

These seven major storms left a lasting impact on Wilmington over the past six years

October 15, 2024 | StarNews (Wilmington, NC) Author: Molly Wilhelm, Wilmington StarNews | Section: News | 1099 Words OpenURL Link

Wilmington is no stranger to the impacts of severe weather, having endured numerous notable storms throughout its history.

The city's location along the North Carolina coast unfortunately makes it vulnerable to the forces of nature, prompting residents to prepare for the worst with the signs of an approaching storm. While the western part of the state was tragically hit the hardest by Hurricane Helene, the storm recently brought mild rain and wind into Wilmington.

From the devastation of Hurricane Florence to an unnamed storm that brought record levels of rain to New Hanover and Brunswick counties just last month, here are seven storms that have left their mark on Wilmington within the past six years.

Hurricane Florence (2018)

Hurricane Florence made landfall near Wrightsville Beach as a Category 1 hurricane on Sept. 14, 2018. The storm brought record amounts of rainfall to eastern North Carolina and record river flooding along the Cape Fear. Wind gusts reached up to 105 miles per hour in Wilmington, more than 110,000 New Hanover County residents lost power, and more than 29 inches of rain were recorded in parts of the area.

It's considered one of the worst storms to ever hit Wilmington, which was essentially an island for a few days as flooding blocked every road into the Port City. An estimated \$17 billion in estimated damages were experienced across the state and nearly 140,000 people registering for disaster assistance.

More photos: After Florence damage, Alton Lennon Federal Courthouse reopens in downtown Wilmington

Hurricane Dorian (2019)

Labeled the strongest and most destructive storm of the 2019 hurricane season by the National Weather Service, Hurricane Dorian passed within 30 miles of the Cape Fear region on Sept. 5 and 6.

The storm recorded maximum sustained winds of 100 miles per hour. Several roadways across New Hanover County experienced more than 10 inches of rain, with U.S. 117 in Castle Hayne submerged by nearly two feet of water. High waters also effected roadways in Brunswick and Pender counties.

Multiple tornadoes touched down across the tri-county area, with three recorded in Brunswick County, four in New Hanover County, and four in Pender County.

On Sept. 6, 2019, people began to remove boards from their homes and businesses as the immediate threat of the hurricane passed. However, the storm left lasting damage, including downed trees and power lines, flooded roadways, and other impacts.

Hurricane Isaias (2020)

Hurricane Isaias made landfall near Ocean Isle Beach as Category 1 storm on Aug. 3, 2020. The storm was one of the earliest to make landfall in North Carolina.

Wind gusts were significant, with maximum sustained wind reaching 85 miles per hour, according to the National Weather Service. While rainfall was relatively limited due to rapid movement of the storm, storm surge flooding impacted southeastern North Carolina.

Trees were downed, roads were blocked, and numerous businesses and residences sustained several inches of flooding.

Peak wind gusts in New Hanover County reached 99 miles per hour in Federal Point, according to the National Weather Service. In Brunswick County, peak wind gusts reached 87 miles per hour in Oak Island and in Pender County, at the Surf City Bridge, wind gusts peaked at 83 miles per hour.

Six tornado touchdowns were confirmed across the state, with the strongest ones touching ground for more than eight miles across Bald Head Island and Southport.

Related coverage: New Wilmington food bank facility is ready to feed the community during the next hurricane

Tropical Storm Elsa (2021)

Wilmington largely escaped the worst effects of Tropical Storm Elsa. While the storm brought heavy rain and gusty winds, no major damage was reported in New Hanover, Brunswick or Pender counties.

Though mild overall, Brunswick County was perhaps the hardest hit of the three during the storm, with Southport recording 2.43 total inches of rain. A National Weather Service forecaster in Wilmington said that winds up to 35 miles per hour were reported in the Port City, with Sunset Beach reporting gusts as high as 58 miles per hour.

Hurricane Ian (2022)

Brunswick County took the brunt of the storm when Hurricane Ian made landfall in September 2022. Heavy rainfall and strong winds left residents across the area, particularly those in Ocean Isle Beach, grappling with debris and mud in the aftermath.

Strong winds, heavy rain and aggressive surf were seen along the North Carolina coast. Peak wind gusts were recorded in Sunset Beach up to 75 miles per hour, according to the National Weather Service. Water up to two feet deep made its way into Ocean Isle Beach neighborhoods, damaging private docks, garage doors, and lower levels of nearby homes.

In New Hanover County, flooding led to road closures, with high-water levels on Canal Drive reaching nearly three feet. The second-highest water level since Hurricane Florence was recorded at Mercer Pier in Wrightsville Beach, peaking around eight feet.

Pender County residents experienced shallow flooding, particularly in Topsail Beach.

Tropical Storm Debby (2024)

Although Tropical Storm Debby initially made landfall in Florida as a Category 1 hurricane, it did not maintain hurricane strength by the time it reached North Carolina. However, the storm still affected Wilmington and the surrounding areas.

River flooding, heavy rainfall between five and 15 inches, and 51 mile-per-hour peak wind gusts hit the Port City, according to the National Weather Service. Three weak tornadoes were confirmed, with two in Pender County and one in Brunswick County.

While the impacts of the storm were less significant than that of Hurricane Florence, several areas still experienced notable disruptions. Moores Creek National Battlefield suffered notable flooding, numerous roads were closed,

schools and offices faced delays and cancellations, and a dam site in Boiling Spring Lakes sustained damage.

Watch this: How Gov. Roy Cooper described storm damage in Southport

Potential Tropical Cyclone 8 (2024)

Though unnamed, Potential Tropical Cyclone 8 brought historic rainfall in mid-September. Areas of New Hanover and Brunswick counties received between 12 and 20 inches of rain in a single day, with significant impacts in Carolina Beach, Southport, Bolivia, and Boiling Spring Lakes, according to the National Weather Service.

Some Carolina Beach residents described the flooding as unlike anything they had ever seen before. Carolina Beach Mayor Lynn Barbee said the impact was the worst he's witnessed in his nearly 50 years in the area.

Homes, businesses and cars were submerged by the unprecedented flooding from the once-in-1,000-year rainfall event, as titled by the National Weather Service Wilmington Office. Roads and bridges were washed out, neighborhoods were inundated, and many residents were left to contend with lasting damages.

At least one person died as a result of the flooding, with an 80-year-old man located deceased inside of his submerged vehicle after driving onto a closed Brunswick County roadway, flooded by high waters. Nearly a month later, several Brunswick roads remain washed out.

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'Hands and feet of Jesus'

October 15, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: SARAH C. JOHNSON sjohnson@hickoryrecord.com| Section: Mapping | 646 Words OpenURL Link

Hurricane Helene has given Christians a chance "to be the hands and feet of Jesus," a Burke County youth pastor said on Tuesday.

Amherst Baptist Church Youth Pastor Braxton Ervin was speaking about continuing efforts to help western North Carolina. He said the heavily impacted communities will need help for months.

"Missions is not only across seas," Ervin said. "It's right here at home, as well."

The Long View Police Department took a utility trailer full of canned foods, toiletries and clothes to Burke County to help victims of Hurricane Helene.

The Long View donations were taken to Amherst Baptist Church in Morganton on Tuesday. Amherst has been distributing hot meals in Morganton and taking donations to western North Carolina. The church is located at 1024 Amherst Road in Morganton.

The donations are going to Columbus, a town in Polk County, Ervin said. Columbus is roughly 30 minutes south of Lake Lure. Amherst Baptist Church is partnering with a church in Columbus which has a pastor who is originally from Burke County, Ervin added.

Long View Public Information Officer Heather Minor said 13% of the town of Long View is in Burke County. She said most of the donations have come from citizens and businesses in Long View, along with some donations from Granite Falls.

"Through all of this I have felt really blessed and lucky," Minor said. "And then there's a sense of guilt with it, too, because we did come out so unscathed and 30-45 minutes up the road, it's just like total devastation."

Two churches in Long View donated a total of \$1,460, which was used to buy supplies. The Word of Life Church donated \$960, Minor said. Another church gave \$500 on Monday, Long View Town Manager James Cozart said.

