart man.

He is survived by his sister, Jennifer Smith (Tony) of Troy; brother, Clayton Burns (Susan) of Carthage; nephews, Jarred Smith and Zachary Burns; niece, Emily Lloyd; and Betty Burns of Troy.

Memorials may be made to the Wesleyan Emergency Relief Fund for Hurricane Helene, c/o 1368 NC Hwy. 134 N., Troy, NC 27371.

Bumgarner Family Funeral Service is serving the Burns family.

Online condolences can be made at www.bumgarnerfunerals.com.

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Watauga County Farmers Market reopens after Hurricane Helene

October 7, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report| Section: Mountaintimes | 393 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — The Watauga County Farmers Market successfully reopened on Saturday, Oct. 5, after much uncertainty following the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene.

While the market space is currently being shared with the Town of Boone for storm debris storage, creative solutions have been implemented allowing the organization to resume operations in order to ensure that the market can continue to serve the community.

A temporary fence has been erected through the lot, requiring a complete re-imagining of the market's layout. Vendors have adjusted by dropping off inventory and parking off-site to maximize parking space for customers. Although the market is operating with reduced space, 26 of the usual 60 vendors were in attendance at the reopening. Many vendors are still recovering from the storm, with some having lost everything and others busy with cleanup efforts in their own communities.

The reopening also featured live music from local band Rastacoustic, who raised \$737 for F.A.R.M. Café's feeding program by donating their tips and a portion of merchandise sales. Their efforts exemplified the community spirit and support so needed in this challenging time.

"We're so grateful to the vendors who were able to make it back, and we know more will join us in the coming weeks," said Market Director Michelle Dineen. "It is more important than ever to keep our local commerce thriving post-disaster. Local farms and businesses need our support. Many have an abundance of crops that are going to waste because other market channels have been shut down. Supporting the market means supporting your neighbors and ensuring our local food system stays strong."

Starting on Oct. 12, the market will take place at Leon Levine Hall, 1179 State Farm Road in Boone due to ongoing recovery efforts and space limitations at the current site.

In addition, the Double Up Food Bucks program remains available, allowing SNAP/EBT, WIC, and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program voucher recipients to double their benefits up to \$75 per market visit. Please note that the spend-by date for Senior FMNP vouchers has been extended until October 15th, allowing participants additional opportunities to redeem these benefits.

The market expects more vendors to return in the coming weeks and encourages the community to come out in full support. Now, more than ever, local farmers and producers need the backing of their customers as they work through recovery efforts.

For more information, visit wataugacountyfarmersmarket.org or contact wataugacountyfarmersmarket@gmail.com. (c) 2024 The Mountain Times. All rights reserved.

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Apple Butter Festival, Ricky Skaggs concert being held in Lenoir Oct. 12

October 7, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: JERRY SNOW| Section: Mountaintimes | 248 Words OpenURL Link

LENOIR — The 5th annual Apple Butter Festival will be held at Saunders Old Country Store, located at 3584 Blowing Rock Blvd., on Saturday, Oct. 12 from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. The Store announced the Festival is still on Facebook (www.facebook.com/saundersoldcountrystore).

The event is free and there will be live music by The JackTown Ramblers starting at noon. The Ramblers are a 4-piece American Bluegrass, Swing & Gypsy Jazz band from Morganton, according to their biography. The band includes: 5-string banjo player Brett Setzer, Shannon Leasure on flat-top guitar, mandolin player Gabriel Wiseman and Mike Street on string bass.

Lenoir will have plenty of entertainment to offer on Saturday, Oct. 12, including a performance by Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky Thunder starting at 7:30 p.m. in the J.E. Broyhill Civic Center (1913 Hickory Blvd. SE).

Skaggs has won15 GRAMMY awards, including Best Bluegrass Album (5 times).

Skaggs was born on July 18, 1954 in Cordell, Ky.; he received his first mandolin at the age of five and was on a stage at the age of six, according to rickyskaggs.com.

According to americansongwriter.com, Skaggs' top five songs include: I Wouldn't Change You If I Could, Country Boy, Uncle Pen, Highway 40 Blues and Cajun Moon.

To learn more about Skaggs, go to his website, rickyskaggs.com.

The Civic Center was closed thru Oct. 6, due to the damage left by Hurricane Helene; Ernie Haase & Signature Sound and Caldwell Cuisine were canceled, according to the Center's website.

More information about upcoming events at the Broyhill at broyhillcenter.com

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Mayberry Food Truck Festival

October 7, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Ryan Kelly | Section: News | 213 Words OpenURL Link

On Sunday, Main Street in Mount Airy was taken over by the Mayberry Food Truck Fest which welcomed residents to sample food and drink from more than two dozen vendors.

The food truck event is held twice a year, and proceeds go to help the efforts of Mount Airy Downtown Inc.

After a stretch of foul weather running back to the remnants of Hurricane Helene the previous weekend, those who came out to the food truck event undoubtedly appreciated the cooperation of Mother Nature who provided ample sunshine and a moderate temperature.

Main Street was closed off in normal Mount Airy street fair fashion from Independence Blvd. down to the Post Office to allow for people to have full access to the downtown. Tables were set up along some of the side streets to allow for more spaces to enjoy the offerings including some picnic tables set up under the Donna Fargo mural.

Some folks were in the downtown just looking for something to do while others brought the whole family and just allowed the Mayberry Food Truck Festival to handle the family meal that day — any agenda was welcome.

The Mayberry Food Truck Festival will return in the spring with another chance to sample the offerings of the expanding number of local food truck offerings.

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After Helene, congregation - returns to worship, fellowship

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Adam Wagner; Staff Writer | Section: News | 732 Words

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WAYNESVILLE First Baptist Church returned to its pews Sunday morning for the first time since Helene devastated Western North Carolina.

Before the service, parishioners gathered in small groups, checking in on each other, asking how they'd fared.

"Did you lose power?" one woman asked another.

"Four days," came the response.

At the door, Bill Teague told a pair of newcomers that his farm had largely done all right but that he'd spent the last week tossing everything from a neighbor's flooded home - clothes, furniture, appliances - before starting in on the drywall.

About 100 people attended service at First Baptist in Waynesville on Sunday. A week before, with cell service and the power grid still hindered, First Baptist held a prayer service in the parking lot.

