

Four county firemen deploy to Avery County to assist in Hurricane Helene recovery

October 15, 2024 | Daily Herald (Roanoke Rapids, NC) Author: Richard Holm rholm@rrdailyherald.com| Section: Local | 560 Words OpenURL Link

ROANOKE RAPIDS — Four Halifax County firefighters deployed Sunday afternoon to western North Carolina, where they will spend two weeks assisting in recovery efforts from Hurricane Helene.

Jarred Wood with the Roanoke Rapids Fire Department, Chris Barus with the Enfield Fire Department, Dylan Clark with the Weldon Fire Department, and Will Harris with RRFD and Davie Volunteer Department prepped Sunday loading gear and necessities to take on their trip to Avery County, where they will provide coverage and assistance to Linville Fire Department.

Fire Chief Jason Patrick with RRFD said the individuals have been rostered with the Federal Emergency
Management Agency through the North Carolina Office of State Fire Marshal to be pulled and deployed for disaster
events. Patrick said this is the first time having a crew deployed for such events since seven years ago when there
were wildfires out in the mountains

"Naturally, we can't afford to send so many at one time, being a small department, but we send a few and then grab a few from outside in the county that might want to be able to go," he said. "And so their initial assignment was Ashe County in the West Jefferson area, but they called Thursday or Friday and had their mission reassigned to Linville. So they're going up near the Grandfather Mountain area in Linville, which is right around the corner from Banner Elk as well."

Patrick said the crew would bring two work trucks, one from the Davie department and one from RRFD, as well as their structural firefighting gear, air packs, and some other necessities. He said there is another group from Winterville that way who they are familiar with and had filled them on some of the details they will be handling.

"Some of our guys are familiar with a couple of those guys, so they've been in contact with them, and they've kind of filled them in about the power and the water and all that," Patrick said. "So they've kind of got a little bit of a heads up on what they're going into, and then they'll be at the mercy of whatever is needed. That's something that the Office of State Fire Marshal sent out a couple of weeks ago just to help these people wherever you can. It might not all be firefighting. You might be out cutting trees, clearing roads or doing whatever. They're there to help where they can."

Patrick said that if the crew pays any out of pocket expenses, they will have to file with FEMA for reimbursement, which includes keeping up with the mileage. He said the reimbursement will go back to the City of Roanoke Rapids to reimburse the members. Additionally, Chief Patrick said the deployment would be good for morale within the community.

"I think it's good for us to go," he said. "You know, for years we've had different ones who want to go, but we've not always been in a way that we could do it. I remember back when [Hurricane] Floyd came through, we had people from all other cities, from public works like Raleigh and different places, who came in to help out with cleaning up our area and stuff like that. So I think it's just a small thing of what we can do to just send a couple of guys up there to try to help out where we can."

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Vice President Harris campaigns in Greenville

October 15, 2024 | Daily News, The (Jacksonville, NC) Author: Janet Conner-Knox Daily News correspondent | Section: Local | 979 Words OpenURL Link

GREENVILLE — Marsha Lyndell and Shenelle Howard met each other in the long winding line, waiting to get into Minges Coliseum on the East Carolina University campus to see Vice President Kamala Harris Sunday afternoon.

The venue, which has 8,000 seats, was full and there were more people than seats.

People got in line as early as 10:30 a.m. Harris spoke for 24 minutes around 4:20 p.m. But those who came did not seem to mind waiting for hours and they sang and danced as they waited.

Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, spent much of the weekend talking to North Carolina residents about her plans for the country, if she is elected president. North Carolina is one of seven states that have almost equal support from both parties, making them battleground or swing states. Harris and former President Donald Trump have concentrated a lot of their attention on these states, campaigning heavily as Election Day approaches on Nov. 5.

It turns out, both Lyndell and Howard wanted to hear Harris speak so they could, hopefully, figure out who to vote for in the November election.

Lyndell, a lifelong Republican, voted for Trump the first time he ran, in 2016. She voted for Biden in 2020 and is unsure what to do this time around.

"I am not happy with Republicans and the things they are willing to say. I don't know when my party got so extreme in their views. No decency," she said. "I am not happy with Democrats, either. I just don't know what to do."

Howard, a lifelong Democrat, said she no longer believes Democrats will keep their promises.

"There are heads of households here who still make \$8 an hour and have the same burdens anybody else has, but not enough money to live," she said. "There is no housing for the working poor and many of them are African-American women. Nobody speaks to us, but they want our vote."

If they do not hear what they need, both Lyndell and Howard say they may not vote for anyone for president but will vote on the rest of the candidates down the ticket. For example, both favor Democrat Josh Stein over Republican Mark Robinson in the governor's race.

It is the undecided voter like Lyndell and Howard that can turn North Carolina and other swing states either blue or red.

As Harris spoke, she began by talking about how the damage from recent hurricanes is a nonpartisan issue, saying her prayers are with everyone who has been impacted by the storm.

"I am focused on those states and those officials, both Republican and Democrat, to let them know we will be with you every step of the way," Harris said. "In times like this, we stand together as one nation. That is who we are."

She warned the enthusiastic crowd, the race to the presidency will be a tight race.

"We have hard work ahead of us, but we love hard work," Harris said. "We will win."

Harris took the time to point out the differences between her and Trump, her Republican opponent, saying their visions are very different.

"His is focused on the past," Harris said. "The other, ours, (is) focused on the future."

Harris said her campaign is focused on helping working families across the country, finding ways to bring down the cost of living, investing in small businesses and supporting reproductive choices for women.

"None of that matters for Donald Trump," she said. "Instead from him, we are hearing from that same old tired playbook."

Harris said Trump has no idea how to help middle class families but is only focused on himself. She pointed out how all of the presidents have done sit down interviews with CBS on "60 Minutes" and released their medical health reports from doctors. She pointed out that Trump has not done either and challenged him to do so.

"He is unwilling to meet again for us to debate," she said.

Harris said it makes people wonder if Trump's unwillingness to debate again would show people he is weak and unfaithful.

"For these reasons and so many more, it is time to turn the page and chart a new way forward," Harris said.

Harris promised to work for all Americans by keeping the Affordable Care Act, and having a \$6,000 credit for families with children. She also promised a tax credit for people who are caregivers for family members.

Harris pointed out throughout her career she has only had one client, and that is the people. She believes it is why she has support from Republicans and Libertarians in this race.

While she says she has nonpartisan support, Democratic presidential candidates have not won in North Carolina since 2008.

Additionally, Harris' poll numbers are down in comparison to where they were in 2020 for President Joe Biden and where they were in 2016 for Hillary Clinton, at the same time in October during their races.

Harris acknowledges the challenge, but told her supporters on Sunday they must work for a North Carolina win.

U.S. Rep. Don Davis, D-N.C., also spoke at the rally and encouraged those in attendance to vote early.

"The road to the White House goes through eastern North Carolina," Davis said. "We can do it. We can win."

N.C. Sen. Rachel Hunt, a Democrat who represents Mecklenburg County and daughter of former governor Jim Hunt, was also at the rally and asked voters for their support in her bid for lieutenant governor.

Harris arrived in North Carolina Saturday and met with Black leaders at The Pit Authentic Barbecue restaurant, in Raleigh, before she joined volunteers who were there to pack bandages, baby formula, baby wipes, pain relief pills and other items for victims of Hurricane Helene, which tore through western North Carolina last month.

On Sunday, the vice president spoke during a church service at Koinonia Christian Center in Greenville prior to the campaign rally at the ECU campus.

The weekend trip was her second to the battleground state after it was struck by Hurricane Helene.

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Helene shows value of fiscal restraint

October 15, 2024 | Daily Record, The (Dunn, NC) Author: John Hood | Section: Opinion | 505 Words

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RALEIGH — The devastation wreaked on North Carolina by Hurricane Helene will take weeks to assess, months to clear out, and years to repair or rebuild. Second only to the value of the lives lost will be the exorbitant fiscal and economic costs of our recovery.

Our state government is reasonably well-prepared to shoulder its share. Our federal government is not.

Last week, the General Assembly authorized an initial \$273 million withdrawal from North Carolina's rainy-day fund to cover initial recovery expenses and changes in elections administration. Gov. Roy Cooper signed the bill.

That's only the first tranche. Lawmakers will return to the capital more than once before year's end, then commence regular session in early 2025. They'll appropriate much more money for reconstruction.

North Carolina has lots of money set aside. The rainy-day fund itself still contains about \$4.5 billion. Other accounts contain billions more. I don't mean to minimize the storm's staggering costs. I'm just pointing out that the General Assembly won't have to cut other programs, raise taxes, or borrow money to fulfill its responsibilities.

Congress is another story. Over the past couple of decades, presidents and lawmakers of both parties have run massive federal deficits and made exorbitant promises that far exceed any reasonable expectation of revenues.