"What we are understanding is the need is changing to stuff to keep warm like blankets, gloves, hats," Cozart said. "We took that (\$500), and our deputy finance director went shopping with it. She just piled her cart full of throws, blankets, all that stuff. She got to the register at Walmart in Hickory. The cashier was checking her out and she said 'Now, when I get to \$500 or close to \$500 stop.' Everything in that buggy went through except for one little throw. She hit the total button. It was exactly 500 bucks."

Minor said the town of Long View will continue to accept donations at their town hall. Ervin said Amherst Baptist Church will continue accepting donations, too. Donations can be taken to Amherst Baptist Church at 1024 Amherst Road in Morganton from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. each day, Ervin said.

"(The donations) are very much appreciated," Long View Mayor Marla Thompson said. "We're hoping that they get to the people that need them. If anybody wants to donate, please feel free to drop off at any time."

Long View plans to bring another load of donations later in the week. Minor said a local manufacturing company is donating a 53-foot trailer filled with supplies.

"(A man) just called us and said, 'I live in Burke County. I work in Conover and my company wants to help,'" Minor

said. "We were like, 'Yes, send it.'"

Minor said it has been incredible seeing her small town pouring out support for their neighbors. She said Long View has a significantly smaller tax base than Hickory. Long View had an estimated population of 5,207 in 2023 and Hickory had an estimated population of 44,415 people, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

"We had a mom, and her several young children come by, and each child got to donate an item," Minor said. "And then our town manager got the opportunity to explain to them why they were needing to donate these items. It was incredible to see them come together."

Long View Town Hall is located at 2404 First Ave. SW in Hickory.

Sarah Johnson is the courts and breaking news reporter for the Hickory daily record.

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Catawba County student served food to rescue crews in Marion in wake of Hurricane Helene

October 15, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: Miya Banks mbanks@hickoryrecord.com| Section: News | 1127 Words OpenURL Link

Amidst the devastation of Hurricane Helene, one of the most striking things 16-year-old Wyatt Spencer witnessed was the desire of people to help one another.

"I saw hundreds of people who just lost everything, but the only thing they wanted to do was help the other person who lost everything else," Spencer said.

Spencer also noted the devastation he saw while volunteering in areas hit by storm. He said he saw pictures on the news and, to a degree, knew what to expect. Seeing it himself put the damage into perspective.

"After seeing the community and the devastation up there on a first-hand level ... I knew I had to come back and help for as long as I could," Spencer said. "There's so many people in need."

He added, "There's people that don't know what they're going to do in the next stage of their life. And to some people, seeing you walk over with the cold drink, hot food and a smile on your face is the best part of their day. And you don't know how much longer it could be before they get that again."

Spencer said he was born and raised in Catawba County. He is an 11th-grade student at Bandys High School.

Spencer said he has volunteered in Spruce Pine, Burnsville, Red Hill, Bat Cave and around Lake Tahoma in McDowell County.

"No one asked him to do this," said Spencer's mother, Kristen Crawford. "(And) he didn't ask my permission. He said he was going."

Spencer said on an average day of volunteering, he would wake up at 3:45 a.m. to 4 a.m. and drive to a location over an hour away. He said he would get home around 11 p.m., sleep and repeat.

Three hours of sleep was a good night of sleep, Spencer said.

Crawford said she cannot put to words how proud she is of Spencer, though she is concerned about his mental health at times with everything he is witnessing.

"But he loves it, and he keeps going back for more, and he feels a calling for it," Crawford said.

Spencer said he plans to continue volunteering.

Spencer shared his experiences in an interview. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What made you want to volunteer?

It kind of started with my girlfriend's dad, Stephen Parker. He's a state trooper. I heard he was going up there with the N.C. Troopers Association and the North Carolina Fraternal Order of Police. As soon as I heard he was going up there, I knew immediately I wanted to go after seeing what had been done to the places up there. I knew I wanted to go and help people in need.

What was the most striking thing you saw?

The biggest thing I saw was the community coming together. I mean, I've seen a lot of bad, but through all the bad, I've seen a lot of good. I saw hundreds of people who just lost everything, but the only thing they wanted to do was help the other person who lost everything else. I met a couple who lost their house, and pretty much everyone they knew was presumably missing. We tried to bring them supplies one day, and even though they were running low on stuff, they wanted to pass it on to the next person. They said, 'We have enough to get us by for now, give it to the next person.' And even seeing rescue crews. You name a state, they were there. There was just so much good in a time of bad.

What type of volunteer work are you doing?

I served food to any rescue crews, any emergency personnel, because we were staged at the McDowell County emergency operations center, and we were serving around 1,500 meals a day for the first few days for emergency personnel and anybody in the community who needed them. And then, as the week went on, we slowed down a little bit. We probably got around 1,000 each day. I started out doing that.

And then I wanted to get more physically involved. I started doing supply runs for people that had no access to anything and started taking food to crews who were in places where they were working 18-20 hour days but weren't getting fed anything throughout the day. What I would do is, I would load up with hot food and cold drinks and take that to them while they were in the field.

Later in the week, I started doing some more hands-on stuff and went up towards Red Hill. We cut some roads up and cleared some driveways and stuff for people who, nobody had really got to them yet. Luckily, they were fine and they had plenty of supplies. But we made it to where they could get out of the driveway for the first time in 10 days.

What values have you grown up with?

Leadership is probably the biggest one, especially in a world like today where everybody kind of wants to see what the people around them are doing. Going ahead and taking charge and showing people the way we should be doing stuff instead of letting them try and figure it out on their own. That, and we need to help the people around us. Definitely caring. My mom owns Endeavors Pediatric Therapy in Statesville, that has a huge role in caring for kids in the community. So, caring is one of the biggest things. Also hardship. Like, not letting something stop you. Keep going and keep pushing until you get the results you want.

What makes you happy or gives you joy?

One of the biggest things that really made me happy and gave me joy is helping people, especially in the past week. Nothing made me feel better than coming home every single day knowing I helped as many people as I could within a community that just lost everything. Even the first responders in the field that had been working for 15 hours, it made them so happy just to have a hot meal in their hands. Whereas somebody that just lost their house, their cars, everything, and they're living in a shed that's 10 foot by 10 foot now, you bring them a case of water and a bag of snacks, and they're more than excited to see you. That's something that makes me happy. Success also makes me happy. Like, achieving a goal definitely makes me happy.

What motivates you?

I want to inspire people, and I want to be seen as a leader within my community. I want people to look up to me and really see what our generation can do. I feel like our generation is really looked down on. We make a lot of bad choices, but I want to show the world there's always hope for the future generations.

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Climate change costs more than gas, sweaty T-shirt

October 15, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Mapping | 681 Words OpenURL Link

I was mowing my lawn in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, as Hurricane Milton's outer bands and the tornadoes it brought with it began to lash Florida last week. Though the lawnmowing was trivial compared to the lashing, a slight inconvenience alongside a pending catastrophe, I couldn't help linking the two because of climate change.

In all my years as a homeowner, I don't remember mowing my lawn this consistently this late in the season. I took out the lawnmower, edger and clippers a couple of weeks ago as well. The hedges had regrown to heights they usually reach at the end of spring.

All it cost me was a few dollars of gas money and a sweaty T-shirt. No biggie. But a change in the climate, even a modest one, could be costly to places such as Myrtle Beach. Despite the draw of Broadway at the Beach, the SkyWheel and Ripley's Believe it or Not!, weather remains the top reason some 20 million people flock here every year. Sitting on the beach taking in the beauty of the Atlantic becomes less palatable without mild, stable weather.

The good news is that the fight to persuade people we are undergoing change is over. NASA says there is "no question that increased greenhouse gas levels warm Earth in response," even if scientists may not be able to say definitively that my lawn is changing or Milton's historic strength was directly caused by climate change because climate is more than just individual weather events.

Nearly 80% of South Carolinians now believe climate change is real, according to Winthrop University polling. That's higher than the national average of about 72%.

The bad news is that fewer of us are in agreement about its causes and what should be done, or if climate change is an urgent matter at all. While 55% of North Carolina residents believe recent extreme weather events are related to climate change, only 47% believe it's an emergency, according to High Point University polling. That's even while knowing rural areas are most vulnerable, which Hurricane Helene has unfortunately just illustrated in devastating ways.

In Florida, the gap is starker. While 90% of Floridians believe climate change is real, less than half would be willing to pay \$10 a month to strengthen that state's infrastructure to weather hazards.