The power may have been back on Sunday - the microphones worked, and the lights, and the screens showing the words of hymns - but the air conditioning for the worship hall and many of the church's other spaces was still out, damaged when the power went out during Helene. And the company that services the systems for the church can't even access its offices yet.

At the beginning of Sunday's service, the Rev. Robert Prince, First Baptist's lead pastor, called those who wanted to the front to say a prayer for those impacted by the storm. About 25 people came to the front of the chapel, some kneeling on one knee, others on two. Some worshipers shrouded their eyes with their hands.

"In the midst of our devastation, we turn towards you. We do wait for you, Lord, we do seek you. There's been so much loss, so much grief in our area and across this whole part of the state, in other states. And God, in this moment, we humbly turn to you. We need your power, we need your strength, we need your perseverance," Prince said.

Those praying were seeking help from God to grapple with the shock of witnessing Helene's destruction and with the emotions that come in the aftermath, Prince said. They were also seeking guidance as a congregation to provide aid to those in need in Western North Carolina.

As Prince gave his sermon Sunday he leaned forward, braced on his right arm and gesturing with his left hand. He addressed uncertainties, ranging from why the storm happened in Western North Carolina, to why it was so devastating, to why certain people died.

"When people ask us why, I think the word from the Lord is, we don't really know," Prince said.

At the same time, Prince said, he is sure that God is present in Western North Carolina, working through the people who are responding to the storm.

"God is here, God is with you and God is going to bring us through this," Prince said.

First Baptist is also trying to help its neighbors, including efforts to help people grapple with the scope of the disaster and participating in countywide disaster relief efforts.

Nina Atwood, First Baptist's pastor for community engagement, told the parishioners that the church is planning to open its chapel from 10 am to 2 pm every weekday to afford people a place to pray as they try to understand the disaster.

"There are folks who just need a way to pray," Atwood said.

When First Baptist did that Wednesday, six people came in. Four of those prayed by themselves, two needed someone to pray with them.

"Let them feel what they feel, let them think what they think and just be there with them through it," Atwood said.

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Meck County residents hit by Helene can apply for federal aid, Harris says in Charlotte

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Mary Ramsey; Staff Writer | Section: News | 500 Words

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Mecklenburg County is now part of the federal disaster declaration issued in the wake of Hurricane Helene, unlocking more aid for homeowners impacted by the storm.

Vice President Kamala Harris announced the designation Saturday while in Charlotte to meet with state and local officials about the recovery from Helene, which last week made landfall in Florida as a Category 4 hurricane.

Downgraded to a tropical storm when it reached North Carolina, it still brought widespread flooding, wind damage and power outages across much of the state, with areas in Western North Carolina bearing the brunt.

Mecklenburg wasn't among the 25 counties included in the federal declaration initially - meaning the federal government wouldn't have helped with home repairs, temporary housing, property damage or other expenses in the same way as communities to the west.

That drew the ire of residents and leaders in north Mecklenburg, where flooding along the Catawba River near Mountain Island Lake damaged multiple homes.

"All the water from the mountains makes its way here, or a significant amount," County Commissioner Elaine Powell said previously. "I feel like a lot of people forgot, and it makes sense, there's so much trauma in Western North Carolina ... but this neighborhood was underwater, and four houses went down the Catawba River."

Now, individuals in that neighborhood and the rest of the county can apply for federal aid. Additional public assistance will also be available to state and local governments.

"We're going to be getting substantial resources in to help folks," Harris said Saturday.

Also announced Saturday: \$100 million in federal funding to repair and reopen roads and bridges damaged by Helene in Western North Carolina.

But some Charlotte-area counties - Iredell, Rowan, Stanly and Union - are still left out of the disaster declaration, according to FEMA's website. Those were among counties Gov. Roy Cooper included in his initial request that weren't included in FEMA's declaration.

FEMA officials briefed Harris at a Charlotte National Guard base Saturday afternoon on their recovery efforts. She was joined by state and local officials including the mayors of Charlotte and Asheville, Gov. Roy Cooper, state Attorney General Josh Stein and U.S. Reps. Alma Adams and Jeff Jackson.

Harris praised residents and leaders for their response, saying she's heard stories "about strangers who are helping each other out, giving people assistance in every way that they need, including shelter, food, and friendship, and fellowship."

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

Harris also met with National Guard soldiers who've responded to the storm and helped prepare care packages to send west with the NC Counts Coalition, a nonprofit that's been sending food, water and hygiene supplies to some of the state's hardest hit areas.

Observer reporter Nora O'Neill contributed to this report.

Mary Ramsey: @mcolleen1996

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Hospitals brace for IV, dialysis fluid shortages after Helene shuts down NC producer

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Mary Helen Moore; Staff Writer | Section: News | 593 Words

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As a key IV fluid manufacturer in the North Carolina mountains works to rebuild after Hurricane Helene, medical facilities around the country are bracing for shortages.

A McDowell County plant, operated by Baxter Healthcare Corp., is closed due to flooding. Heavy equipment can't reach the site because of a bridge failure that may take weeks to repair.

Until then, Baxter is limiting what its customers can order according to available inventory and medical necessity.

IV products that will be rationed include:

Saline: Used to rehydrate patients and replace electrolytes.

Dextrose: A sugar solution used when patients are dehydrated or have low blood sugar. (Saline and dextrose are also used in combination with other drugs that need to administered by IV.)

Dialysis solutions: Used to treat patients with kidney failure.

Baxter, which opened its North Carolina plant in 1972, says it is the largest manufacturer of these solutions in the United States.

The American Hospital Association says before the storm, the plant produced 1.5 million bags of IV fluid daily - 60% of the nation's supply.

Gregory Pauly, president of Duke University Hospital, said on Friday that teams across the university's health system are impacted by the shortage.

"Our teams have been working to assess inventory, deploy conservation strategies, and triage future distribution in an equitable manner across the health system," Pauly said in a statement shared with The News & Observer.

"At this time, we are making case-by-case assessments of our ability to safely perform certain surgeries and procedures going into the weekend and next week.".

The Food and Drug Administration said last week it was monitoring the situation and working with Baxter to try to increase production at its other facilities as well as trying to find other sources of the fluids. But as of Sunday, the FDA had not declared a shortage.