Every dollar Congress authorizes and the executive branch distributes for hurricane relief in North Carolina is, in effect, a borrowed dollar. It represents a debt to be paid in the future, not a gift.

Of course, North Carolinians aren't the only ones who must pay each dollar back (with interest). Decades ago, our politicians essentially nationalized the provision of relief and reconstruction after natural disasters. I don't think that was wise. States and localities ought to make their own preparations and save their own money to handle future emergencies.

But at this point, I'm not sure how to extricate ourselves from this process. If Congress passed a law next year to slash federal disaster relief and then Kansas gets clobbered by tornados, their taxpayers could reasonably complain that they helped clean up after North Carolina's disaster and then didn't get their "turn" at withdrawing funds for their own.

The next best thing, then, is for future Congresses and presidents to take their budgeting responsibilities more seriously. As I've pointed out many times, the opportunity to bring federal revenues and expenditures closer to alignment without painful adjustment has long since passed. The gap is too large.

It can't be substantially closed by eliminating "waste, fraud, and abuse." Nor can it be substantially closed by "tax hikes on the wealthy." Contrary to popular misconception, the United States already has one of the most steeply progressive tax codes in the developed world. According to the left-wing Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, the bottom quintile of American taxpayers pay an average of 17% of their income in federal, state, and local taxes. The middle quintile pays 26%. The wealthiest 1% pay 35%.

Washington's fiscal recklessness should be one of the top voting issues this year. Alas, it isn't. But ignoring the problem won't make it go away..

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'Wonder Women' to the rescue

October 15, 2024 | Daily Record, The (Dunn, NC) Author: Robert Jordan | Section: News | 581 Words OpenURL Link

Hurricane Helene devastated North Carolinians in the western part of the Old North State. A group of brave, hard working women joined the throngs of those determined to make a difference for the victims.

Rev. Meagan V. Greene, co-pastor of First Baptist Church of Erwin, joined a seven member all-female team during their deployment on a relief mission to the mountains of western North Carolina on Tuesday, Oct. 8. The women joined with Baptists on Mission as the crew became part of an enormous disaster response of volunteers helping recovery efforts following the destruction from the storm. Greene accompanied Rev. Allison Farrah of First Baptist Church of Hamlet on the mission.

With boots on the ground for three days, the team accomplished numerous assignments and dubbed its group "The Wonder Women."

The squad arrived on scene in Hendersonville on Tuesday evening. Only 45 minutes after they arrived at First Baptist Church Hendersonville, the power was restored.

"This makes First Baptist Church Erwin's motto 'Go Shine the Light' take on a deeper meaning," said Greene.

The rest of the first day was spent checking in with Baptists on Mission.

The team was dispatched to a Helene survivor's home on Wednesday morning.

"He lived by a creek," explained Greene. "When the flood waters rose, the water inundated the residence. The water mark was 5 feet and one could clearly see that level mark on the side of his home.

"When we arrived, he looked at our group of seven women and another church group accompanying us and with tears in his eyes said, 'I wish I knew you were coming to help, I would have taken off work. Thank you for reminding me that I do not walk alone.'"

The team spent the morning cleaning his yard, removing debris and fallen trees while the accompanying group worked inside removing furniture that the flood waters had ruined.

By Wednesday afternoon, the team completed the work at the first home and were sent to remove a fallen tree at the home of a woman and her five children. "When we arrived, she said, 'It's the Christians that always show up first,'" shared Greene.

The group spent the rest of the day operating chainsaws and removing the fallen trees.

The Wonder Women went to Spruce Pines Thursday morning. The first assignment was performing a mud-out on a couple's home. The husband told the team his neighbors had already come and completed the work. The couple told the women it was comforting to know they had not been forgotten by Baptists on Missions who had sent the team to help.

The second assignment of the day was to go tear out the sheetrock of a home where the basement had completely flooded. The seven ripped out all of the damaged drywall within a few hours.

"The devastation in Spuce Pines was difficult to see," Greene said. "But the resilience of the people and their

determination was evident. The storm, flood and mudslide devastated the community but hope was everywhere and hope is never a small thing."

The Baptists on Mission organization reports volunteers have helped feed the hungry; assisted with shower and laundry facilities; manned chain saw teams; tarped roofs; cleaned out muddy homes and more.

"Please know that we will have many opportunities to serve for many weeks, months and years to come," the missions group states on its website. "Your team may very well be more needed a month or two from now than they are right now."

The relief efforts continue. The recovery may well last for months and years.

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John Hood: Helene brought out the best in Carolinians

October 15, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 652 Words OpenURL Link

As we mourn the deaths and grapple with the destruction inflicted on our state by Hurricane Helene, I submit that the storm has brought out much that is good about North Carolina — and much that is vile about social media.

I'll start with the positive. Residents of the mountain counties most affected by Helene have fought heroically for their lives, their families and their neighbors, often against long odds and terrifying threats. They haven't fought alone. Others from across North Carolina and beyond flocked in to help.

We've only just begun to collect their stories of prudent planning, daring rescues and dogged determination. These tales feature the likes of Hendersonville's James White, who led more than a dozen neighbors sheltering in his home to safety with ropes and lifejackets, as well as Eddie Hunnell, recently moved to North Carolina from Colorado, who leapt into the swollen New River to save a stranger, Lesley Worth, separated from her husband by the raging stream.

At larger scale, hundreds of churches, charities, companies and volunteer networks sprang to the assistance of their fellow Carolinians. So did law enforcement, fire and rescue teams and emergency response personnel from counties, municipalities, state agencies and other public authorities.

On the ground, we've seen a great deal of cooperation across jurisdictional and political boundaries. Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler, for example, sent North Carolina Forest Service staffers familiar with the rugged terrain to guide National Guard units into position. On Oct. 7, Democratic and Republican appointees on the State Board of Elections voted unanimously to empower local boards in 13 hard-hit counties to modify the locations and hours of early-voting sites and other election procedures — but only by bipartisan votes of those boards, a prudent constraint to reassure a jittery public.

Democratic mayors have worked closely with Republican county commissioners to coordinate relief. Gov. Roy Cooper, U.S. Sens. Thom Tillis and Ted Budd, lawmakers from both parties — all have pitched in to comfort victims, survey damage, coordinate responses and convey timely, accurate information to the public.

That's not to say there haven't been miscues and disagreements. Tillis and Budd questioned the pace at which military personnel from Fort Liberty and other bases were deployed into the devastated counties after the storm. Others have criticized the adequacy of the response by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

While it will take some time to sort out all the claims and counterclaims, it's not too early to label these issues as legitimate topics for debate.

Unfortunately, much of the "debate" unfolding on social media over the past week has been anything but legitimate. Whether spreading wacky conspiracy theories about lithium mines and weather control or uttering grotesque slanders about Kamala Harris and Joe Biden intentionally "letting" Republican voters "drown," a host of very-online, supposedly conservative provocateurs and hacks have made a bad situation immeasurably worse.

Here's what a real conservative leader, state Sen. Kevin Corbin, had to say.

"PLEASE help stop this junk," wrote Corbin, who represents North Carolina's eight westernmost counties. "It is just a distraction to people trying to do their job.

"Folks, this is a catastrophic event of which this country has never known. It is the largest crisis event in the history

of N.C. The state is working non-stop. DOT has deployed workers from all over the state. Duke [Energy] has 10,000 workers on this. FEMA is here. The National Guard is here in large numbers."

Some incendiary memes are likely the product of misunderstandings, such as emergency officials redirecting volunteers away from dangerous roadways or relief agencies refusing certain donated items they aren't equipped to store or distribute. Others may well be the result of bad calls made in good faith, in stressful conditions, by officials with incomplete information or inadequate training.

Can policymakers properly second-guess such decisions after the fact? Of course! That time will come. Right now, our immediate challenges remain rescue and relief — challenges our fellow North Carolinians have met with magnificent resilience.

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US sees millions of climate refugees - Many moving to new locations over flooding

October 15, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The (NC) Author: Andrea Riquier; USA TODAY | Section: News | 811 Words Page: A7 OpenURL Link

Images from Florida, battered by two once-in-a-generation storms in a matter of weeks, are prompting a reckoning by Americans across the country.

"Will Florida be completely unlivable/destroyed in the next few years?" one Reddit user wondered.

On Oct.7, science writer Dave Levitan published an essay titled "At Some Point You Don't Go Back."

As many wonder why people still live there, a report from data analytics provider First Street offers some answers. Americans are perhaps more aware of the risks of a volatile climate than it might seem, and have been migrating in response to its effects for many years. The catch: the vast majority of those moves have been local, to higher ground across town or to the city next door, where better infrastructure may mean it doesn't flood as often.

As the threat has multiplied, however, the report's authors say it's now safe to assume that many parts of Florida have reached a "tipping point" at which moving a few blocks uphill isn't enough, and so many residents are leaving the area permanently that the population could decline.