In Congress, when Democrats talk about climate change or "green" projects, many Republicans criticize them. Only 13 House GOP members voted for the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which represents the country's biggest investment in the climate change fight. More needs to be done, but President Joe Biden signed it into law just a couple of years after President Donald Trump spent his time in office rolling back such eff orts.

It's akin to knowing an out-of control freight train is screaming down the track. Instead of working to either try and stop it or get people out of the way, we're stuck arguing if it's really an emergency worth the sacrifice of short-term political wins or a few extra dollars to equip those who can mitigate the damage with the tools they need.

The truth is we've been forking over extra dollars anyway. Some of it has been in the form of having to mow the lawn and cut the hedges a few extra times, the kind of thing that feels small but will add up over time. We've even accepted the occasional house on the North Carolina coast falling into the Atlantic because of rising seas as a curiosity rather than calamity.

In other ways, it is easier to see that the freight train that is climate change has already arrived. In recent years, a variety of storms and other natural disasters around the nation have caused damage that is approaching nearly

\$100 billion annually — the highest it's ever been.

While we can't say with absolute certainty that the damage from Helene and Milton is a direct cause of climate change, we'd be fools to believe it isn't, and bigger fools to let partisanship stop us from committing to doing something serious and sustained about it.

Bailey writes for The Charlotte Observer: charlotteobserver.com.

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Lies, liars and lying are threatening our democracy

October 15, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Mapping | 725 Words OpenURL Link

At a recent campaign rally in Michigan, former president Donald Trump claimed that "Kamala has spent all her FEMA money, billions of dollars, on housing for illegal migrants."

Could it possibly be true? This is the sort of question Duke University's Bill Adair and a team of student reporters have been asking themselves for 17 years as they've fact-checked politicians and other public figures for the PolitiFact website that Adair created in 2007. The answer, of course, is no.

As William Shakespeare might have said, it is a lie "told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

The truth is that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has two distinct funds. One is to help cities temporarily house migrants. An entirely separate \$20 billion fund was created by Congress for disaster relief. This one is running low because of the number and scope of disasters this year, but the two funds are not interchangeable, nor is either being used for purposes other than those intended.

During and after Hurricanes Milton and Helene, FEMA has been present and working to help victims, largely to the acclaim of state and local leaders.

At a news conference to address Helene's damage to parts of the state, South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster, a Republican, said federal assistance had "been superb." He mentioned that President Joe Biden, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell had each called to off er support.

This is what one would expect from federal officials during a crisis, and it wouldn't require highlighting but for Trump's intentional lies.

As a rule, I'm not one to use the words "lie," "lying" or "liar." Their power to destroy someone's reputation is too great for comfort. But Trump has forced many of us, including Adair, to abandon the soft-pedaling etiquette of euphemism and to say what is factual. Lying, for Trump, is so reflexive that he needn't bestir his fourth-grade vocabulary to seize headlines and malign those he finds inconvenient to his purposes.

Will things ever change? Not soon, says Adair. Unfortunately, lying pays dividends in today's universe of partisan television, radio and social media, and for a complicit political base manipulated by sophisticated and sometimes immoral consultants. Fact-checking lies has had to become an industry, but it can't possibly keep up. What's needed is more fact-checking, which means more money and more staff, and for Americans to demand that the lying stop.

Over the years, Adair and his revolving teams of students have created a methodology and a "Truth-O-Meter" for assessing the accuracy of a given statement. Rankings from "true" to "false" to "pants on fire!" are assigned based on findings, which are explained and sourced on the website.

Adair is quick to note that political lying began long before Trump. President Richard Nixon lied about the Watergate burglary out of self-preservation. President Bill Clinton lied about "sex with that woman, Monica Lewinsky," because he was in very hot water.

In a sense, Trump is the inevitable benefactor of a culture of lies that has become normalized through passive acceptance of lying as the nature of politics.

Adair explains in his new book, "Beyond the Big Lie," that politicians every day try to score points with key constituencies: voters, party leaders, influencers and media figures. "A decision to lie is a simple math equation: I am likely to score enough points with this lie that it will outweigh any consequences it might have from voters/donors/the media."

Adair states that Republicans lie more than Democrats do, according to a statistical analysis detailed in the book. He spends several pages explaining how "facts" are selected for scrutiny, but it basically comes down to whether something just doesn't sound right. For example: Does it sound right that Harris "stole" FEMA money to house illegal migrants rather than help hurricane victims?

Actually, no — which is why PolitiFact gave Trump a "pants on fire!" rating for telling this easily disprovable lie.

Voters concerned about truth and the consequences of lying might want to check with PolitiFact at least as often as they check the polls. They'll learn that Trump, contrary to what he recently told Hugh Hewitt, has never been to Gaza. And that Harris' claim that unemployment is at a historic low for all groups of people was rated only "half true." It's good to know the truth, even if you don't like it.

Parker writes for The Washington Post.

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Hickory's Riverwalk bridge closed indefinitely due to storm damage

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Hickory's Riverwalk bridge is closed until further notice due to damage caused by Hurricane Helene, according to a press release from the city of Hickory.

The bridge trailhead and parking lot at 1580 Old Lenoir Road NW will also remain closed, the press release said.

The Riverwalk section that goes over the water is closed due to damage caused Sept. 27 by the remnants of the hurricane, the press release said. A section of handrailing was damaged by debris and must be replaced, the city said.

"At this time, the reopening date is unknown," the press release said.

Other parts of the Riverwalk trail, including sections that are elevated over land and the paved greenway within Rotary-Geitner Park, are open, the press release said.

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CAKED IN MUD

October 15, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Mapping | 745 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 fl ood 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 fl ooding that followed Hurricane Helene.

And they will be talking about it for the rest of their lives.

"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 restaurant 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 a 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 October 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:

A SELECTION FROM "RIVER ROAD"

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 thing not tied down — and many things that were.

d.G. Martin, a retired lawyer, served as uNc-system's vice president for public affairs and hosted Pbs-Nc's North carolina bookwatch.

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Democratic NC governor candidate Josh Stein makes stop in Hickory Tuesday

October 15, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC)
Author: Billy Chapman and Xavier Martin wchapman@hickoryrecord.comxmartin@hickoryrecord.com| Section: News | 510 Words
OpenURL Link

Democratic candidate for governor and current North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein made a campaign stop at Morning Star First Baptist Church in Hickory on Tuesday afternoon.

"I'm running for governor because I love our home state and I believe in its promise," Stein said to a room of about 80 people. "If we work hard, where you come from should never limit how far you can go."

Stein said he was on his way to Boone and surrounding counties to help with recovery efforts from damage caused by Hurricane Helene.

Stein laid out his platform at the event, saying teacher pay, protecting reproductive rights, public safety and protection of personal freedoms were among his top priorities.

"Governing is not that complicated, it's just not," Stein said. "It's about putting people first and then fighting for them."

Stein cited his record as attorney general as among the reasons he is qualified to serve as governor.

Stein said he reduced the backlog of untested rape test kits and helped secure \$50 billion from opioid companies by leading a bipartisan coalition of state attorney generals.

North Carolina is expected to receive over \$1 billion as part of settlements against pharmaceutical companies associated with manufacturing and distributing opioids.

Stein also addressed some of the controversies surrounding his Republican opponent, current Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson.

"The vision of our opponent in this race, the lieutenant governor, is one of division, violence and hate," Stein said.

Stein cited a CNN story that reported Robinson made controversial and offensive comments in an online forum in the early 2010s.

Robinson has denied the allegations in the CNN story. Earlier Tuesday, Robinson announced he was suing CNN for defamation.

"There's not a person in this room who needed that CNN story to know that that man was wholly unfit to be governor," Stein said to applause and cheering.

Supporters who showed up for the event echoed Stein's statements about top priorities.

Marcella McCombs, a military veteran, said protection of women's reproductive rights was a top issue for her.

"Personally, I don't think you should ever be able to tell somebody what to do with their body," McCombs said. "Keep your guns, we'll keep our uterus and we'll be all right. ... I fought for people's rights and let's keep them. When people start taking people's rights, it's awful."

Doug Auer was direct with his answer on why he was voting for Stein.

"The other guy is just a disgusting human being," Auer said. "He's (Stein) a man of high integrity, understands government, believes in government. He's right on the issues."

Aubrey Gregory had another reason for voting for Stein.