1 foot of rain fell on NC health care plant

Baxter's IV manufacturing plant is located in the North Cove township near Marion, a heavily damaged area that was lashed with rain when the remnants of Hurricane Helene swept through Sept. 27.

The state climate office reports more than 12 inches of rain fell on the area in just three days.

Baxter said a levee breach allowed water to permeate its plant.

Roads leading to the site are damaged, but Baxter said Thursday that 500 workers were already at the plant working on repairs.

"We expect this number to double in the week ahead," the company said in a news release.

A bridge failure has prevented heavy equipment from reaching the plant, and made it impossible to deliver inventory that wasn't damaged in the storm.

"We expect a permanent bridge will be installed by the Army Corps of Engineers and North Carolina Department of Transportation in the coming weeks," the company said in the Thursday update.

Baxter reports it's been able to contact most of its 2,500 employees, and that it's established assistance center a few miles from the plant. There, staff can take showers, wash clothes, charge devices and receive food, water and other basic supplies.

"We will spare no resource - human or financial - to resume production and help ensure patients and providers have the products they need," president and CEO José Almeida said in a news release the morning after the storm.

The company said it will work with the FDA to "leverage Baxter's global manufacturing network" until the Marion facility is back operating at 100% capacity."

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Reality Check - Officials: Misinformation hurting Helene relief efforts

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Chantal Allam and Joe Marusak; Staff Writer Section: News 1484 Words

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Emergency officials responding to the Hurricane Helene disaster in Western North Carolina say false rumors on social media are impeding their efforts to help tens of thousands of people in need.

"False information is being widely shared on social media channels, including AI-generated content and images," N.C. Department of Public Safety officials said in a statement. "Nefarious actors and those with ill intent may be taking advantage of this situation by spreading false information."

False rumors even spread claiming the government had created the hurricane.

The public should find and share information from trusted sources and discourage others from spreading information from unverified sources, NCDPS officials said.

On social media Friday, the American Red Cross said misinformation is hurting its Hurricane Helene relief efforts.

"Misinformation can spread quickly after a disaster, causing confusion and distrust within communities struggling to recover," the Red Cross said in a statement. "Unfortunately, we're seeing this during our response to Hurricane Helene."

Here are rumors being spread on social media and the facts offered in response by government agencies:

Rumor: Governments aren't responding to the disaster.

Facts: The N.C. State Emergency Response Team is working 24/7 to save lives and provide Helene relief. The team includes local, state, federal and military units; power and cell phone companies and other businesses; and volunteer organizations.

On Saturday, Mooresville Fire Chief Curt Deaton said his team alone has rescued 11 people and two animals in Ashe County and will remain there until it is safe for residents and their first responders.

"This work is very strenuous," Deaton said. "These men spend most of the time walking and climbing through dangerous debris piles, searching for any survivors or victims ... Some of our team, they've been there for 10 days straight now, working around the clock."

Rumor: Donations, volunteers turned away at checkpoints.

Facts: Western N.C. roads are still dangerous and impassible in many places, and landslides remain a threat. Traffic is being rerouted on some roads so emergency vehicles, disaster relief efforts and local traffic can still access them.

Rumor: Governments are discouraging and confiscating donations.

Facts: The state encourages financial donations to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund and to N.C. volunteer organizations responding to the disaster. The state is working with the organizations to collect and distribute physical donations coming in from across the state and country.

Coordinated volunteer disaster relief efforts are needed in Western North Carolina, according to the NC Department of Public Safety.

"We strongly encourage neighbors to continue helping neighbors in impacted areas," department officials said. "Those wishing to volunteer should register at www.nc.gov/volunteer," and not "self-deploy" to the region.

Rumor: The government created the hurricane

Facts: Helene formed from an organized band of showers and thunderstorms in the Gulf of Mexico, the National Hurricane Center in Miami reported.

Rumors that the government created the storm were fueled by U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene's tweet late Thursday that "Yes they can control the weather. It's ridiculous for anyone to lie and say it can't be done."

Rumor: The FAA is restricting access to the airspace.

Facts: The FAA is not restricting access for recovery operations but is trying to keep people safe. There has been a 300% increase in air traffic in the region, the FAA says.

"The FAA is coordinating closely with state and local officials to make sure everyone is operating safely in very crowded and congested airspace," according to a statement by the N.C. Department of Public Safety.

When President Joe Biden visited the area on Wednesday, the Secret Service took painstaking care to keep all search-and-rescue and relief flights going, a U.S. official told The Charlotte Observer.

The official said recovery-related flights that are coordinated by the N.C. Emergency Operations Center are assigned special Beacon codes and allowed to proceed. If a pilot lets the EOC know they are planning to deliver aid, the plane would be pre-cleared by the FAA.

The only flights affected would have been by pilots unknown to members of the relief or search-and-rescue community, the official said.

Rumor: "The Red Cross isn't here."

Facts: At least 1,300 Red Cross disaster responders are helping people in the Carolinas, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee and Virginia with safe shelter, food, hygiene items, medications and emotional support.

Before Helene made landfall, the Red Cross positioned hundreds of disaster responders and thousands of relief supplies across the Southeast.

Rumor: The Red Cross is confiscating or discarding donated items.

Facts: The Red Cross is not "confiscating, removing or discarding donated items," Red Cross officials said in a statement Friday. The Red Cross focuses on providing shelter, food and relief after disasters.

"While we don't accept physical donations, as managing them takes time and resources away from our mission, we work with community partners who are better equipped with these resources to handle and distribute these items," Red Cross officials said.

Call 211 to find out where donated goods are available.

Rumor: The Red Cross is taking over shelters.

Facts: The Red Cross does not take over shelters. Rather, it provides management support at the request of local

partners.

Rumor: The Red Cross is taking over volunteer groups.

Facts: While the Red Cross is working alongside other volunteer groups, the Red Cross is not taking over their efforts or services.

Rumor: FEMA does not have enough money to provide disaster assistance for Helene.

Facts: FEMA has enough money right now for immediate response and recovery needs.

In North Carolina alone, FEMA has provided more than \$26 million in housing and other types of assistance to over 25,000 households, it said in an Oct. 5 release.