"I do think there are places where we are approaching tipping points and we will begin to see larger migration movements," said Jeremy Porter, head of climate implications research at First Street, which released the report last winter.

"In Florida, the fact that homes are seeing longer 'time on the market' and lower 'sale to list prices' is indicative of declining demand and population outmigration," Porter said in a recent email exchange with USA TODAY.

Florida's real estate woes are well documented.

"Of the dozen markets where prices have fallen over the past 12 months, seven are in Florida," real estate data company ICE noted in its October Mortgage Monitor. Challenging market conditions throughout the state may be in large part due to the difficulty in obtaining affordable property insurance. In some areas like Jacksonville and Cape Coral, premiums are up nearly 80% since 2019.

Contract signings are also down in Florida, recent Redfin data showed. While Hurricane Helene probably accounted for some of the decline in recent weeks, sales activity also plunged 13% compared to a year ago in Fort Lauderdale and 15% in Miami, both of which are located on the eastern coast and are so far unaffected by storms.

But as First Street data show, Florida isn't the only place climate migrants are fleeing. At the micro level, more than 800,000 census blocks in the U.S. – or 7.4% of all blocks – have already passed local "tipping points" and are seeing outright population declines. These "Climate Abandonment Areas" have had a net loss of more than 3.2million people between 2000 and 2020 that can be directly attributed to flooding, the research shows.

Many of these areas are familiar to locals: parts of Staten Island, New York, that see constant "sunny day flooding," for example, or Bexar County, Texas, home to San Antonio – and an area not typically known for being waterlogged, Porter says.

"In Bexar County, TX, 17.1% of all blocks are declining in population and have high flood risk above the 'tipping point,' making them Climate Abandonment Areas even though the county as a whole has grown significantly

between 2000-2020," First Street's report says.

First Street's data suggests that climate risk is already having a significant impact on local economies even if people aren't fleeing in droves. Its model shows that many parts of the country that have seen the most growth despite being most exposed to extreme climate – the Houston metro area, for example – would have attracted even more people if not for the known risks.

In fact, the "thousand-year storms" that get so much attention may not be as perilous as consistent, low-level flooding, Porter said.

"Say you're stuck in your house, you know, twice a month every month out of the year. That slowly erodes the infrastructure in the area, and people start to avoid the area because it gets reputationally branded as an area that floods."

The 3.2 million Americans who have already left home because of climate concerns are just the beginning, First Street believes. Millions more are likely to leave in the coming decades.

Porter said he thinks Americans will soon start to take climate risk into account when house hunting just like they do school quality and walkability.

"What we're going to see in the form of climate response is smarter ways of thinking about information like climate risk within cities," he said

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High school football power rankings

October 15, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Joe L Hughes II; Gaston Gazette | Section: Sports | 705 Words Page: B1 OpenURL Link

Here's a look at the top eight high school football teams in Cleveland, Gaston and Lincoln counties following Week 8, as ranked by the USA Today Network.

1. South Point

(5-0, 3-0 Big South 3A)

Last week: defeated Kings Mountain, 28-21

The scoop: A week after rallying for a win over Crest, the South Point football team put together another strong effort Friday night to earn a key road win at Kings Mountain. The Red Raiders rushed for 337 yards, helping them to hold the football for almost 32 minutes. Senior standout Chyance Ford played a huge role, rushing for 194 yards and two touchdowns.

Next: at Ashbrook (6-1, 3-1 Big South 3A)

2. Crest (5-1, 2-1 Big South 3A)

Last week: defeated North Gaston, 42-6

The scoop: After four trips to the end zone in Week 8, senior running back Aiden Carson now has 14 total touchdowns this fall. He's scored in each of the Chargers' six games. However, all eyes will be on who actually hands him the football — is it senior starter Turner McSwain, or Virginia football recruit Ely Hamrick, who transferred to Crest from A.C. Reynolds following Hurricane Helene?

Next: at Forestview (1-6, 1-3 Big South 3A)

3. Ashbrook

(6-1, 3-1 Big South 3A)

Last week: defeated Stuart Cramer, 44-0

The scoop: The Ashbrook defense continues to play at a high level, posting its third shutout of the season Friday night with a 44-0 win over Stuart Cramer. However, of the Green Wave's six wins, only one has come against a team which goes into Week 9 with a winning record. It has an opportunity to change that Friday, a win over South Point also potentially flipping the Big South 3A title race on its head.

Next: vs. South Point (5-0, 3-0 Big South 3A)

4. North Lincoln (6-1, 3-1 Western Foothills 3A)

Last week: defeated St. Stephens, 48-14

The scoop: Friday night didn't have all the gaudy numbers one has come to expect from North Lincoln this fall.

However, the Knights averaged close to eight yards per carry, with four of their backs scoring touchdowns in a winning effort. Should North Lincoln win out, it could earn Western Foothills 3A's second automatic playoff berth and a potential home game to start the postseason.

Next: vs. Foard (0-5, 0-2 WFAC)

5. Shelby (5-2, 3-0 Southern Piedmont 1A/2A)

Last week: Idle

The scoop: Shelby was idle for Week 8, getting healthy and mentally prepared for the home stretch toward the postseason. Opponents have not scored on the Golden Lions since the fourth quarter of its Sept. 13 win at Olympic, Shelby scoring 217 unanswered points. In the same stretch, quarterback Lan Farmer has completed 23 of 27 passes for 688 yards and 13 touchdowns.

Next: vs. Bessemer City (5-3, 3-1 SPC)

6. Kings Mountain

(4-2, 2-1 Big South 3A)

Last week: lost to South Point, 28-21

The scoop: Kings Mountain's four-game win streak came to an end Friday night, dealt a 28-21 loss to South Point. Quarterback T.J. Armstrong and wideout Jayden Gash have become a potent connection, the two linking up 21 times for 471 yards and three touchdowns this fall. Health is of greater concern: Key contributors such as wideout William Vaughn and defensive standout Eli Lipscomb are each playing through lower body injuries.

Next week: at Stuart Cramer (1-5, 0-3 Big South 3A)

7. East Lincoln (5-2, 2-2 Western Foothills 3A)

Last week: defeated Foard, 35-0

The scoop: East Lincoln has feasted against lesser competition this fall, each of its five wins against teams with losing records. In its two matchups against teams with winning marks, the Mustangs have allowed a total of 76 points in losing causes. Its next test against a winning team won't come until Nov. 1 in a matchup with rival North Lincoln.

Next: at St. Stephens (1-6, 1-3 WFAC)

8. Burns (5-2, 3-0 Southern Piedmont 1A/2A)

Last week: defeated Thomas Jefferson, 61-0

The scoop: Burns has run roughshod over league competition, outscoring Highland Tech, Bessemer City and Thomas Jefferson by a combined tally of 165-8. The Bulldogs' passing attack is coming along nicely as well, starting quarterback Marshall McGowan throwing five touchdown passes thus far in Southern Piedmont 1A/2A play.

Next: at East Gaston (3-4, 2-1 SPC)

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US sees millions of climate refugees - Many moving to new locations over flooding

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"In Bexar County, TX, 17.1% of all blocks are declining in population and have high flood risk above the 'tipping point,' making them Climate Abandonment Areas even though the county as a whole has grown significantly

between 2000-2020," First Street's report says.

First Street's data suggests that climate risk is already having a significant impact on local economies even if people aren't fleeing in droves. Its model shows that many parts of the country that have seen the most growth despite being most exposed to extreme climate – the Houston metro area, for example – would have attracted even more people if not for the known risks.

In fact, the "thousand-year storms" that get so much attention may not be as perilous as consistent, low-level flooding, Porter said.

"Say you're stuck in your house, you know, twice a month every month out of the year. That slowly erodes the infrastructure in the area, and people start to avoid the area because it gets reputationally branded as an area that floods."

The 3.2 million Americans who have already left home because of climate concerns are just the beginning, First Street believes. Millions more are likely to leave in the coming decades.

Porter said he thinks Americans will soon start to take climate risk into account when house hunting just like they do school quality and walkability.

"What we're going to see in the form of climate response is smarter ways of thinking about information like climate risk within cities," he said

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Andrea Riquier, USA TODAY, 'US sees millions of climate refugees - Many moving to new locations over flooding', *Gaston Gazette, The* (online), 15 Oct 2024 A5 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C390FF5FA2A200>



Musician pitches in for storm victims

October 15, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Author: NANCY MCLAUGHLIN Staff Reporter | Section: Main | 588 Words

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The path of destruction Hurricane Helene left through his beloved Asheville and western North Carolina has Grammy Award-winning Graham Sharp's heart and his hands.

The singer and banjo-playing member of the bluegrass group Steep Canyon Rangers who grew up in Greensboro spent his 20th wedding anniversary along with his wife volunteering with the MANNA FoodBank back in Asheville, after having also collected supplies with Westminster Presbyterian Church that were airlifted to the region.

And during concerts with Steve Martin and Martin Short the following weekend in the Midwest, the group raised thousands of dollars for relief in western North Carolina.