"I'm voting so my two daughters know I did everything I could to preserve their rights," Gregory said.

Stein concluded the campaign event with a message of fighting for the future of North Carolina.

"The stakes could not be higher. The choice could not be clearer," Stein said. "Two competing visions: ours (is) positive, forward-looking, welcoming. It's about fighting for every person, creating opportunity for every person, and tapping the potential of every person so that together we can build a brighter, better future for every one of us."

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Billy Chapman and Xavier Martin wchapman@hickoryrecord.comxmartin@hickoryrecord.com, 'Democratic NC governor candidate Josh Stein makes stop in Hickory Tuesday', *Statesville Record & Landmark* (online), 15 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C45F78DFE90588



Balloon festival starts Friday in Statesville: Here's 7 things you should know

October 15, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: Ben Gibson | Section: Events | 1182 Words OpenURL Link

If you want to get the most out of a day at the 49th Annual Carolina BalloonFest, Executive Director Sam Parks recommends coming early and staying late to see the hot-air balloons taking to the sky or glowing as the sun goes down.

"If you don't get there in time to see the mass ascension, the next best thing is to watch the balloon glow, which is going to be at about seven o'clock and that's when it's dark and all the balloons start to light up," Parks said. "It's really magical to see that, as well."

Weather permitting the balloons launch around 7 a.m. and then again just a few hours before sunset. There is also the nightly balloon glow that takes place around 6:30 p.m.

This year's Carolina BalloonFest kicks off at the Statesville Regional Airport on Friday at 3 p.m. and closes for the night at 8:30 p.m. Saturday's festivities run from 7 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. and the weekend closes out on Sunday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Here are seven things to know if you're planning to attend what organizers say is the second-oldest, hot-air balloon festival in the country.

How much are tickets?

The price depends on which day you go. On Friday, tickets are \$20 for adults, \$10 for children 7-12, and children 6 and under get in free. While children's prices are the same all weekend, it costs \$30 for adults on Saturday and \$25 on Sunday. Weekend passes are \$60 for adults and \$35 for children.

VIP tickets cost \$175 for adults and \$40 for children 12 and under. A VIP ticket allows access to covered seating for viewing main stage entertainment, balloon ascensions, and the nightly balloon glow for all three days. Other benefits included catered meals all three days, unlimited coffee and non-alcoholic beverages, and limited amounts of beer and wine.

Guests can leave and return to the festival at any time, but parking spots may fill up and park-and-ride options can be halted due to festival capacity. When leaving, guests can have their hands stamped to allow free re-entry. Guests have access to park-and-ride options which are included in the ticket price.

Where do I park?

There is still on-site parking that will set guests back \$15 for general parking and \$25 for VIP, which has a private entrance and exit. A general parking pass for all three days is \$40. VIP parking passes for the weekend are sold out.

Parks said organizers have nearly doubled the number of parking spaces on-site and at park-and-ride locations.

Bicyclists can take advantage of this year's Park & Bike option, which allows them to park at Celeste Henkel Elementary School and take a 2.5-mile bike ride down Bethlehem Road to the airport where the bikes will be taken care of by valet service.

A ride-share drop-off point has also been established to make it easier for people to use apps like Uber or Lyft to get behind the airport and to the area of the property where the event takes place.

Parks said organizers hope these changes will make for a better experience for guests.

What should I bring? What should I leave at home?

According to the festival's website, there are a few things they recommend to bring as well as prohibitions against others. Bring your camera, lawn chairs, and a small umbrella. Unopened water bottles and snacks are allowed, but leave large hard-shell coolers, alcohol, glass, and weapons — including knives with blades longer than 4 inches — at home. Drones and pop-up canopies are also banned.

No pets are allowed, except for service animals.

Guests are advised to bring cash for purchases.

Keep an eye on the weather

Clear skies and only light winds are expected for the upcoming weekend. The wind is an important factor, Parks said, as anything above 10 mph can make landing a hot air balloon — with no brakes and limited ways to control flight — a dangerous proposition.

In a conversation at last year's event, veteran pilot Jack Ponticelli said he once tried to land a balloon in 38 mph winds. He said he went nearly 200 yards before successfully stopping the balloon on the ground.

With powerlines and trees dotting the countryside of Iredell County, pilots said they need calm conditions to ensure the safety of passengers and pilots.

Windy weather last year grounded the fleet of balloons. The festival continued with music, food, vendors, and other entertainment for the thousands who attended.

Want to ride in a hot-air balloon?

If you're looking to take to the skies and see Iredell County from above, you'll need to book a balloon flight ahead of time. The flights often sell out ahead of time. The rides cost \$400 a person and are booked directly through the pilots. More information is available on the BalloonFest website.

Flights take place early in the morning and late afternoon.

For those looking to stay a little closer to the ground but still want the experience of floating in a balloon, tethered rides are available on a first-come, first-served basis at the festival. Tether pilots only accept cash, according to the festival website, and rides are \$10 a person. Children under the age of 12 must be accompanied by an adult.

Hot-air balloon pilot meet-and-greets are also scheduled for Saturday and Sunday afternoons from 2-3 p.m.

What else is there to do?

Music, food, shopping, as well as play zones for children are part of the attractions at the festival.

Main stage entertainment begins on Friday with Bing Futch taking the stage at 3 p.m., followed by Dani Kerr and the Skeleton Crew at 5 p.m., and Albannach at 7:30 p.m.

The first band to hit the stage on Saturday morning will be the fittingly named LeeD Not Follow at 10 a.m. The music continues with Albannach at 11:15 a.m., The Broad Pickups at 12:30 p.m., The Chain at 2 p.m., Bing Futch at 3:45 p.m., N-SPIRE at 5:15 p.m.

Randall Sprinkle kicks off Sunday's entertainment at 10 a.m., Love Not Money at 11:30 a.m., Bing Futch at 1 p.m., On The Border at 2:30 p.m., Bing Futch at 4:15 p.m., and finally Albannach closing out the fest with a 5:15 p.m. show.

The Kids Zone has inflatables for children to play in and on, as well as a Ninja Course that costs \$10 to take part in. The Interactive Theater of Jef and Mr. Marvel's Magic Show are scheduled throughout all three days of the event. A balloon that guests can walk inside costs \$2 as well.

The NC Wine & Craft Beer Garden is open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Sunday.

The Artisan Village and Marketplace where vendors offer crafts and festival souvenirs is open throughout the weekend.

Profits will help Hurricane Helene victims

Carolina BalloonFest organizers said the balloon festival could go on for two reasons.

"We're far enough away both in the calendar as well as geographically that it was OK for us to continue to move forward with this. And then also to be able to give back to the relief effort," Parks said.

A portion of profits from the 49th Annual Carolina BalloonFest will go towards relief efforts.

For more information, visit www.carolinaballoonfest.com.

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Cats click on both sides of ball to down Wofford 30-16

October 15, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 220 Words OpenURL Link

Cole Gonzales threw for 294 yards and a score, Jalynn Williams rushed for three touchdowns and Western Carolina welcomed their fans back to E.J. Whitmire Stadium in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene with a 30-16 win on Saturday.

The Catamounts (3-3, 2-0 Southern Conference) beat Wofford at home last Saturday without spectators in the stands because of rescue and recovery efforts taking place around Western North Carolina.

The Catamounts debuted a "Prayers for Western Carolina" helmet sticker while also promoting a "Fill the Truck" effort to load the team equipment truck with fan donations of goods.

Gonzales' 18-yard touchdown pass went to Zion Booker to open the scoring. Booker finished with 102 yards receiving. Williams capped two long drives with second-quarter touchdowns and the Catamounts led 21-7 at halftime.

Gonzales was again efficient throwing the ball, finishing 28-of-38 passing.

Johnathan Bennett rushed for 155 yards on 22 carries with a score for the Bulldogs (2-5, 0-4). He also had 155 yards passing but was intercepted twice, including a C.J. Williams interception at the goal line at the end of the first half and Samaurie Dukes' pick at Western Carolina's 1-yard line late in the game.

Western Carolina plays its first of consecutive league road games next Saturday, Oct. 19, as the Catamounts travel to chromatic rival Furman for a 2 p.m. kickoff at Paladin Stadium.