More than 700 FEMA staff and over 1,200 urban search and rescue personnel are on the ground. Over 1,000 National Guard troopshave also been deployed to the state.

Rumor: FEMA is no longer accepting applications for housing assistance.

Facts: FEMA is still accepting assistance applications throughout areas affected by Helene, it said.

Over 1,400 people who cannot return home are currently staying in safe and clean lodging through FEMA's Transitional Shelter Assistance program.

FEMA said residents in declared counties who have applied for disaster assistance may be eligible to stay temporarily in a hotel or motel paid for by FEMA while they work on their long-term housing plan. People do not need to request this assistance. FEMA will notify them of their eligibility through an automated phone call, text message, and/or email, depending upon the method of communication they selected at the time of application for disaster assistance.

Twenty-two shelters are housing just over 1,000 people, FEMA said. Mobile feeding operations continue to help survivors in hard-hit areas, including three mass feeding sites in Buncombe, McDowell and Watauga counties.

For current application timelines, visit disasterassistance.gov or FEMA's state-specific Helene disaster site for North Carolina.

Rumor: Funding for FEMA disaster response was diverted to support international efforts or border-related issues.

Facts: This is false, FEMA said. No money is being diverted from disaster response needs. FEMA's disaster response efforts and individual assistance is funded through the Disaster Relief Fund, which is a dedicated fund for disaster efforts.

Commodity distribution, mass feeding and hydration operations are underway in areas of western North Carolina, FEMA said. Commodity shipments are also en route.

"The agency is on track to meet requested delivery timelines for meals and water," it said in a statement released Oct 5. "Voluntary organizations are supporting feeding operations with bulk food and water deliveries coming via truck and aircraft."

In North Carolina alone, the Salvation Army has nine mobile feeding units and has served over 7,100meals, 6,600 drinks, and 3,700 snacks, it said.

Resources:

Residents can visit: ncdps.gov/helene to get information and additional assistance.

Residents should not travel to western North Carolina to keep the roadways clear for search and rescue teams and utility crews.

Residents can get in touch with loved ones by calling 2-1-1 or visiting unitedwaync.org to add them to search and rescue efforts.

Rumor: FEMA is in the process of confiscating Helene survivor property. If I apply for disaster assistance and my land is deemed unlivable, my property will be seized.

Facts: FEMA cannot seize your property or land. Applying for disaster assistance does not grant FEMA or the federal government authority or ownership of your property or land, FEMA said.

When you apply for disaster assistance, FEMA said an inspector may be sent to verify the damage on your home. "This is one of many factors reviewed to determine what kind of disaster assistance you may be eligible for," it said. If the results of the inspection deem your home uninhabitable, that information is "only used to determine the amount of FEMA assistance you may receive to make your home safe, sanitary and functional," it said.

If you were affected by Helene, apply for disaster assistance. The fastest way is through DisasterAssistance.gov. You can also apply through the FEMA mobile app or by calling the FEMA Helpline at 800-621-3362. If you use a video relay service, captioned telephone service, or other communication services, provide FEMA the specific number assigned for that service.

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When cell towers and internet fail, ham radio operators can still talk. How to get involved

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Renee Umsted; Staff Writer | Section: News | 579 Words Page: 8A

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When Helene swept across the Southeast on Sept. 27, including Western North Carolina, cell phones and internet-based communication became unusable.

People still needed a way to talk - to check on friends and family or receive updates on the storm's aftermath - especially as roads and bridges were washed away, isolating communities.

But there's a way to communicate without cell signals or internet, and about 750,000 people across the country know how to use it: amateur radio.

Also known as ham radio, this old-school method of technology allows people separated by large distances to stay in touch.

"People might think that cell phones have made amateur radio obsolete," said Chuck Till, the vice president of the Raleigh Amateur Radio Society. "As you can see, that's far from the truth."

RARS, which has more than 450 members, is a nonprofit organization and one of many radio clubs across the country. While the club offers many services, helping the public during times of emergency is among its goals.

"It's a tireless activity, and these hams are so dedicated to it," said Fin Gold, the president of RARS. "And people don't realize that they're out there, and they're there to help."

How hams help during disasters

Across North Carolina, amateur radio operators have helped with search and rescue efforts and condition reports, Gold said.

Many of the repeaters, which are automated relay stations that have broad coverage, were offline because of Helene. But one repeater on Mount Mitchell, the highest peak in North Carolina, was still operational, and the hams on the mountain were able to help check on people and pass along radio messages, Gold said.

There's a program called AUXCOMM, developed by the Department of Homeland Security, in which certain hams work with government agencies including North Carolina Emergency Management, Till said. Other hams may assist with health and welfare messaging.

"The more people that join us, the more we can help," Gold said.

How to find a ham

Search for amateur radio operators in a given area on the Federal Communications Commission's website.

Search online for a local radio club.

Some operators may have a special license plate with their radio call sign.

How to get involved with ham radio

There are many reasons why people are drawn to radio, Till said. They may want to socialize, compete in contests, perform a public service or experiment with building the technology.

Anyone in Raleigh who is interested in becoming an amateur radio operator can contact RARS.

Hams are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission and must pass an exam to become licensed, said Till, who earned his first license in 1970. RARS and other radio clubs offer classes to prepare for exams, and people may also purchase study materials online.

Equipment costs vary depending on what a person wants to do with the radio.

"You can get into it for as little as \$50," Till said. "I know people who have spent tens of thousands of dollars on their station, but you don't have to do that."

Other ways to communicate without cell signal

Satellites such as Starlink systems can be used for communication. In Western North Carolina, counties reported that the systems allowed emergency responders to receive calls and members of the public to check on family, The News & Observer reported.

Satellite phones may also be used when there's no cell service.

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Renee Umsted, Staff Writer, 'When cell towers and internet fail, ham radio operators can still talk. How to get involved', *News & Observer, The* (online), 7 Oct 2024 8A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C12464B3B5BB60>



Feds to send \$100 million to repair Helene-damaged roads and bridges in Western NC

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Joe Marusak; Staff Writer | Section: News | 193 Words Page: 3A OpenURL Link

The federal government is sending \$100 million in emergency relief to repair and reopen roads and bridges damaged by Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina, the Federal Highway Administration announced Saturday.