At Westminster, the initial challenge was getting the huge collection of items where it needed to go with the roads destroyed. But Sharp's son, a pilot, brought their attention to Operation Airlift, which was operating out of the Greensboro airport. The collection of supplies through the church is ongoing.

"It felt strange to be out of Asheville when so much help was needed but the surrounding communities have been vital to the recovery so far," Sharp said.

The Grimsley graduate wants to help keep the attention on the region.

Before Helene, the Asheville-based band had previously partnered with a film company to create a public service video to help the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation raise money to complete an improvement project at Graveyard Fields, located at parkway milepost 418 near Asheville and Brevard.

Sharp lost power to his home but says his family's situation was far short of the brutality that came to the region with the force of Helene and the many who lost their lives.

Images from around that area that have also made their way to social media remain seared into his thoughts. His parents were rescued from their cabin in Boone by his brother Brandon, who drove from Chapel Hill to get them while maneuvering through rough terrain in his truck.

"When we first were able to get around town we went and looked out over the river," Sharp said of the French Broad River in Asheville. "All you could see were rooftops surrounded by water and couldn't even tell where the river normally flowed."

His neighborhood has electricity back. The timeline they're hearing for restoration of water is weeks longer.

"A common sight in the neighborhood is people carting around jugs and tanks of water," Sharp said.

A neighbor set up a pump at the creek so they could get greywater, which can be used for flushing toilets, among other things. Another neighbor with a well set up an outdoor shower to use.

"All of the neighborhood pulled together quickly when we were faced with loss of power and cell service after the storm," Sharp said. "Without any information or way to connect with the 'outside' world, we had to look after each other for a couple days. Roads in and out of the neighborhood were blocked and a bridge washed away."

As roads were cleared, word spread that Interstate 26 toward Greenville was open, and fortunately, he said, they had a full tank of gas.

But they're back in Asheville now and grateful to be a part of the recovery.

"When we got back to Asheville there's really not much else to do except pitch in however you can," Sharp said. "The decision to spend our 20th anniversary helping hand out supplies just felt like the natural thing to be doing right now."

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Novant Health offers help to western NC

October 15, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Author: RICHARD CRAVER Staff Reporter | Section: Main | 580 Words Page: 4A

OpenURL Link

Novant Health Inc. has commenced its Hurricane Helene relief efforts in western North Carolina with in-person urgent care and telehealth services.

"Western North Carolina is facing immense challenges in the wake of this disaster, and our teams are working together to support these communities - both in-person and across the Carolinas," said Carl Armato, Novant's president and chief executive.

The system began operating Friday a mobile clinic and pharmacy at A.C. Reynolds High School in Asheville, joining a Federal Emergency Management Agency comfort care station initiative. Services will be available daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 1 Rocket Drive.

The clinic will feature a community care cruiser to offer urgent care services, including connections to obstetric and pediatric care. These medical resources will be available to all patients at no cost.

The deployment includes physicians, advanced practice providers, pharmacists, and other clinical and nonclinical team member volunteers.

Novant said it has deployed "dozens of team members" that include from its New Hanover Regional Medical Center and an ambulance, as well as utilizing its Critical Care Transport team to support patient transfers as needed.

"Our teams have been on the ground in these communities and have seen the challenges people are facing to gain access to care," said Dr. Pam Oliver, Novant's chief medical officer.

"We are committed to offering as much support and as many resources as possible, and we will continue to partner with communities across Western North Carolina to identify ways Novant Health can assist."

The telehealth services also will be provided at no cost at NovantHealth.org/VirtualCare.

Virtual care offers treatment around the clock for conditions, such as fever, COVID, cold and flu, ear infections, shortness of breath, rash and common skin conditions, back pain and urinary tract infections.

However, Novant cautioned that virtual care should not be used for emergency care. Those experiencing a medical emergency should call 911.

Novant is working with the Buncombe County American Red Cross chapter to operate a shelter at 1815 Hendersonville Road in Asheville. For shelter details, go to?RedCross.org/Shelters.

For western N.C. residents who have been displaced by flooding and other Helene impacts, they can make an appointment at NovantHealth.org/doctor?or by calling 855-875-8310.

Novant in western NC

Novant has been expanding its presence in the Asheville market in recent years, such as expanding urgent-care services with three GoHealth urgent-care centers in Asheville and Black Mountain.

In November, it opened Novant Health Surgical Partners - Biltmore.

In May, Novant disclosed plans for a projected \$249.7 million capital investment in establishing an operational hubforemost a 26-bed Asheville Medical Center focused on cancer care - through filing a certificate-of-need application with the N.C. Division of Health Service Regulation.

The proposed Novant hospital would be built on a 24-acre site located at 455 Long Shoals Road. The capital investment amount is significantly higher than what similarly sized hospitals typically cost, which is in the \$50 million to \$150 million range.

There are competing applications from AdventHealth Asheville and Mission Hospital Inc. that also would add 26 acute-care beds.

The applications come 17 months after state health regulators denied Novant's bid to open a 67-bed community hospital in Asheville and chose instead to approve the CON application for 67 beds from AdventHealth over Novant and Mission Hospital Inc.

Novant had planned to spend \$328.7 million on the 67-bed hospital.

Novant said another step would be committing \$20 million over the next five years "to further develop rural primary care."

As part of that effort, Novant said it has acquired space at 1815 Hendersonville Road in Asheville to open a multispecialty medical office building.

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Lies, liars and lying are threatening our democracy

October 15, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Section: Main | 875 Words

Page: 7A OpenURL Link

At a campaign rally last week 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 offer 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 with everyone (except his feminist supporters, who remained curiously silent).

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. Thanks to the fire hose of 24/7 news, there's hardly time to clean up one mess before a hundred more have been dumped on the living room floor by people paid to create and disseminate falsehoods.

Adair explains in his new book, "Beyond the Big Lie," that politicians every day try to score points with key constituencies: "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."

Through numerous interviews with political pundits, pollsters, politicians and public figures, Adair has learned that lies are mostly manufactured for a candidate's base, whose members are willing to accept anything that affirms what they already believe. For the Republican base, which readily embraced Trump's earlier birther lie that Barack Obama was born in Kenya, it takes little to persuade them that Harris would steal money to support illegal migrants.

In what is certain to ignite passions on the right, 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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The Briefcase

October 15, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Section: Main| 697 Words Page: 6A

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Hooker Furnishings inks Margaritaville licensing agreement

Hooker Furnishings said Monday it has entered into a licensing agreement with Margaritaville to launch an extensive line of home furnishings that spans various price points and categories.

The planned launch of the complete indoor/outdoor whole home collection will be in October 2025 at Hooker Furnishings' Showplace showroom in High Point.

The partnership will include indoor and outdoor furnishings, such as wooden furniture, upholstery, lighting and accessories for the residential, contract and hospitality markets. There are plans to provide furnishing options for Margaritaville's branded real estate properties and communities.

The agreement includes the flagship Margaritaville brand, as well as Latitude by Margaritaville and Island Reserve by Margaritaville, that creates "tiered product differentiation that aligns well with Hooker Furnishings' versatile brand portfolio."

Margaritaville is renowned for its multi-faceted brand presence, with consumer touchpoints across hospitality, food and beverage, real estate, gaming and retail.

The brand is owned by Margaritaville Holdings, started by the late entertainer Jimmy Buffett and named after his smash single.

"This partnership is a game changer for us," said Jeremy Hoff, chief executive of Hooker. "Margaritaville's global appeal, particularly with a younger demographic, positions us to reach new customers with a premium lifestyle brand that complements where we are heading as an enterprise."

Richard Craver

Baptist Children's Home of NC hires new chief executive

Baptist Children's Homes of N.C., based in Thomasville, announced Saturday it has named David Melber as its chief executive. He was appointed in a vote Friday by the agency's board of trustees and will begin his new duties on Jan. 2.

Melber is a 25-year leader who worked in non-profit ministry within the Southern Baptist movement, including as an ordained minister.

He will be coming to Baptist Children's Homes from serving as chief operating and chief financial officers for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board. He will remain with that group through the end of the year.

Melber will be present for the 2023 annual meeting of the Baptist State Convention of N.C. at Koury Convention Center in Greensboro. He will be introduced to messengers from the stage during Session 2 at 10:20 a.m. Nov. 5, as well as two meet-and-greet events from 7:30 to 8:15 a.m. and noon to 1:30 p.m.

"Coming into this role at Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina is both sobering and uniquely humbling,"

Melber said. "This is an opportunity to serve, to share the incredible needs, to build relationships and see the body of Christ mobilized so that lives are changed for all eternity."

Richard Craver

Truliant hires Troutman as new chief operating officer

Truliant Federal Credit Union said Friday that Michael Troutman has been hired as chief operating officer.