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Smoky Mountain doubles team makes regional play

October 15, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Smoky Mountain | 295 Words OpenURL Link

By Todd Vinyard

The Smoky Mountain High School tennis doubles team, featuring Braelyn Mulligan and Kailey Broom, has qualified for Regionals, after the Mountain 7 Conference tournament.

The Mustangs hosted the tournament at Western Carolina University, where the top four singles players and top three doubles teams earned a spot at Regionals, which will take place in Hickory on Oct. 18. Mulligan and Broom secured their place by defeating

West Henderson's Moraga Pizarro and Jaden Suttles in a hard-fought match, 6-4, 3-6, 6-0, finishing third overall.

"The team is thrilled to have made it to Regionals," said Smoky Mountain tennis coach Eliza Dean. "It was a tough match, but what really stood out was Kailey Broom's encouragement of Braelyn Mulligan. Her positive energy was key in securing the win."

Other Smoky Mountain participants included Becca Welch and Elle Wahnetah (doubles), Adrienne McCoy (singles), and Kaitlyn Tahquette (singles). Welch and Wahnetah won their opening match 6-2, 6-1 against North Henderson but were defeated in the second round by Franklin, 0-6, 0-6.

McCoy fell in her first-round singles match 1-6, 3-6 to Franklin, while Tahquette lost a close first-round singles match, 4-6, 4-6, to Tuscola.

Smoky Mountain has also qualified for the dual team playoffs, which follow a team-based format similar to the regular season. The Mustangs' first-round playoff match is scheduled for Oct. 21.

Smoky Mountain concluded the regular season with a 5-5 record, as matches against East Henderson and Tuscola were canceled due to Hurricane Helene. The team's final regular season match resulted in a loss to Franklin.

Volleyball

Smoky Mountain won two volleyball matches over East Henderson on Oct. 9 and Oct. 10. Smoky won 3-0 over East Henderson on Oct. 9 and 3-1 on Oct. 10, according to Max Preps. Smoky Mountain is 6-14 overall and 2-9 in the Mountain Seven Conference.

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SMHS soccer now 4-4 in conference

October 15, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Smoky Mountain | 230 Words OpenURL Link

On Monday Oct. 7, the Smoky Mountain High School men's soccer team hosted their close rivals from Franklin High.

For both teams, it was their first time back on the pitch since Hurricane Helene.

The first half was scoreless, with the Panthers missing off the crossbar early. Smoky established some control before the half, but went into the break 0-0. It didn't take Smoky long to find the net.

Eduin Maldonado scored 2 minutes in, but it was called for offsides. However, Smoky took the lead on a free-kick set. The ball was played short and after some passes, Keegan Allen crossed the ball and Eduin finished to give Smoky the 1-0 lead.

Just a few moments later, Smoky's Willie Antoino hit the post. Smoky kept the pressure in the Panthers' end, earning several corner kicks. With about 22 minutes left, Nolan Donley finished a corner service from Keegan Allen to go up 2-0. Smoky would take a 3-0 lead on Willie Antonio's toe poke past the Franklin keeper. Sammy Hernandez assisted Smoky's third goal.

Franklin found the net twice late to make it interesting, but Smoky was able to hold off the final 3 minutes for the Mountain 7 Conference win. Smoky is now 2-2 in the conference, while the Panthers fell to 0-4.

The Mustangs travel to play Pisgah at Bethel Middle School on Wednesday, Oct. 9, as conference play resumes their schedule.

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Rierson Farms to host fall festival

October 15, 2024 | Thomasville Times, The (NC) Author: TIMES STAFF| Section: Thomasville Times | 143 Words OpenURL Link

THOMASVILLE — Rierson Farms in Thomasville wants all of Davidson County to feel welcome on the farm on Saturday for its fall festival.

Local vendors will show and sell handmade items, and there will be pumpkins for sale, raffles to win gift baskets, face painting and fairy hair.

Also, Goose and the Monkey Brew House will sell craft beer, Bridgett's Kitchen will sell smoked meat food plated, and other vendors will be there.

Farm owners Zach and Monica Rierson also are using the fall festival to to help western North Carolina residents affected by Hurricane Helene. They ask attendees to bring canned food and coats for Marshal, Burnsville, Spruce Pine and other communities.

"Our efforts are based on a marathon mentality as these areas are years from a sense of security again, and they will need us for weeks and months to come," Zach Rierson said.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

TIMES STAFF, 'Rierson Farms to host fall festival', *Thomasville Times, The* (online), 15 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3EA8FD1F7F9C0



Hearts with Hands, community members help Swannanoa after Helene

October 15, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Karrigan Monk; Black Mountain News| Section: News| 722 Words Page: A5 OpenURL Link

SWANNANOA - As the small unincorporated community of Swannanoa continues to recover from the impacts of Tropical Storm Helene, residents are finding relief from within the community.

One local organization, Hearts with Hands, is processing as many as 5,000 meals a day to feed first responders and other emergency workers, according to Greg Lentz, president and director of the organization.

Hearts with Hands is also bringing in hundreds of volunteers a day to help sort supplies in a warehouse in Swannanoa. The volunteers are putting together food boxes, hygiene kits, and cleaning kits while also giving out water, diapers, wipes, pet food, and other supplies that are in demand in the wake of Helene.

"That's what we're doing from this hub here," Lentz said. "Bringing it in, processing it, and then trying to get it right back out the door."

The organization also has helped set up comfort stations at the Swannanoa Ingles with showers, water, bathrooms and laundry services.

Hearts with Hands recently started working on procuring 275-gallon water tanks that will go out into communities as water sources. Once they are set up, the organization will establish a water route to fill them as needed.

'We're here trying to help our people in our community'

Lentz described the work he does with Hearts with Hands as "a calling."

"Just to love on people and share the love of Christ with them, love of Jesus with them and let them know somebody's here in their community that's going through the same thing they have and just try to love on them," Lentz said. "I'm here. This is me. This is us. We're local and we're here trying to help our people in our community."

Black Mountain-based entrepreneur Judi Melton was driving around with a car full of clothes and blankets to a variety of sites Oct. 11. She dropped off socks to the comfort stations at the Swannanoa Ingles earlier in the day before making her way to Blunt Pretzels in Beacon Village, where World Central Kitchen was giving out hot meals.

Melton said it is important to remember the smaller towns because they may not receive as many resources as more populated places.

"I think everybody's doing a great job," Melton said. "But a lot of the big donations go to big cities and I'm finding, especially here in Swannanoa, if your house was flooded and your car was flooded, how are you getting to these big sites to get stuff? It's just trying to help our neighbors."

Stranger from Ohio hands out \$50 bills

Dreama Wilson of Swannanoa said her home was flooded by the creek in her front yard because of Helene, though her home is salvageable. She said the creek is now "at least five times wider" than it was before the storm.

Wilson said she has seen the impacts of the community, from both in her neighborhood and those that come from outside to help.

"I had a guy this morning from a church in Ohio randomly come through our neighborhood and just gave us all \$50 bills just for help," Wilson said. "You just don't see that."

She spoke of neighbors helping her pull out the water-soaked carpet that was in her home.

"People are so kind," Wilson said. "It really brings out the kindness in people."

Melton said she started a GoFundMe to raise money to help buy supplies for those affected by Helene. She said she has seen plenty of food and water but wanted to raise money to help buy things that some people may not think of, particularly clothes and shoes of uncommon sizes.

As she is out in the community delivering the supplies, she said she is seeing the power of community and connection.

"For that 10, 15 minutes or whatever it is, you kind of block out what's going on because you're having these human interactions," Melton said. "I think that's super powerful of community."

Karrigan Monk is the Swannanoa Valley communities reporter for Black Mountain News, part of the USA TODAY Network. Reach her at kmonk@blackmountainnews.com.

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What the numbers tell us about Helene's devastation, recovery

October 15, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Steve Howe; USA TODAY NETWORK | Section: News | 402 Words Page: A4 OpenURL Link

Tropical Storm Helene brought unprecedented destruction to Western North Carolina and while calculations about the full extent of the damage are ongoing, some preliminary numbers give perspective on the devastation.

93:

The number of verified storm-related deaths reported by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services as of Oct. 13.

100,000:

The upper estimate of the number of people in WNC who still lack running water due to damage to the North Fork Reservoir, water treatment plant and distribution system as of Oct. 13.