"Working in close coordination with North Carolina, we are providing this initial round of funding so there's no delay getting roads repaired and reopened, and re-establishing critical routes," U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said in an email statement. "The Biden-Harris administration will be with North Carolina every step of the way."

The money will "help get transportation networks back up and running safely and will be followed by additional federal resources," Buttigieg said.

North Carolina requested the money, and federal highway officials OKed sending the amount to the North Carolina Department of Transportation, the Secretary said.

"It has been devastating to witness scenes of the North Carolina families, neighbors, and communities destroyed by Helene explain what it means to have access to significant aid relief slowed or even cut off," Acting Federal Highway Administrator Kristin White said in the statement.

The aid to North Carolina followed a quick release of money by the Federal Highway Administration to South Carolina earlier in the week.

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Joe Marusak, Staff Writer, 'Feds to send \$100 million to repair Helene-damaged roads and bridges in Western NC', *News & Observer, The* (online), 7 Oct 2024 3A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C12464A8244A78>



In off-the-grid Egypt, NC, - not even helicopters can get close enough to deliver relief

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Julia Coin; Staff Writer | Section: News | 625 Words

Page: 2A OpenURL Link

Egypt, North Carolina, doesn't show up on most maps.

Less than 800 people lived there before the floods of Helene rushed roads and widened rivers on Friday. How many survived? Unknown.

On Wednesday, five people could be spotted from a helicopter lowering toward the township's tin-roofed volunteer fire department. A shoulder-width hole was sawed out of the top.

"Oh, so that's how the firefighter got out," said pilot Gary Heavin, who hovered above the cracked, cliffed road now caked with orange paste - a mixture of mountain dirt and water.

"This is a job only helicopters can do," Heavin said. But his black chopper with a United States of America seal stickered on couldn't do this job.

The ravished lanes below - the only border between total ruin and semi-salvageable devastation - were too narrow to land on. The closest field was too sloped, the next clearing too far away.

Heavin pulls up. None of the five people flag down his helicopter that's holding three others - an N.C. fire marshal, a friend and a Charlotte Observer reporter. He assumes the people visible down below have what they need to survive, for now.

He flies south, to Burnsville, to drop the supplies stacked in his "bird," as he and everyone else flying supplies west out of Hickory via Operation Airdrop call their copters.

Everyone is ready to pivot.

"The mission is to do whatever needs to be done," says Sam Parks, Heavin's friend from Statesville.

Bringing people out of flooded areas

The day before, they rescued a woman with Stage 4 cancer and looked for two kids. The kids were gone, possibly dead somewhere beneath branches and sludge, he said.

In Burnsville, Gordon Higgins, a volunteer firefighter of nearly 30 years, waves the chopper into a field adjacent to powerlines. Heavin unloads some of the 300 Starlinks flown in by Ivanka Trump hours before.

And the water in the back will go to the 50 rescued from Pensacola, N.C., - a town next door, where Hurricane Helene's remnants pushed houses into rivers, says volunteer Kayti Ledford.

"It's just horrible in Florida, too," she said. "But at least there it's flat. Here, there's no quick rebuild. The landscape isn't just changed. It's gone."

Heavin, the founder of Curves fitness franchise from Waco, Texas, volunteered to fly with Operation Airdrop, a nonprofit that drops supplies and leads rescues to help those stranded in disasters.

He and most of the other 50 volunteer pilots at Hickory Regional Airport were ready to rebel against a no-fly order as President Joe Biden descended into Asheville on Wednesday.

The Federal Aviation Administration issued a temporary flight restriction Wednesday afternoon over the area, with some exceptions. Matt McSwain, the nonprofit's Hickory organizer, said he wouldn't abide by it. He wasn't going to stop pulling people out of the rubble for one person to visit it, he said.

A U.S. official told The Charlotte Observer flights coordinated with the North Carolina Emergency Operations Center or that otherwise make it known they intend to deliver aid could proceed without any delay. But the restrictions could have affected other types of aircraft that were "freelancing," the official said.

Heavin lifted off 10 minutes into the modified no-fly order, spotting military helicopters not showing up on his radar. Minutes after he lifted off, his radio went down; no one could hear him trying to get approval to touch down.

He called the tower on his cell, an unlit cigar between his bottom lip and the phone's microphone. They told him to land anyway, and the 73-year-old woman and her dog stepped out and into nurses hands.

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Free legal assistance available for Helene - storm victims in NC. - How to get help

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 231 Words Page: 7A OpenURL Link

As thousands of North Carolinians continue to pick up the pieces from the destruction left behind by Hurricane Helene, free legal help is now available to help those in need.

The North Carolina Bar Association and Foundation, Legal Aid of North Carolina, the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and the Federal Emergency Management Agency have teamed up to launch a pro bono legal program with local lawyers.

The Disaster Legal Services hotline (866-219-5262) is available for low-income survivors to connect with volunteer attorneys to assist with any storm-related questions and disaster benefits, including:

FEMA appeals

Disaster Unemployment Assistance

Insurance claims

Home repair contracts and contractor disputes

Contractor fraud and consumer protection matters

Replacing destroyed legal documents

Mortgage-foreclosure

Landlord or tenant issues

The toll-free hotline is available 8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and 5:30-8:30 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays. To be connected to a volunteer lawyer, explain which county you are located in and ask for Disaster Legal Services assistance.

According to Legal Aid of North Carolina, 26 continues have been approved for the federal assistance: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

You can find more information about the Disaster Legal Services hotline and Legal Aid's resource library with tips for replacing lost documents, property taxes, unemployment assistance and more online at legalaidnc.org/disaster.

Chyna Blackmon: @chynablackmon

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C12464B4EAD448>



Shame on Trump for Helene lies

October 7, 2024 \mid News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: the Editorial Board \mid Section: Editorial/Opinion \mid 572 Words

Page: 11B OpenURL Link

Western North Carolina is trying to pick up the pieces left behind by Hurricane Helene, which decimated the region, leaving communities destroyed and a death toll in the triple digits.

This is not a situation to capitalize on for political gain. But former President Donald Trump has politicized the situation at every turn, spreading falsehoods and conspiracies that fracture the community instead of bringing it together.

The worst example is a social media post Trump made on Monday, in which he accused the federal government and Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper of "going out of their way to not help people in Republican areas. MAGA!" That same day, Trump also posted that the Biden administration has "left Americans to drown" in North Carolina and other states.