Troutman will be responsible for branch operations, mortgage, Truliant Financial Advisors and Truliant Business Services. He also will contribute to developing and implementing Truliant's financial objectives and execute its operational plans and strategic business goals.

Troutman was most recently middle market commercial banking relationship manager for USD Bancorp in the Carolinas and Virginia. He has spend more than 20 years in the financial industry career.

He attended BB&T University's Management Development program.

Richard Craver

Lumber company plans NC distribution, warehouse facility

Cedar Direct LLC, a lumber distributor, said Monday it will create 20 new jobs in Rutherford County as part of building a \$925,000 distribution and warehousing facility in Spindale.

Cedar Direct distributes cedar and specialty lumber to wholesalers and suppliers. The company supplies lumber yards, mills, supply houses and contractors with high quality Western Red cedar and other specialty building products.

This site will be a third location for the company offering boards, lumber and timber.

The average annual wage will be \$61,800, exceeding the Rutherford average of \$45,030.

The company has been made eligible for up to \$50,000 in performance-based incentives from the One North Carolina Fund, which requires local government matches.

Richard Craver

Employers gain extra time to meet wage filing requirements

The N.C. Division of Employment Security said Friday it has extended the deadline for businesses affected by Hurricane Helene damage to meet their third-quarter wage filing requirements.

The deadline is now Dec. 31 for the 27 counties declared eligible for disaster relief programs, including Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga and Wilkes in northwest North Carolina.

Businesses in non-disaster-declared counties have until Oct. 31 to meet their third-quarter wage filing requirements.

For more information, go to des.nc.gov/dua or des.nc.gov/ncsuits.

Richard Craver

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Temporary housing database launched for families displaced by Hurricane Helene

October 15, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)

Author: Chantal Allam; Staff Writer | Section: Business | 410 Words

Page: 11B OpenURL Link

Local real estate groups have launched a website aimed at helping people displaced by Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina to find temporary housing.

HurricaneHomes.org - built by Cary-based doorify Multiple Listing Service (MLS) in collaboration with Canopy Realtor Association and Solid Earth - offers a curated list of active rental properties around the state.

It also shows additional listings from other states for those seeking housing outside the region.

"We wanted to leverage the thousands of active rental listings we already have in the MLS," said Matt Fowler, CEO of doorify MLS, in a release. "By making these listings visible, we [hope] to create a resource that simplifies the process of locating housing."

doorify MLS covers 16 counties - including Wake, Durham, Johnston and Orange - and is the operating system for over 15,000 real estate brokers and agents in five Realtor associations in the greater Triangle.

The database's launch comes as the group seeks to rebrand as more "consumer facing and transparent" amid sweeping industry changes to Realtors' compensation.

HurricaneHomes.org has around 45,000 listings. They range from one- to four-bedrooms, in metros like Charlotte, Durham and Raleigh, as well as in outskirt towns like Knightdale.

Rentals starts as low as \$995 per month, depending on location and type.

doorify MLS is also encouraging its listing brokers to identify properties that could be temporarily offered as rentals, Fowler said. "This is a small way we can help those displaced by Hurricane Helene," he said.

Separately, FEMA is accepting housing assistance applications throughout areas affected by Helene.

Shelter numbers continue to decline, with 17 shelters housing just more than 700 occupants, FEMA said on Oct. 9.

Over 2,600 people who cannot return home are staying in lodging through FEMA's Transitional Shelter Assistance program.

FEMA said residents in counties covered by the federal emergency declaration 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 said. FEMA will notify them of their eligibility through an automated phone call, text message or email, depending upon the method they selected in their application.

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

Chantal Allam: 919-829-4522, @chantalallam

• Citation (aglc Style)

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Green River Gorge woman hiked through Helene to safety

October 15, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Adam Wagner; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1746 Words

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SALUDA When the house across the street exploded, Susan Figetakis knew it was time to run from the rising Green River.

Figetakis stowed her three cats in the top floor of her three-story home, put her birth certificate and a few key belongings in a knapsack and started to climb the mountain that rises behind her home on Green River Cove Road. This scenic part of Polk County is nestled into a valley between several mountains, with the river that gives the road its name running through a gorge at the bottom.

But on Sept. 27, that river frothed as Helene's heavy rainfalls raised it. And the mountains that surround the road boomed with the sound of landslides from above and riverfront homes smashing below, Figetakis said.

Figetakis knew Helene was going to be bad. The area had flooded in 2018, damaging large portions of Green River Cove Road and flooding cars and property. Still, the water hadn't crossed the road onto Figetakis' property then.

Helene was different.

Days before the storm, the local fire department had come through to evacuate everyone on the northern edge of Green River Cove Road, which runs along the river. They didn't say anything to Figetakis or the other people living on the southern side of the road.

'One way out'

In the early hours of Friday morning, Figetakis watched as the water started to creep up the driveway to her house.

As the water was rising, Figetakis was making her escape plan. She didn't know who else was on the road or how high the water would go. She thought about trying to stay, trying to retreat higher and higher in the three-story home.

The water spilled across Green River Cove Road and steadily crossed her yard.

About an hour later, the water was inside her walk-out basement, Figetakis said. The clock that had been in the basement was stopped at 9:30. Then, she said, the water was "just boiling up the stairs."

It would end up reaching the second-highest stair to the home's second floor.

"There's only one way (out)," Figetakis said - the mountain.

Around 10 a.m., she saw a house on stilts across the street explode, something Figetakis believes happened due to a propane tank. She stowed the cats, then threw her birth certificate, a change of clothes, a spare pair of shoes and her cell phone charger into a knapsack.

Clad in a rain suit, Figetakis went out a back window and started to climb.

As she walked uphill, Figetakis tried to stay away from large trees, afraid of what would happen if the ground beneath them gave way in a landslide. Still, the ground underneath her feet was squishy, saturated from all of the

rain that had fallen even before the storm arrived.

Figetakis described paying close attention to the ground, trying to walk where leaves from previous seasons seemed to still be clustered, because those were places where mudslides hadn't yet disturbed the ground. The storm was just passing overhead at that point, and Figetakis remembered the rain picking up.

Around her, waterfalls were forming where there hadn't been any before as the rain sought a path off the mountain she was trying to climb.

"It was actually quite beautiful," Figetakis said.

Even though she didn't have cell service, she texted her partner, Ernie Planck, who was driving home after a shift working as a helicopter pilot in Louisiana, evacuating workers from oil rigs as the storm churned through the Gulf of Mexico. Figetakis described what she was wearing and where she was walking, hoping he would be able to help someone find her or, in the worst case, her body.

"It was bad. I was just like, 'Don't give up. Keep going up, keep going up,'" Figetakis said.

As she told the story outside of her waterlogged home Monday afternoon, Figetakis stared into space, her gaze pointed in the direction of the debris-littered river but not focused on anything. Occasionally, Figetakis fidgeted with the N95 mask she was wearing, leaving smears of dark mud across the white mask.

She recalled how she felt like Bilbo Baggins walking through The Shire in "The Lord of the Rings." She marveled at the fact that she had been able to walk up the mountain. And she said she had felt a strange sense of calm throughout the ordeal.

Eventually, as Figetakis climbed, she flipped to Facebook on her phone and saw that a friend was marked as online. She sent a message describing where she was.

Then she stumbled across an orange marker on a tree, a sign that she was on a trail. Figetakis described generally following the trail for a while, trying to stay above it when it dipped downward.

After walking for about two hours, Figetakis came to what she described as a small shed, and a friend was able to find her there after a neighbor told him where the trailhead was located. By about 2 p.m., Figetakis was off of the mountain.

Days later, Figetakis seemed almost surprised at her escape.

"I just did it," she said. "I had to."

Landslides on Green River Cove Road

The descent to Green River Cove is tricky even in the best of times. There are 17 switchbacks on two miles of Green River Cove Road, with the steep grade earning a profile on DangerousRoads.org.

On a map, part of the road from Saluda into the valley looks like an EKG reading, with five remarkably consistent peaks, each with a switchback at the top and at the base.

Monday afternoon reddish dirt clearly marked where several landslides had occurred throughout the descent from Holbert Cove Road. In some places, metal guardrails hung in thin air, the dirt their posts had been driven into washed onto the road below.

About halfway down the mountain the face above had given way, leaving a hill of dirt the size of a large house gradually descending off of the cliff. It was possible to walk up and over the hill or to take a jolting ride on an off-

road vehicle, but the one-lane road had only recently become accessible to the bravest car drivers after the National Guard used a bulldozer to smooth out the dirt.

Helene's floodwaters destroyed 37 homes on Green River Cove Road, said Christina Hallingse, an acting spokeswoman for Polk County.

"They were essentially washed away. Those houses do not exist," Hallingse said Tuesday.

Monday, small clutches of supplies sat in front of the houses that remained. Donations of bottled water, plastic bags, Nabs and a spare set of shoes neatly gathered on plastic folding tables like offerings to whichever passerby needed them right that instant.