1 million:

Number of Duke Energy customers in North Carolina who had power restored by Oct. 1. There were still 11,301 customers without power in North Carolina in the afternoon on Oct. 13, 16 days after the storm hit.

10 million cubic yards:

The volume of debris created by the storm in WNC since Sept. 30, according to the Army Corps of Engineers. That's enough debris to fill the Empire State Building nearly 8 times and Army Corps officials expect the number to grow.

31.33 inches:

The three-day rainfall total in Busick, Yancey County between Sept. 25-27, which was among the highest in the state. The Sept. 27 rainfall total alone was 14.91 inches.

26.1 feet:

The record-breaking crest of the Swannanoa River at Biltmore Village, besting the previous record of 20.7 feet set in 1916. Flood stage is 10 feet.

24.67 feet:

The record-breaking crest of the French Broad River in Asheville, besting the previous record of 23 feet set during the Great Flood of 1916. Flood stage is 9.5 feet.

100:

Estimated number of bridges evaluated by North Carolina Department of Transportation that will need replacement due to Helene.

80%

The estimated portion of Asheville's River Arts District destroyed by the floodwaters of the French Broad River, according to Katie Cornell, executive director of ArtsAVL. The district had 26 warehouses of art space and 300 artists. Those looking to help sustain the artists can shop their wares at www.loveashevillefromafar.com.

'Several billion':

The rough, early estimate of the cost to repair and replace just NCDOT-maintained roads, according to a department spokesperson.

\$250 billion:

The upper limit of AccuWeather's estimate of Helene's damage in the United States.

40 trillion gallons:

The estimated five-day rainfall totals east of the Mississippi River from Sept. 24 to Sept. 29, based on calculations from research meteorologist Ryan Maue. That's enough water to fill about 60,606,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

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Army soldiers help WNC community after Helene, a bail of mud at a time

October 15, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Ryley Ober; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 917 Words Page: A2 OpenURL Link

CHIMNEY ROCK – Holding mud-soaked Christmas ornaments and standing in the ruins of his once-beloved, now-condemned holiday shop of 24 years, Frank Plichta dealt with the destruction left from an unprecedented Western North Carolina flooding event like a modern-day Santa Claus.

He cracked jokes. He laughed. He cursed the "pricks" of Farm Bureau Insurance.

"People ask me, why are you laughing? If I don't laugh, you don't want to see what I'd do," Plitcha said Oct. 10, between calling out orders of where to place Christmas knickknacks and antiques, now muddied from the Rocky Broad River bursting a hole in his Chimney Rock shop two weeks ago.

Plichta is accustomed to strangers picking through his holiday themed trinkets at The Christmas Cottage; but usually, it doesn't require digging through layers of muck to sort through his nativity scenes, peppermint-scented lotion and nutcrackers. And his usual shop goers aren't dressed in camo, boots and bearing the patch of the 101st Airborne Division of the U.S. Army.

"U.S. Army, thank God they are here. If I had to do this by myself, it'd be months," Plitcha said, noting that October is the shop's best season. It was "beyond" stocked.

Up Main Street, a mound of soiled shoes lay outside Bubba O'Leary's General Store, hauled out by Army soldiers. A chasmic hole gapes in the floor of Chimney Rock Gem Mine as more Army members organize store goods. Further up, the bridge leading up to Chimney Rock State Park is being rebuilt – the road beyond it is indistinguishable from the river.

For most of the small business owners along Chimney Rock's Main Street, this was one of their first glimpses of the destruction left by Tropical Storm Helene, which whipped across WNC Sept. 27. Officials have a list of business owners, as well as residents of Terrace Drive, to keep traffic limited during cleanup.

They were first allowed access to work on their shops Oct. 9, according to Chimney Rock Mayor Peter O'Leary. A whole Army battalion arrived to start shoveling mud.

"It's amazing to see all these people bringing out all these buckets of mud, and you start to realize the magnitude of the cleanup," O'Leary said, who also owns Bubba O'Leary's.

"You can't live through something like this and live the rest of your life without wanting to help other people," O'Leary finished through tears, "because they're helping us."

'We plan for this': Army support sticking around WNC

When Jacob Layton, soldier in the 101st Airborne Division, left his hometown outside Fayetteville to help with disaster relief in WNC, it was the first time his wife was happy to see him go. Growing up with the mountains at his back door, he recalled visiting Lake Lure and Chimney Rock. His sister took her senior pictures on the Lake Lure Flowing Bridge, now destroyed by floodwaters.

Layton has trained Ukrainians on the U.S.'s mortar system in Germany. A fellow 101st soldier, Nathan Baca, helped build a NATO base in Hungary. Yet, coming to WNC after Helene has felt more meaningful, they said.

"I'm from a rural area like this," Baca said. "And I know how it feels being on that end of things when no one was there to help."

"It feels like we're putting our time to better use here, because we're directly helping Americans," he added.

This portion of the U.S. Army arrived to help with recovery efforts in WNC on Oct. 4, starting around Marshall and Hot Springs then moving south to Chimney Rock. Another branch of the U.S. Army, the Corps of Engineers, mobilized to WNC the day flood waters crested on Sept. 27, according to Colonel Brad Morgan.

At FEMA's request, 250 USACE engineers and contractors are providing support to 25 effected counties in WNC through temporary power installation, debris removal, water and wastewater infrastructure assessments, filtration of contaminated water, and emergency support, Morgan said.

Despite Milton hitting Florida just two weeks after Helene's catastrophic flooding on WNC, Army engineers will be here to rebuild as long it takes – anywhere from "months to a year," Morgan added.

"We are always planning within our region, how do we respond to near simultaneous disasters," Morgan said, explaining how the South Atlantic Region of USACE does a tabletop exercise every April to plan for a possible "one-two punch."

"You plan for it, you prepare for it, then you kind of see how it plays out."

Ryley Ober is the Public Safety Reporter for Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA Today Network. She is a graduate of Indiana University and was the Citizen Times Summer News Reporting Intern in 2022. Email her at rober@gannett.com and follow her on Twitter @ryleyober

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C38F79B6F2BA08>



Searching for hope in chaos - Asheville mother loses parents, child to Tropical Storm Helene's floodwaters

October 15, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Isabel Hughes; USA TODAY NETWORK | Section: News | 1677 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

A single, pink rose blossomed on a scraggly bush next to where the front wall of the Drye family home stood until 16 days ago, the plant's greenery a welcomed brightness amid the mud-coated land. Two thorny offshoots, each holding a single, unopened bud, clung defiantly to the bush. Despite floodwaters rising 27 feet above Swannanoa River Road, the plant persevered, its leaves now soaking up the bright Asheville sun. At first glance, the rose bush appeared largely unremarkable. It was a feat that it survived Tropical Storm Helene's flooding. But several other plants and at least one tree also remained standing when the waters receded. But it was the trio of roses that Megan Drye took solace in on a Sunday afternoon in mid-October. She believes they are a sign from her parents and young son, who perished when the family's home collapsed into the Swannanoa River on Sept. 27.

Megan, 39, was the sole survivor of the flood, which killed 7-year-old Micah Drye and Nora and Michael Drye, both 73.

In the wake of Helene's devastating blow to the family, Megan and her two sisters, who live out of state, are trying to pick up the pieces. While each day is a struggle, they're focused on remembering their family for how they lived, rather than the tragedy of their deaths.

"Micah was a piece of all of us," Megan told the Citizen Times Oct. 13. "He was silent — he was actually quite shy until he opened up, just like mom, and then he was your best friend.

"And he was affectionate, just like my dad and me," she continued. "He got a little piece of everyone."

Drye sisters await news as the flood comes

The last two weeks were a blur for the Drye sisters.

When floodwaters forced the family to the roof, Megan texted sisters Heather Kephart and Jess Drye Turner, telling the women they had escaped to the highest spot in their home. Though cell service was already knocked out, Megan had upgraded to the iPhone 16 a week before. The new iPhones allow for satellite messaging when there's no cell or Wi-Fi coverage.

Jess quickly took to Facebook to document the increasingly-frightening situation.

"They are watching 18-wheelers and cars floating by," she wrote on Facebook at 1:46 p.m. on Sept. 27. "This is definitely a moment when faith is all you have. God knows the outcome already."

About 30 minutes later, she added a photo that Megan had sent, which has since gone viral. It showed Megan's white sneakers on the roof of the home, water nearly reaching the eaves. Two hours later, she added a second photo, which also received thousands of interactions.