Trump has also said that Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp couldn't get President Joe Biden on the phone to help his state with hurricane relief - a claim that Kemp himself debunked - and falsely claimed that the government doesn't have enough money to respond to the disaster because "Kamala spent all her FEMA money, billions of dollars, on housing for illegal migrants." He's called it "the worst response in the history of hurricanes" and suggested it would be the Biden administration's own Hurricane Katrina.

There's no evidence to support any of those ridiculous claims. And by every indication, state and federal agencies have been working to help people in need. They've been airlifting food and other supplies to affected areas. Helping families get information about missing loved ones. Providing monetary assistance to folks whose homes were destroyed. Working to clear and repair roads and get critical infrastructure back up and running.

It may not be enough, because this is one of the worst disasters our state has ever seen. It will take months and years to rebuild, and we still won't be able to recover everything that was lost. But the people of North Carolina have not been left out to dry. Their government has not abandoned them. The Republican governors of Georgia and South Carolina have expressed satisfaction with the federal response.

Trump knows that. So does Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, who accused Cooper and Biden of not doing enough to prepare for and respond to the storm. Robinson has used the tragedy for photo ops and posts on social media and predicted he will be called a "hero" for his efforts to help victims, despite the fact that he missed a key vote to declare a state of emergency in preparation for the storm.

Trump's claims are as hypocritical as they are harmful. POLITICO's E&E News reported this week that, as president, Trump could be "flagrantly partisan" in times of disaster and "on at least three occasions hesitated to give disaster aid to areas he considered politically hostile or ordered special treatment for pro-Trump states." According to the report, Trump was hesitant to send disaster aid when California was ravaged by wildfires in 2018 until he learned the affected part of the state was saturated with Trump voters.

Let's be clear: Western North Carolina is not a political football. This is not a campaign opportunity. The most unhelpful thing any politician - or anyone else - can do right now is spread misinformation and tell people that their government isn't doing anything to help them.

Sowing the seeds of political division is always an unnecessary and tiresome endeavor. But doing so in times of great need, when unity is paramount, is particularly shameful.

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Pet adoptions 'urgently needed' at Wake SPCA for displaced NC animals after Helene

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 362 Words

Page: 3A OpenURL Link

Following the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Helene, a Triangle animal group is pleading to the public to help pets that were displaced during the storm.

As local, state and federal officials continue rescue and recovery efforts in Western North Carolina, the SPCA of Wake County says pet adoptions are "urgently needed" to free up space and resources for other affected shelters who are asking for help in taking in as many evacuated pets as possible.

"We have seen how devastating natural disasters can be for both people and animals," Darci VanderSlik, a SPCA Wake spokesperson said in a statement. "By adopting a pet from a shelter like ours, you are not only bringing joy and love into your own life, but you are also helping to save a life and provide a second chance for an animal in need."

The Triangle nonprofit has a variety of animals dogs, cats, rabbits, and other animals in need of homes that were already up for adoption at other shelters before the storm hit.

"The affected shelters need to clear animals out to safe areas like Raleigh in order to create room for incoming lost pets so that they can reunite them with their owners," Samantha Ranlet, Communications Manager for SPCA of Wake County, told The News & Observer.

"Otherwise they would face this inundation of lost pets with facilities that are already at max capacity, which would either mean turning lost pets away with nowhere to go, or having to euthanize adoptable animals to create space."

How to adopt from SPCA of Wake County

If you're interested in making a furry friend in need a part of your family, here's how the adoption process works at SPCA of Wake County:

Submit an adoption survey to meet with an Adoption Specialist

Schedule an appointment to ask questions and learn more about a potential pet

Finalize paperwork and pet adoption

You can find more information about the adoption process and fees, which include spaying/neutering, vaccinations, microchipping, and more, online at spcawake.org or visit the shelter open everyday from 11 a.m.-6 p.m.

Chyna Blackmon: @chynablackmon

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Dean's List: How you can help Western NC colleges recover from Helene's damage

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Korie Dean, News & Observer | Section: raleigh deanslist newsletter | 920 Words OpenURL Link

It's been almost two weeks since Hurricane Helene left much of Western North Carolina devastated and destroyed.

Many of the region's colleges and universities sustained damages and experienced other impacts, too. For example:

Appalachian State University in Boone has power, water and internet, and none of the university's residence halls are "structurally compromised." But the campus saw "unprecedented levels of flooding," and several academic buildings have "significant water damage," interim Chancellor person value="APIN:3135797922">Heather Norris said last week.UNC Asheville "sustained minimal structural damage," but remains "at the mercy of the water supply lines on campus" to determine when campus will reopen, Chancellor Kimberly van Noort said in a campus update Friday. Officials in Asheville and Buncombe County have not given a timeline of when water service might be restored, The Asheville Citizen Times reports.

App State and UNC Asheville are just two of the universities in Western North Carolina continuing to grapple with the storm's impacts. The region also includes several private colleges, such as Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa and Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, plus several community colleges that are also recovering.

It will take months, and likely years, to rebuild parts of Western North Carolina. But if you're looking to help the region's colleges as they recover, there are ways you can help right now.

Welcome to Dean's List, a higher education newsletter from The News & Observer and me, Korie Dean.

In this week's edition, I'll highlight the ways you can help colleges and universities in Western North Carolina recover from Helene and share other higher ed happenings to expect this week.

Let's get started.

Helene relief, recovery efforts for WNC colleges

The UNC System's Western North Carolina campuses have established relief funds for their campuses:

Appalachian State is taking donations for its disaster relief fund through its main website, appstate.edu. Click "Give Now" to make a donation.UNC Asheville's disaster relief fund is available at giving.unca.edu.Western Carolina University offers a Student Emergency Fund, which "provides support for students in immediate financial need due to an unavoidable emergency situation." You can make a donation to the fund and find other ways to help the university by visiting wcu.edu and clicking "How You Can Help."

App State Helene 3Appalachian State University was one of several campuses in Western North Carolina to sustain damages from Hurricane Helene.

North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, the statewide office for private, nonprofit colleges in the state, is offering support for its member campuses through the Independent College Fund of North Carolina.