Cleaning up, trying to stay

Before Helene, the banks of the Green River were 250 feet away from Figetakis' house.

On a Google Streetview image taken in front of the home last December, it's impossible to see through the thick clumps of trees to the river. Several buildings are clearly visible.

Helene changed all that.

The buildings were nowhere to be seen, and even large areas of debris from fallen structures seemed to be mostly absent. The trees had gathered in clumps throughout the riverbed. A new southern branch of the river seemed to be flowing where there had been dry land a little more than a week before.

"It's just gone and now it's like there's a little Grand Canyon there," Figetakis said, pointing to a new cliff on the river's northern edge. "It's really weird."

Figetakis and Planck returned to their home shortly after the storm to retrieve the cats. They also started cleaning up the mess that Helene left behind.

The river had almost entirely flooded the home's finished basement and nearly reached the second floor. A twostory garage that had sat behind their house was toppled onto its front, its roof facing the jagged remains of the street on Monday.

Just west of the house, an ATV trail had been formed out of still-slushy mud. East of the house, what remained of the road was so muddy that it was difficult to discern that the narrow strip that was being traveled was the shoulder and a small bit of the eastbound lane.

Clad in a white hazmat suit that had turned brown from the shoulders down, Figetakis made trip after trip into the basement, pulling out the items that she and Planck had collected over decades.

Mud-splattered items from the basement were piled outside, books and a drum set and mirrors and a lamp still wet.

As she carried the books out, Figetakis said she was thinking, "Oh my God, I wish I'd never gotten these."

Two cars sat at odd angles in the front yard, where the river the had deposited them. An SUV sat askew, a mud splashed couch wedged up against it. A brand new ATV sat next to it - Figetakis and Planck's current transportation.

The smell of mildew reached from the basement almost to the road, more than 50 feet away. Inside, an ankle-deep layer of mud still laid across the floor. The roar of a generator made it impossible to talk inside.

Back outside, Figetakis described the physical challenges of cleaning up, of lifting the heavy mud and moving all of her belongings.

But there's also a monetary side to recovery, and like so many in Western North Carolina, Figetakis and Planck did not carry flood insurance.

"We really felt like we didn't need it because of how high up we are. ... If we thought we had needed it or were even remotely close ...," Figetakis said, trailing off.

Still, she has been drawn to the natural beauty of Western North Carolina since moving to the region in 1989. She'd like to find a way to keep living in the area, maybe even in the same house on Green River Cove Road. But for now, she's not sure if it's inhabitable and is staying at a nearby inn.

"I'd like to stay here but we'll see what happens," Figetakis said.

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Wake County firefighter rescued dog in Western NC, then couldn't let her go

October 15, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Lexi Solomon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 594 Words Page: 4A OpenURL Link

Korey Floyd went to Western North Carolina to help save lives after Hurricane Helene. He didn't expect to bring home a companion.

Floyd, 23, has worked for the Wake Forest Fire Department for four years. His latest mission took him to Mitchell County as part of a swift water rescue team.

Deployed two days before Helene hit, Floyd spent 10 days in some of the hardest-hit parts of the state with 11 other firefighters, helping to cut trees, do welfare checks and more.

Several days in, Floyd's team drove down a road near Bakersville, a town of about 700 people between Boone and Asheville, where they found a group of sheriff's deputies cutting up a fallen tree - and a deputy's wife holding a dog.

The black and white pitbull mix had been wandering on the road, the woman told Floyd. She'd tried to find the owner, but no one in the community recognized the dog.

"So we went up and said, 'We'll take it for you, look around for you, try to find the owner,'" Floyd recalled.

After traveling a couple of miles up the road and back, asking anyone in sight if they recognized the dog, Floyd and his colleagues realized the pit mix would likely go to the pound if no one took her in.

"We went and got her scanned; she has no microchip," he said. "So we ended up taking her home and trying to give her a better life than she would have had."

They named the dog Lulu and got the Mitchell County animal shelter to ask its Facebook followers if anyone recognized her. As the firefighters waited for responses, they took Lulu back to the Bakersville station, giving her food and water and enjoying time with her in between tasks.

"Whenever we went back to the station, we'd go say hi to her, play with her a little bit," Floyd said. "It brought everybody's mood up."

Floyd laughed with colleagues about taking Lulu home, but when the time came to return to Wake Forest on Sunday and the dog still didn't have an owner, he realized it was no longer a joke.

Already the owner of a 3-year-old beagle mix, Winston, and a gaggle of chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys, Floyd decided he'd bring Lulu home with him.

"She's great with the other dog and with the birds and everything," he said. "She loves them all. She doesn't try to attack [Winston] or anything."

Capt. Kyle Mangum, Floyd's supervisor, said Floyd's decision to rescue Lulu is an example of his generous spirit.

"He wanted to give her a home to be loved in," Mangum said. "He has contacts with the community that he found her in and is still trying to locate the owners. Korey is just that kindhearted of a person."

A veterinarian estimated Lulu is 2 or 3 years old, Floyd said. She's been given all her shots and is being treated for

two tick-borne diseases and a bout of worms - but overall, she's healthy, he said.

"She helps a lot," Floyd said. "She's always just there, ready to hang out and chill with us."

The calm, playful pup is an example of how Floyd and first responders like him can save human lives and animal lives, he said.

"We try to do what we can for both," he said. "You can help an animal out just like a human."

Lexi Solomon: @solomonlexib

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Lexi Solomon, Staff Writer, 'Wake County firefighter rescued dog in Western NC, then couldn't let her go', *Herald-Sun, The* (online), 15 Oct 2024 4A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3C6132C035968>



Support Western NC artisans, Helene storm victims at State Fair

October 15, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 394 Words Page: 2A OpenURL Link

Communities across the Carolinas are stepping up to support those impacted by Hurricane Helene with donation drives, storm relief t-shirts from local businesses and even benefit concerts from big stars.

As relief efforts ramp up, you'll also be able to support storm victims at this year's N.C. State Fair.

The state's largest annual event returns to the capital Oct. 17-27.

Here's how you can show your support while there.

N.C. State Fair Cares fundraiser

One week before the fairgrounds officially open for the 11-day event, the state fair team has launched the "N.C. State Fair Cares" donation tab in support of those in Western North Carolina..

"Many people have asked about doing something for Western North Carolina and this will give those who would like to donate an easy way to do that when they purchase their advance ticket," Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler said in a statement. "The need is great in Western North Carolina and MANNA FoodBank will continue to work to meet those needs despite the setback."

Similar to a fundraiser following Hurricane Florence, all proceeds will be distributed to the MANNA FoodBank of Asheville. The food bank, which was also a former recipient of the Mountain State Fair's annual canned food drive, lost its distribution warehouse after Helene swept through the region as a tropical storm.

Donations can be contributed online for those buying tickets on the state fair's website with the option to give to the fundraiser link before you check out with the option to give \$5-\$25.

The donation drive isn't the only way to support those affected by the storm at the state fair this year.

Support for Western NC artists

One of the most popular attractions, the Village of Yesteryear, will return with dozens of artists and craftsmen creating handmade goods and crafts at the fairgrounds.

Of the more than 75 artisans coming out for fairgoers to see them in action, many are from Western North Carolina, and the State Fair has confirmed that they will still be able to attend.

Here's a list of some of the member crafters you can support as the cleanup continues in their communities:

The Village of Yesteryear will be open at the N.C. State Fair from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day. On opening day, Oct. 17, it'll be open at noon. You can find more information online at ncstatefair.org.

Chyna Blackmon: @chynablackmon

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'You've got to fight for everything': Canton carries - on after floods, mill closure

October 15, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Ryan Oehrli; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1016 Words Page: 3A

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CANTON When the Pisgah Black Bears returned to football practice Oct. 7, one of Jody Mathis' junior varsity players was a no-show.

The school had checked on its students the week before and kept a tally of how many lost their homes to Helene: 22. Mathis got a new tally and an explanation for his missing player the next day.

"I just found out they lost their house," the coach said in an interview with The Charlotte Observer that day. "That's why he wasn't here yesterday. It makes sense now."

Three football players lost their homes, Mathis said. Floodwater in Pisgah Memorial Stadium covered all the visitors' bleachers save for three rows. The football field is damaged and much of the fence around it is destroyed.

Seniors have likely played their last game on the field. Mathis hopes juniors will get to play there again.

The Pigeon River crested at nearly 26 feet - a new record.

People dragged wet trash to the curb: family furniture, clothes, toys that children couldn't play with anymore. Some older women slept in a storage shed. Others left town at night, coming back each morning to rebuild.

The town is used to struggle.

In September 2004, Hurricane Frances hit Haywood County. Nine days later, as the ground dried, Ivan paid a visit. Mathis thought he'd never see anything like it again.

But in 2021, he watched from a distance as Hurricane Fred filled his football stadium. At the same spot, he watched it when Helene hit.