Jess' next update wasn't for almost 11 more hours, just before 3 a.m. on Sept. 28.

Her parents and nephew had drowned, she wrote. Megan was also plunged into the river during the home's collapse, but she was rescued after becoming wedged between storage containers. They weren't sure, however, where their sister was taken.

By 4:12 a.m., Jess and her husband were preparing to head to Western North Carolina from Texas. They'd arrive by noon that day, she wrote in the Facebook post, which was gaining traction. Could anyone help them find Megan?

The plea paid off.

A nurse who worked at the hospital where Megan was brought was made aware of the post. She alerted her director, who allowed the sisters to speak on the phone.

Megan was relatively unharmed, suffering only a broken ankle and hypothermia. She spent a single night in the hospital.

"Whoever it was that contacted someone they know in the hospital to see if she was there, I can never thank you enough for what you've done," Jess later wrote on Facebook.

A mother watches as her son, parents are swept away

Once Jessica and Heather were reunited with Megan, and she recounted what occurred.

The family was on the roof for hours as the floodwaters rushed by them. Eventually, the house gave way.

The group managed to temporarily remain to the roof, which was floating. Then, power lines and trees dislodged Megan and Michael from their spot. Nora and Micah, who were nearby, managed to remain in place.

As Michael began to slide toward the water, Megan tried to grab him, she said. Unsuccessful, they both fell in.

Megan briefly managed to get back out of the water, but not for long. She could no longer see her mom or son. She could hear the 7-year-old scream, however.

"Jesus, save me!" she remembers him crying.

Then, "chaos happened," she said.

Megan watched as her father floated by. The current was so strong that it moved tractor-trailers like twigs.

Soon after, Nora began screaming for Micah. Not long after, she, too, floated by Megan. Micah followed.

Megan, meanwhile, was struggling on her own. She and her dog Bella were stuck in a tree that was felled in the flood, and the water periodically kept pushing her under.

"I just kept thinking, 'I didn't know I was going to die today,'" she said. "It was complete panic."

At some point, she said, she felt a presence within her that guided her next steps.

"'You have to let go, and you have to let go of everything on you,'" Megan recalled a voice telling her. Letting go included releasing the dog from her arms. "I remember thinking about Bella and saying, 'I'm so sorry.' It was loss after loss after loss."

Yet she listened to what she believed was God and removed her shoes and her backpack and other items. She became light enough that the water stopped pulling her down. Then, she let go to the tree she was clinging to and felt "this peace, this presence, this this calmness that wasn't me."

Megan eventually stopped moving after becoming stuck between the two storage trailers. That's where she later was saved.

"It wasn't until they finally rescued me that I completely turned, like, human again, and completely crumbled," she said. "I don't think that (human) version of me could have survived, so that's only God or something bigger that that filled me in those moments."

On Sept. 30, three days after the flood, the family learned search and rescue workers found Micah's body. He was located about a quarter-mile from where Megan was rescued, which was a mile from where the home once stood, Jess said.

Two days after that, on Oct. 2, search crews found Michael's body. And three days later, Jess received a call that Nora was found. The "stubborn" woman, Jess said fondly, had kept her backpack on. That's how first responders were able to identify her.

Remembering their loved ones

In the wake of that horrifying day, the three sisters are turning to one another for comfort. They also take solace in their family memories.

Michael was an empath, Megan and Jess both said, who always found time to comfort anyone in need. A family law attorney, Jess joked that she didn't know how he pushed through, given he "just absorbed everything about everybody."

Megan echoed her, saying that even in her most difficult moments, he'd find ways to help.

"Even if I was giving the most rejecting type of demeanor, he would still be there and push and push," she said.

"He'd remind me that he loves me, remind me that God loves me and remind me that I could do all things through

Him."

Nora, meanwhile, was a strong woman who would do anything for her family.

While it may have appeared to some that she had an outer shell, Jess said, it was only because she was choosy who she gave her energy to. Nora stepped in to help Megan, a single mom, more times than she can count.

"She was my constant, the person I did everything with" Megan said. "Our bond was different because of the presence she filled in mine and Micah's lives."

And little Micah.

A student at Haw Creek Elementary School, he was gentle and affectionate, a lover of superheroes and dinosaurs and Legos. He was one of several Helene victims who attended Buncombe County Schools.

He was brave, too, Megan said.

One night prior to moving to her parents' home, Megan heard her son in their apartment. He wanted an evening snack, but it was dark out and the kitchen lights were off. He was scared.

"'Be brave Micah, be brave,'" Megan heard him say. He eventually mustered up the courage to run in and out of the room and fill his small belly.

"He really, truly believed that he could conquer anything, even at that small age," Megan said. "He was just confident that he was always protected and secure."

As she later thought back to the roses that remain outside her family's home, she was even more convinced the flowers were her family's spirits.

Micah, Nora and Michael were all strong and beautiful in their own way, pushing through any hardship that came up — even if it was just a dark kitchen. Much like the roses, they bloomed more vividly after a challenge.

As she thought about the plants, the sadness in Megan's voice abated.

"The seeds that are planted and the roots that are embedded can't be taken away, and they will come back and bloom again" Megan said. "I believe that's a sign, that that's them saying, 'Hello, It's bigger than us.' It's bigger than anything earthly."

Isabel Hughes is a Delaware-based public safety reporter aiding the Asheville Citizen Times with post-Helene coverage. She can be reached at ihughes@delawareonline.com. For all things breaking news, follow her on X at @izzihughes_

Text updates

We are staffing a text message service to bring you the latest on Helene, connect you with resources and answer any questions you have. To sign up, text "Hello" to (239) 241-6343.

More coverage

Army soldiers help WNC community after Helene, a bail of mud at a time. 2A

Asheville knew a disastrous flood was possible. What'll change next time? 3A

What the numbers tell us about Helene's devastation and recovery. 4A

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Hearts with Hands, community members help Swannanoa after Helene. 5A

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Asheville knew a disastrous flood was possible - What'll change next time?

October 15, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Steve Howe; USA TODAY NETWORK | Section: News | 1433 Words Page: A3 OpenURL Link

Asheville is no stranger to flooding and extreme precipitation events, though the impacts of Tropical Storm Helene were unprecedented in their intensity.

Helene was a sobering reminder of the effects of climate change, which enhanced the tropical cyclone with record-warm Gulf of Mexico waters and increased wind speeds. It also washed away the last vestiges of the climate haven mirage — a title bestowed on Asheville by national media outlets — for a community removed from the extreme heat and coastal flooding tied most closely to the public perception of the climate crisis.

Asheville always expected extreme precipitation

An extreme precipitation event in Asheville isn't an unknown phenomenon. The city's 2018 climate resilience report highlights it as the stressor in four of its seven main climate threats: flooding, landslides, supply chain threats and nuisance flooding, runoff and erosion.

Western North Carolina has seen flooding and landslide devastation in the past, with the previous benchmark 1916 flood — a 500-year flooding event — and tropical cyclone-spawned floods in 2004 and 2021.

A stalled band of showers preceded the rainfall from Helene, combining for record-breaking rainfall totals. The Asheville Regional Airport lost communication the morning of Sept. 27, but still broke its three-day rainfall record with nearly 14 inches of precipitation. The heavy rain swelled the Swannanoa and French Broad rivers well beyond major flood stage, cresting at 26 feet and 24.67 feet, respectively.

North Carolinians already knew the mountains were vulnerable to floods, highlighted recently by catastrophic flooding three years ago from Tropical Storm Fred. There's a fire risk in the region, too.

"While it may seem it's a little bit cooler or it doesn't have sea-level rise issues, we never really viewed Asheville or anywhere as a climate haven," said state climatologist Kathie Dello. "You can point to anywhere in the world and see the fingerprints of climate change."

Asheville's climate risks highlight the dual components of that threat: the likelihood of an extreme event happening and the inability of built human systems to respond to it, said Nicholas Shanahan, outreach and engagement specialist with the North Carolina Institute for Climate Studies.

"Here in the mountains we have particular vulnerabilities that were really exposed by Helene, particularly becoming cut off by landslides and remembering that this has historically been a very remote area," Shanahan said.

It's not that Asheville and Western North Carolina are worse off than other areas when it comes to effects of climate change, Shanahan said, but there are vulnerabilities.