NCICU-affiliated schools in Western North Carolina include Brevard College, Gardner-Webb University, Lees-McRae College, Lenoir-Rhyne University, Mars Hill University, Montreat College and Warren Wilson College.To donate to NCICU's recovery efforts, visit ncicu.org/support-hurricane-helene-recovery.

More than 6,000 employees and nearly 74,000 students at North Carolina's community colleges were impacted by Helene

To support these schools, the North Carolina Community College System established the Hurricane Helene Community College Response and Recovery Fund. The fund is intended to be used across the roughly two dozen Western North Carolina community colleges recovering from the storm, but donations can also be directed to individual campuses. To make a donation, visit the community college system's website at nccommunity colleges. edu and click "Donate to Hurricane Recovery" at the top of the page.

What about state-funded relief efforts? State legislators will be back in Raleigh on Wednesday for a one-day session, with plans to vote on an initial relief package for the affected communities. The state Department of Public Instruction, which oversees K-12 schools, is requesting about \$166 million for building repairs and renovations, school nutrition, equipment, supplies and technology losses.

I asked a UNC System spokesperson about whether the public university system plans to request any relief funding during this week's session, and received this response: "The UNC System will certainly request relief funds at some point, but it's too soon to evaluate costs when the region is focused on life, safety and health. We also support the state and congressional delegation who are advocating for federal support in North Carolina."

To keep up with more of The N&O's ongoing coverage of Helene, visit: newsobserver.com/topics/helene-nc.

Roberts to be installed as UNC chancellor

UNC-Chapel Hill Chancellor Lee Roberts, who held the job on an interim basis beginning in January and assumed the position permanently in August, will be officially installed as the university's top leader later this week.

Since 1957, it has been a tradition for new chancellors to be installed during the first University Day ceremony of their tenure. The annual ceremony and other festivities honor the day in 1793 that the cornerstone was laid at Old East, which would become the university's first building.

This year's ceremony will be held Friday, Oct. 11, at 11 a.m. in Memorial Hall on the UNC campus.

Roberts will take his oath of office using the Durant Bible, North Carolina's oldest family Bible. The campus chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine plans to picket the event.

RAL_GRAD09-051124-EDH.JPGUNC Chapel Hill interim chancellor Lee Roberts takes to the stage before UNC Chapel Hill's commencement ceremonies at Kenan Stadium in Chapel Hill, N.C., Saturday, May 11, 2024.

Higher ed news I'm reading

Monday marked one year since the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel. Among other impacts, the attack and the ensuing war in Gaza became a flashpoint on college campuses around the country. A year after last Oct. 7, Inside Higher Ed features the perspectives of several higher education leaders and their thoughts on what happens next on campuses.

See you next week

Thanks for reading this week's Dean's List. I hope to see you right back here next week.

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NC elections board authorizes western counties to change voting plans due to Helene

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Kyle Ingram, News & Observer | Section: election | 645 Words OpenURL Link

The North Carolina State Board of Elections voted on Monday to give the counties hit hardest by Tropical Storm Helene broad authority to change their election plans to respond to the storm's disruption.

The resolution, approved in a unanimous vote by the bipartisan board, allows counties to change their early voting and Election Day polling sites, gives them greater flexibility in appointing poll workers and gives voters in the affected counties more options to receive and deliver absentee ballots.

"We will continue to make voting accessible to voters," said Stacy "Four" Eggers, a Republican board member. "Whether we need four-wheelers, horses or helicopters, this disaster highlights the need for consistency in our work and making sure that we get to the locations that the voters expect us to be."

All county board of election offices are now open for business, after 14 closed last week in Helene's wake. However, many election officials in Western North Carolina are still without power or water in their homes and several previously designated polling sites will now be unusable due to damage, inaccessibility and staffing issues.

"Our struggles are not over," Karen Brinson Bell, executive director of the board, said. "That is why we need the board to take action to give the flexibility necessary to carry out these elections and to be of the best service to the voters that we can be."

Brinson Bell emphasized that disruptions from Helene's aftermath will not affect the state's election schedule, and early voting will begin on Oct. 17 in all 100 counties, as planned.

The counties included in Monday's resolution are Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga and Yancey.

Election officials in those areas will now be able to change voting sites to account for any sites that were destroyed or otherwise rendered unusable. Any changes will have to be approved by a bipartisan majority vote of the county's board of elections.

County election boards are currently structured to have three Democrats and two Republicans, but any change to polling sites would need approval from members of both parties.

"This requires that a change is not going to be a Republican change or a Democrat change and that it's required to meet the needs of the voters and the administration of our elections," Eggers said.

There are 40 early voting sites among the 13 counties included in the resolution. State officials are uncertain how many of those will need to be replaced, though Brinson Bell noted that even if some buildings are unusable, officials may be able to erect temporary voting facilities in the parking lots of those sites.

To address potential issues with staffing, Monday's resolution will allow affected counties to bring in poll workers from other areas across the state and reassign existing workers to new locations.

The resolution also allows for more flexibility with absentee voting. Voters within the affected counties will be able to request an absentee ballot in person at their county board of elections office, including voters who already requested a ballot, but may have lost it in the storm.

Since many voters may have been displaced by Helene, the board also voted to allow affected voters to turn in their absentee ballots to any county board of elections office - not just the one in their home county. Voters will be able to deliver those by mail or in person up until 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 5.

The resolution also expands the use of Multipartisan Assistance Teams. These groups traditionally assist voters in nursing homes or assisted living facilities with requesting and completing absentee ballots. Now, counties will be allowed to send those teams to disaster shelters where they can help displaced residents vote absentee.

Brinson Bell said the board may need to approve future changes to election administration in Western North Carolina as recovery efforts continue.

Under The Dome embed (2022)

New Under the Dome newsletter subscriber embed (graybox)

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In Helene's aftermath, FEMA search-and-rescue teams know they now search for victims

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When the excavator's claws clenched and lifted the white Dodge Charger out of the Swannanoa River on Sunday, brown water and mud poured from its undercarriage.

Once the car had landed on the ground with a loud thunk, four men dressed in blue swarmed it with crowbars and shovels. These were members of Maryland Task Force One, a federally funded Montgomery County, Maryland-based urban search-and-rescue team that has been part of FEMA's response to Helene.