"God dang, I've seen it twice - and twice in the last three years," the 21-year coach said.

On top of it all, Canton lost about 1,000 jobs last year when a company closed the doors to its historic paper mill.

'Fight for everything'

About 20 minutes from touristy Asheville, Canton is an old-school, blue-collar town.

For more than a century, it made paper. Smoke would billow out of the mill downtown. People across Western North Carolina remember the smell of wood chips pulping, sometimes even fondly.

More than being a major employer, the mill symbolized Canton. A mural, local businesses and even a bluegrass song by the North Carolina band Balsam Range pay homage to it.

Mathis, 51, is a fourth-generation mill worker. His great-grandfather worked at Sunburst, a logging community whose wood helped build the mill where his grandfather worked as a foreman and his father had a salaried job.

The youngest Mathis went in as a salaried employee, too. By 2023, he managed inventory, logistics and a

warehouse.

The running joke: In 1908, the mill opened on Tuesday. By Friday, it was shutting down. As soon as it opened, it was at risk of closing. Its workers were always struggling against something, like prior floods that filled its basements or environmental concerns, Mathis said.

"That's where you get this mentality. You've got to fight for everything," he said.

Pactiv Evergreen, the last company that ran the mill, shuttered it in May 2023. About 1,200 people worked there. Four thousand people live in Canton.

The company cited expenses, like upgrading the century-old mill, and an unfavorable market.

When the news of closure broke, Gov. Roy Cooper warned Pactiv Evergreen in a March 2023 letter that closing would violate a state incentives agreement and could cost the company \$12 million.

"The Canton mill has been in operation for more than a century and has been the lifeblood of that town and region," the governor wrote. "I am deeply concerned about the impact of the mill's closure, which will have a devastating effect on the livelihoods of thousands of people in Canton and western North Carolina, as well as the region's economy and social fabric."

Attorney General Josh Stein followed up with a lawsuit. Last week, a Wake County judge ruled the suit can move forward.

Speaking at Pisgah Memorial Stadium Oct. 4, Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers said Spiritas Worldwide, a potential buyer, is still interested in buying the property, to his knowledge. It's unclear what the company would do with it.

"But again, it's one of those things," Smathers said. "The world looks much different now than it did literally a week ago. If we were in this stadium a week ago, we'd all be underwater."

For now, the mill remains idle.

"Milltown Mentality" - the branding on Mathis' shirt Tuesday and a sort of slogan among townspeople - doesn't.

The Bears, for example, have been helping their neighbors. After COVID-19, two floods in three years and Canton's economic and cultural heart stalling, Mathis has seen his kids get their hands dirty.

Ten were asked to help clean up a house damaged by Helene. Twenty showed up, and that grew to 25.

Knee-deep in mud, they got to work. That's the way it's always been, Mathis said: People have each other's backs.

When the whistle blows

Waiting in a long line to get gas at a BP station in neighboring Clyde days after Helene tore through Western North Carolina, Bobby Thompson offered what was on his mind: Pisgah Memorial Stadium.

Some normalcy would be nice, but the field had been wrecked, he said.

"This town needs it," Mathis said of football.

It's unclear how long it will take to repair the field and host games there. It fared better after Helene than it did in 2021 when Fred hit. The turf stayed put this time.

"When we get on the field - win or lose - it's gonna be great," Mathis said. "Because at that point, we know we can

start moving forward."

Canton has survived adversity before, and Mathis looks forward to the eventual return. In the meantime, the Bears will play at a temporary home field.

On a typical home game night, the Bears line up and two rows of people numbering in the hundreds watch as they walk to the stadium. The dormant mill, still the heart of the town's identity, sits downhill.

The stadium's whistle from the old paper mill survived the storm.

Latched onto a scoreboard, it bellows when it's time for kickoff or when the Bears score a touchdown.

Whenever they play at home again and the whistle shrieks, Mathis said, Canton will go wild.

Ryan Oehrli: @oehrli

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Here's every step in - NC's absentee process, from requesting your ballot to counting votes

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RALEIGH Absentee voting has been a feature of North Carolina elections for decades. This year, however, it may be even more important as voters displaced or otherwise affected by Hurricane Helene seek to cast their ballot amid the destruction.

In recent years (and especially in the last few weeks since Helene hit), misinformation has spread about the safety and integrity of absentee voting.

To get a closer look at the process, The News & Observer watched the absentee ballot mailing and receipt process at the Wake County Board of Elections office on Oct. 8.

While processes can vary slightly between counties, state law broadly requires that all absentee ballots be dealt with the same way throughout the state.

Here's every step of the absentee process, from requesting the ballot, to having your vote counted on Election Day.

1. Voter requests an absentee ballot

Absentee ballots are only sent to registered voters in North Carolina who request them.

Some states, like California, automatically send absentee ballots in the mail to all registered voters. Here, however, voters must request an absentee ballot through the state's online request form or by filling out an official paper request form.

Voters requesting an absentee ballot must sign their request and include their date of birth and either a driver's license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number.

Election workers will check and validate a voter's registration before mailing them an absentee ballot.

A voter's near relative or legal guardian may also submit the request on the voter's behalf.

2. Poll workers pack and mail envelope

Poll workers pack envelopes to send to voters containing their ballot and instructions on how to fill it out.

Using a voter's address, poll workers determine which of the over 2,300 ballot styles they will use to vote.

Each packet includes a container envelope which voters will use to include their ballot and a photocopy of their ID. If voters don't have an ID, they can fill out an ID exception form, which is also included in the packet.

The completed packets are then mailed to voters across the state.

3. Voter fills out absentee ballot

Once they receive their absentee ballot in the mail, a voter marks their preferences just as they would if they were voting in-person.

However, state law requires absentee voters to have two witnesses or a notary present when they fill out their ballot. Those witnesses will also need to sign the envelope.

As mentioned earlier, voters will also need to include a photocopy of an acceptable form of voter ID in their ballot envelope or fill out an ID exception form.

4. Voter delivers absentee ballot to county elections board

Voters using an absentee ballot can either deliver it by mail or in-person at their county board of elections office.

All absentee ballots must be received by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 5. State election officials recommend sending absentee ballots at least a week before the deadline to ensure the postal service delivers them in time.

Voters from the 25 counties in the federally declared disaster area from Hurricane Helene can deliver their absentee ballots to any county board of election office in the state - not just the one in their home county.

All voters who vote absentee can track their ballot using an online service called BallotTrax.

5. Election workers conduct initial audit of absentee ballots

Once ballots are received, election workers check for any immediate deficiencies in the envelope. If there are any rips, signs of tampering or loose or unsealed ballots in the envelope, staff can present the packet to the county board for inspection.

Correctly returned envelopes are then checked for ID documentation. If none is provided, staff will reach out to the voter to request more information.

Staff also check that voters have signed their container envelope and included two witnesses or a notary. If any of that information is missing or filled out in the wrong section, it would be presented to the board.

If the voter's signature is the only thing missing, staff can send a cure certification letter to the voter and present that ballot to the board once they receive the completed letter.

6. Bipartisan county board members check and approve absentee ballots

After the staff audit, bipartisan county board of election members check and approve absentee ballots at weekly public meetings.

County boards of elections are currently structured to have three Democrats and two Republicans.

Individual board members check once again that each ballot includes an ID, signature and witnesses. Any special cases must be considered by the full board before they're approved.

For example, any voter who completed an ID exception form will have their ballot considered by the full board. Those ballots can only be rejected if the board unanimously decides that the voter provided false information on the form.

7. Election workers open envelopes and prepare ballots for processing

The approved ballots are taken to election workers, who unseal the container envelopes and straighten the ballots so they can be

entered into the counting machine.

8. Bipartisan board members deliver ballots to counting machine

Board members from each party then deliver the ballots to a high-speed counter, where they are scanned.

However, votes are not actually tabulated until Election Day.

9. Ballots are sealed in boxes

The voted ballots are sealed in boxes, with seals signed by each board member. Those boxes are then stored in a ballot cage, which is under 24-hour video surveillance and requires employee badge access and an alarm code.

10. Reports are tabulated and reported on Election Day

The county board will meet at 5 p.m. on Election Day, where it will tabulate the absentee votes. Those results will then be uploaded at 7:30 p.m. on the State Board of Elections' website.

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NCDOT still working to connect Bat Cave with outside world

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Author: Richard Stradling; Staff Writer | Section: News | 859 Words

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BAT CAVE When Chelsea Atkins and her husband came down from the cabin where they had taken refuge during Hurricane Helene, they were shocked by what was left of their community.

The Rocky Broad River, normally knee-deep, had ripped away homes and businesses and the land on which they stood. Their own house was still standing, though the back deck was gone along with part of the wall closest to the river.