"We got hit with a major event that is certainly shocking, but in some ways, is not entirely surprising," he said. "These type of events have always happened. They are increasingly happening in the region."

Climate change is expected to exacerbate three influences on flooding: more intense rainfall, drier soils and less snow. The regions already carrying an outsized burden of flooding, including Appalachia, are expected to see more of the same in the future.

Turning to climate resilience

Climate resilience can take a lot of different forms, including better planning for future development and better communication systems.

Dello said that where flooding from Helene occurred should likely become the new benchmark for determining where new homes and businesses are built. Flood waters from Helene well exceeded the boundaries of the 100-year flood maps.

There also was a huge communication gap during Helene, where the forecast was accurate but people living in affected areas didn't necessarily get the message it would be fatal or catastrophic. The gap was both a physical reality of spotty cell service and internet in rural mountain communities and a more philosophical one: People didn't comprehend the unprecedented risk from the storm.

Instead of looking for a climate haven, a near-mythical location isolated from the effects of a warming planet, climate experts are instead looking toward climate resilience — preparing better for disasters, including improving infrastructure, and determining how to recover rapidly from extreme events.

"There are climate threats everywhere in the country, but so much of it is about how we deal with those events after the fact," said Laura Stevens, research scientist with the North Carolina Institute for Climate Studies.

Communities can improve their climate resilience several ways, from long-range planning on development to prearranged mutual aid among communities in rural areas that may go days before receiving state and federal assistance. It's also as simple and fundamental as re-evaluating zoning and building codes.

Many of the hardest hit areas were in older zoned areas, Shanahan said. "We're going to have to make some very tough decisions about how and where we rebuild and where we don't," he said.

Those informal conversations already are happening online in places like the Asheville subreddit, where different proposals for the future of the city's River Arts District were bandied about. The arts district was particularly hard hit due to its proximity to the French Broad River. Policymakers will have to have real conversations about the future of regions affected by Helene and what will happen next in terms of infrastructure and development.

The city's climate resistance report highlights how many properties already were at a medium or high vulnerability and risk of flooding, including 450 commercial parcels, 16 industrial parcels and 572 residential parcels. It acknowledged steps like property buyouts and flood control measures, but said the city continues to face an increasing risk of flooding due to more development and impervious surfaces.

"How Asheville responds and rebuilds will almost necessarily become a focal point, a sort of gold standard, of how to do things in the region," Shanahan said.

The Asheville climate-haven myth

In her 15 years in Asheville, few people in the city are likely to have had more conversations about climate change than Stevens, the research scientist.

Stevens does education and outreach in local communities. Asheville as a climate haven has come up in those conversations, including in retirement communities where some residents moved to Western North Carolina due to its desirable weather.

The list of those moving to the Asheville area for more pleasant climes includes Stevens's mother-in-law, who wanted to avoid the tornadoes, ice storms and extreme heat of Oklahoma.

The existing climate hazards around flooding, landslides and wildfires had sparked discussion of whether Asheville was a climate haven in those community outreach events — even before the devastation of Helene, Stevens said.

"A lot of the folks there didn't think it was (a climate haven) now, even though that was the reason why they had initially moved here," she said.

A climate haven is a place believed to be relatively isolated from the impacts of human-caused global warming and subsequent climate change, said Lawrence Torcello, a professor of philosophy at Rochester Institute of Technology who studies climate change and disinformation. They're a refuge from the most urgent effects of climate change. They're also not real.

"It is a less extreme form of self-deception but the notion that we can flee from global warming shares a similar source of anxiety as some more pernicious versions of climate science denial and conspiracy thinking," Torcello said in an email.

The idea of a safe port in the climate storm is appealing, but not rooted in the reality of the crisis. Especially in the aftermath of an unprecedented disaster like Helene. "I was never crazy about the term, because where do you go to outrun climate change?" Dello said.

Outside of anecdotes, polls show Buncombe County is concerned about the crisis. An estimated 69% of residents polled by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication are worried about climate change, 5% greater than the national average, and an estimated 48% believe they've personally experienced climate change, 4% greater than the national average.

The view of anywhere being a climate haven, including Asheville, provides a false sense of security, Shanahan said.

"We just need to be sober and clear-eyed about every area's climate vulnerabilities, including ours," he said.

People want to feel safe where they live and where they visit, especially in the face of an existential threat like the climate crisis. But it takes more than good vibes to have communities ready to withstand more severe weather resulting from the warming planet.

"I think that there are discussions we can have about how to keep people safe, but right now, just advertising places as climate havens and having none of that resilience discussion is dangerous," Dello said.

Steve Howe reports on weather, climate and the Great Lakes for USA TODAY Network-New York. An RIT graduate, he has covered myriad topics over the years, including public safety, local government, national politics and economic development in New York and Utah.

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I-40 won't open until at least January

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A major thoroughfare through Western North Carolina into Tennessee will remain closed until at least January, according to the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

Interstate 40 closed between exit 20 in North Carolina and exit 432 in Tennessee due to damage from Tropical Storm Helene. The state secured Wright Brothers Construction on a \$10 million contract with incentives to stabilize the westbound lanes to open to some traffic by Jan. 4, NCDOT spokesperson Tanner Holland told the Citizen Times.

Plans to fully reconstruct the damage to I-40 are under discussion with the Tennessee Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration with the goal of a contract agreement by the time the stabilization is complete.

The proximity to the Pigeon River at the Tennessee border has made restoring the interstate a challenge, Holland said. NCDOT drone photographs show the river caused the partial collapse of the shoulder and supports for eastbound lanes of the highway, including a bypass lane around the tunnel near mile marker 4.

The damage to roadways in Western North Carolina was eye-opening, Holland said, and much work remains for the more than 2,000 NCDOT employees deployed to the region. The agency expects more than 100 bridges will need full replacement following assessments in the wake of the flooding.

"We're into damage assessment now and ... we are comfortable at this point saying that it's going to be several billion dollars for all of the damage to just DOT roadway infrastructure," Holland said.

Alternate routes from Tennessee and North Carolina while I-40 is closed

Interstate 81: Interstate 81 offers a bypass to I-40. From Knoxville, travelers can head north on I-81, which connects with Interstate 26, providing an alternate route to Asheville and other areas in North Carolina. This is the alternate route TDOT recommends.

Local alternatives: U.S. Route 25E takes travelers from Knoxville northeast through Morristown, where it links up with Interstate 81.

Check for road closure updates across North Carolina at drivenc.gov.

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Head of North Henderson High School Named Principal of the Year

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HENDERSONVILLE — John Shepard, principal of North Henderson High School, has been named the 2024-2025 Principal of the Year for Henderson County Public Schools, the district announced yesterday. Shepard earned this honor previously, in 2019. He was chosen for the award by his peers — the other 22 principals in the county school system, who nominate candidates and choose a winner each year.

Shepard's peers surprised him with news of his award during a Hurricane Helene Recovery meeting.

"I am once again truly overwhelmed by this honor," Shepard said in a statement. "It brings me great joy to serve the students, staff, and community of North Henderson High School. Henderson County is blessed with exceptional district leadership, remarkable school administrators, and outstanding teachers. Working with these committed educators is a distinguished opportunity."

Shepard taught social studies and worked as an administrator in Buncombe County before joining Henderson County Public Schools in 2013 as an assistant principal at North Henderson High. In 2014, he was appointed principal there. He holds a bachelor of science in Education from Western Carolina University, a master's degree in school administration, and a doctorate in educational leadership from Gardner-Webb University.

HCPS Superintendent Mark R. Garrett lauded the principal, saying in a statement, "Dr. Shepard's continued focus on both academic growth and personal leadership makes North Henderson High School a model across the state."

Garrett said he had witnessed Shepard help distribute supplies to the local community center in the wake of Tropical Storm Helene. Garrett said, "He truly personifies his school's motto, 'Love Purple! Live Gold!' We are fortunate to have Dr. Shepard leading in our district and proud to have him represent Henderson County Public Schools."

According to a school district announcement, North Henderson High School achieved the highest academic growth index in the district for the 2023-2024 school year and has been certified as a Lighthouse School through the LEAD High School program, which aims to foster student leadership and personal development. Shepard has been a champion of the Leader in Me model, which incorporates leadership lessons into the school curriculum.

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