RAL_100524-HELENE-TEL-024.JPGA FEMA search and rescue team from Maryland search for human remains in car in Swannanoa on Sunday, Oct. 6, 2024 after Tropical Storm Helene flooded the Swannanoa River. North Carolina officials have confirmed 76 deaths from Tropical Storm Helene.

FEMA has sent more than 1,200 urban search-and-rescue personnel to North Carolina as part of the Helene response.

On Sunday, part of that task force was scrambling across a hillside on the southern bank of the Swannanoa River, just east of the Whitson Avenue Bridge. They were looking for people who died during Helene, as search team dogs had indicated there could be human remains in the Dodge Charger partially sunk into the bank and in the debris of a structure that had been smashed against the U.S. 70 embankment by the floodwaters.

RAL_100524-HELENE-TEL-011.JPGA FEMA search and rescue team from California search for flood victims using a human remains dog named "Rubble" in Swannanoa on Sunday, Oct. 6, 2024 after Tropical Storm Helene flooded the Swannanoa River. North Carolina officials have confirmed 76 deaths from Tropical Storm Helene.

Moving brush and debris

Largely using chainsaws, team members dismantled what was left of the building. They pulled off a piece of sheet metal here, lifted a two-by-four wood plank away there, quickly but methodically taking the ruins apart to try to find whatever the dog had smelled.

RAL_100524-HELENE-TEL-013.JPGA FEMA search and rescue team from Maryland search for human remains in debris from a structure in Swannanoa on Sunday, Oct. 6, 2024 after Tropical Storm Helene flooded the Swannanoa River. North Carolina officials have confirmed 76 deaths from Tropical Storm Helene.

Before Helene, the area where the team worked had been a forested bank of the Swannanoa, tucked between the river and U.S. 70.

Now, many of the trees had fallen and cars were littered throughout the area, some of them tossed onto their sides by a river that had risen to historic levels. It was impossible to tell what building the long ribbons of sheet metal high up in the trees had started on, or whether they'd started nearby at all.

Many of those cars were marked with a spray-painted X. That's a sign that the car or structure has been searched.

When members of the search team enter the structure, they spray paint a slash mark to indicate that they're in it. They also spray paint the date and time. When they leave, they put another slash, along with the number of people found there and symbols for any known hazards, Robert Lipp, a FEMA spokesman, explained as he walked past several buildings and cars marked with different colors of paint.

That's partially for safety, in case something happens while the searcher is inside the building, and partially to keep rescue teams from duplicating efforts.

RAL_100524-HELENE-TEL-018.JPGA FEMA search and rescue team from Maryland search for human remains in debris from a structure in Swannanoa on Sunday, Oct. 6, 2024 after Tropical Storm Helene flooded the Swannanoa River. North Carolina officials have confirmed 76 deaths from Tropical Storm Helene.

Teams have helped more than 6,500 people

As of Sunday afternoon, nearly 50 search-and-rescue teams working in Western North Carolina had rescued, evacuated or helped 6,586 people, according to a release from Gov. Roy Cooper's office.

While the unofficial death toll from Helene is well over 100 in North Carolina, Cooper's office said 77 deaths have been confirmed by the state medical examiner's office. That number will rise as the Maryland team and others like it locate victims.

"It's one of those things where somebody's got to do it and we hate to see a disaster happen, but the majority of us are firemen, and if there's a disaster and somebody needs to help, we want it to be us," Josh Kurland, the leader of Maryland Task Force One, told The News & Observer.

Photos: Rescue turns to grim recovery in the mountains of Western North Carolina

Kurland's team was originally deployed to Georgia on Sept. 25, arriving by noon the next day. Helene hit in the early hours of the 27th, and Maryland Task Force One was woken up at 4 a.m. to respond to a two-story brick building that had collapsed in Valdosta, Georgia.

After working there for two days, the team was sent to Cherokee, North Carolina. Operating from, they worked in Haywood County for two days before being sent to Swannanoa.

A typical day right now in Helene's response lasts from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., with a lengthy drive on each end.

"They're long days," Kurland said, also acknowledging that at this point there are fewer rescues and more recoveries of those who died in the storm.

RAL_100524-HELENE-TEL-021.JPGA FEMA search and rescue team from Maryland search for human remains in car in Swannanoa on Sunday, Oct. 6, 2024 after Tropical Storm Helene flooded the Swannanoa River. North Carolina officials have confirmed 76 deaths from Tropical Storm Helene.

A car full of mud

On the banks of the Swannanoa, the search team knew that it needed to reach the Charger. First, though, a member of a construction crew who was operating an excavator needed to move a silver Toyota SUV and several trees that had either fallen or were leaning precariously where the floodwaters had rushed past.

Claw-full by claw-full, the excavator worked through the brush and debris until he reached the Charger itself. Then, after some discussion with rescue team members about where it should go, he lowered the claw, closed it around the car's hood and dragged it out of the mud.

RAL_100524-HELENE-TEL-022.JPGAn excavator moves a car to a safer position so a FEMA search and rescue team from Maryland can search it for possible human remains in Swannanoa on Sunday, Oct. 6, 2024 after Tropical Storm Helene flooded the Swannanoa River. North Carolina officials have confirmed 76 deaths from Tropical Storm Helene.

When the car came down with a thud, the search-and-rescue team members surrounded it.

They smashed out its remaining windows using shovels and a baton handed over by a U.S. Border Patrol Agent who was watching.

RAL 100524-HELENE-TEL-032.JPG

When the front doors opened, the car's interior was filled nearly to the windows with mud. A foul odor hit some onlookers.

The search and rescue team pulled the silt out gently, shaking it out on the ground to make sure they weren't missing anything important.

Then they moved to the backseat, asking the construction crew to bring in a smaller excavator that could pull the rear door of the car off entirely. With the crunching of glass and mangling of twisted metal, the excavator did just that.

As the mud was lifted out of the car, it became clear that no one was inside. In fact, the owner arrived, searching for the wallet he thought he'd left in the center console. He had to settle for the pair of prescription sunglasses that were in the car, still sealed inside their case.

Lipp, the FEMA spokesman, recalled seeing similar small pieces of people's lives recovered after other disasters.

"It seems really tiny," Lipp said, "but for him I'll bet it's a little bit of a bright spot in his day."

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.

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