The roads in and out of Bat Cave were blocked by landslides, washouts and downed trees. Just beyond the Bat Cave post office toward Chimney Rock, U.S. 64 disappeared, pavement either washed away or covered by several feet of mud and debris. The bridge that carried the highway over the river was still standing, but with a wide gap on one side where water had washed out earth and riprap.

Atkins said they thought it might be months before anyone made it in to Bat Cave.

"I really didn't think anybody was coming for us," she said Thursday, two weeks after the storm. "The fact that people are here and care is just wild to me."

Among the people in Bat Cave now are contractors for the N.C. Department of Transportation, which is working to fill that gap between the U.S. 64 bridge and the river bank. Restoring use of the bridge is the best hope NCDOT has for rebuilding U.S. 64 and other roads into the community, said Michael Patton, resident engineer on the project.

"This bridge is very, very vital to getting men, equipment, materials, supplies, electricity, you name it, back into Bat Cave and then other areas beyond Bat Cave, including Chimney Rock," said Patton, standing a few feet from the gap that workers have begun to fill with dirt and fine gravel.

From Hendersonville, U.S. 64 crosses the Eastern Continental Divide, then follows Reedy Patch Creek down toward Bat Cave and Chimney Rock. When the wind and rain stopped on Sept. 27, the winding two-lane road was blocked by downed trees and power poles, mud from landslides and places where the creek had washed out the pavement.

From the cabin up the hill, Atkins said she watched the Rocky Broad gradually overwhelm buildings.

"We could see them falling in. It sounded like thunder crackling," she said. "We saw our neighbor's motor home. It was huge; I don't know how many feet. And it looked like a little kid's toy in a bathtub. It just swam away."

First step: Get equipment to Rocky Broad bridge

On Thursday, NCDOT engineers took reporters down U.S. 64 from the continental divide to show what they had accomplished and how much work still lay ahead.

The road along Reedy Patch Creek is passable again and was lined with tree crews from Alabama and utility contractors from Canada and Indiana. The mudslides are clear and washouts filled, though guardrails hang down like spaghetti where the creek washed away the shoulder.

The road is good enough to bring in the earth-moving equipment and dump trucks needed to fix the bridge, which is as far as the NCDOT vans could go. Ben Williams, an NCDOT maintenance engineer based in nearby Fletcher who

drove one of them, said he'd cleaned up after many storms in his 25 years with the department.

"I've never dreamed of anything like this," Williams said, walking past the shattered buildings hanging over the river. "I can't wrap my head around what I'm looking at."

The concrete span over the Rocky Broad River was built in 1958. The deluge from Helene pressed trees, pieces of buildings and a shipping container, now flattened by the force of the water, up against the steel pilings. Partly blocked by the debris, the rampaging water began scouring the riverbanks at either end of the bridge, creating the gap workers are now trying to fill.

The bridge is tilted slightly downstream. Early on, NCDOT wouldn't let anyone go underneath it for fear it would topple over. Concrete poured around the piles has helped stabilize it.

"We monitor it every day," Patton said. "It's found its happy spot right now."

When NCDOT crews first got to Bat Cave, they found that residents had jerry rigged a rickety walking bridge over the river. Thinking they could do better, NCDOT engineers found four pieces of scaffolding and bolted them together, creating something stable enough to roll a wheelbarrow over.

As of Friday, NCDOT still listed more than 700 roads in Western North Carolina as either closed or partially closed as a result of Helene. NCDOT's strategy has been to fix the roads just enough to restore connections, particularly to isolated communities like Bat Cave, and worry about long-term reconstruction later.

The bridge over the Rocky Broad River will need to be replaced. But Patton said contractors should be able to fill the gap and get it open to truck traffic in a week or two, allowing crews to begin rebuilding roads and power lines in the valley.

"We've gotten to here," he said. "Now we got to get across the river and we can do more."

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Harris blasts Trump, lays out plans at Greenville rally

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Author: Tammy Grubb and Avi Bajpai; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1630 Words

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GREENVILLE Kamala Harris attacked her Republican opponent Sunday in Greenville in ways that echoed Donald Trump's own past criticism of her and Joe Biden.

A roar went up from the crowd as the vice president and Democratic presidential nominee entered the Williams Arena at East Carolina University's Minges Coliseum. Many had waited hours to hear her roughly 25-minute speech.

Harris opened her remarks by reflecting on the damage from Hurricane Helene, noting, "in times like this, we stand together as one nation. That is who we are."

She then launched into the differences between what she called Trump's focus on the past and her vision for the future, and questioned why the former president has not released his medical records, appeared for a "60 Minutes" interview or agreed to a second debate. Harris appeared last week on the CBS news show and released her medical records over the weekend.

"Why does his staff want him to hide away?" Harris asked. "Are they afraid that people will see he is too weak and unstable to lead America?"

Trump and others attacked President Biden's mental fitness when he was the Democratic candidate, then criticized Harris for ducking media interviews once she replaced Biden.

"It is time to turn the page, because America is ready to chart a new way forward, ready for a new and optimistic generation of leadership, which is why Democrats, Independents and Republicans are supporting our campaign, because they and we know we need a president who works for all the American people," Harris said Sunday.

Harris' rally at ECU followed visits earlier Sunday with a local church congregation and Black farmers.

Harris lays out plan, Trump fears

Harris told the Greenville crowd she has a plan, in comparison to Trump's "concept of a plan," a reference to his remarks at their Sept. 11 debate.

She would pass a middle-class tax cut, help first-time homebuyers and entrepreneurs, expand the federal child tax credit and add home health care coverage to Medicare, Harris said, and address other key issues, from abortion and a woman's right to choose to gun violence, voting rights and LGBTQ+ rights.

"So much is on the line in this election," Harris said, reminding the crowd that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled a president is in many cases immune from criminal prosecution for acts committed while in office.

"I do believe Donald Trump is an unserious man, but the effects of him being back in the White House would be brutally serious. Just imagine Donald Trump with no guard rails," she said.

He would "weaponize" the U.S. Department of Justice against his political enemies, she added, as some of her supporters in the crowd broke into chants of "lock him up," replicating the chant that was common at Trump rallies when he ran against Hillary Clinton in 2016.

Harris turned to the section of the crowd that was leading the chant and interrupted them, saying with a chuckle, "Hold on, here's the thing, let's let the courts handle that, and let's handle November."

Democrat in tossup race throws support behind Harris

U.S. Rep. Don Davis threw his full support behind Harris at the beginning of Sunday's rally, to booming cheers from the crowd. State Sens. Kandie Smith and Rachel Hunt, who is running for lieutenant governor, also appeared at the rally.

As a son of Eastern North Carolina, Davis said, "the path to stop Project 2025 and the path to the White House comes through Eastern North Carolina." Trump has been tied to the conservative plan for the next Republican president, despite denying his involvement.

"The stakes are high," said Davis, a Snow Hill Democrat running for reelection in a swing district in the northeastern part of the state. "This election is the most consequential in our lifetimes. ... Vice President Harris and Gov. (Tim) Walz are fighting for families right here in Eastern North Carolina. They are fighting for lower costs, to protect our freedoms, and they will serve all Americans ... regardless of party."

"But on the other hand, some who are pretty extreme running in support of a pretty extreme agenda, a manifesto called Project 2025," he said.

Earlier, Davis greeted Harris at Pitt-Greenville Airport Sunday morning. Harris shook hands with Davis and they spoke for a few minutes after he met her at the bottom of the stairs as she got off the plane. They high-fived, and Harris got in the motorcade for the ride to a Greenville church.

Davis first gave Harris his support for the presidency in July, but not before voting with House Republicans and five other Democratic members to pass a resolution condemning Harris as a failed "border czar."

Immigration is a key policy issue in the 2024 race, with Republicans attacking Harris on her work at the southern U.S. border, and Democrats pointing to Trump's pressure on Republican lawmakers as the reason a bipartisan border bill wasn't approved this year.

Day starts with church service in Greenville

Ahead of the rally, Harris extolled members and visitors at a Greenville church on Sunday to keep their faith and help others in need.

The congregation at Koinonia Christian Center Church stood and cheered as Harris took the stage. The vice president, recounting her conversation with the pastor prior to Sunday's noon service, said "It does my heart and soul good" to be with the congregation.

"In times of crisis - and we're looking at the images of the aftermath of the hurricane - it is easy in these moments of crisis to question our faith, to sometimes lose our faith for a moment, because what we see is so hard to see that we lose faith," Harris said.

She also addressed rumors rampant on social media after the remnants of Hurricane Helene battered Western North Carolina, saying the people behind those rumors are "trying to gain some advantage for themselves."

"The problem with this, beyond the obvious, is it's making it harder to get people life-saving information if they're led to believe they cannot trust" those trying to help, Harris said.

Former U.S. Rep. Eva Clayton, the first Black woman in Congress from North Carolina and a longtime advocate for Eastern North Carolina, attended the service.

Rally at ECU draw support, critics

Supporters of the vice president began lining up outside the 7,100-capacity arena early on Sunday morning.

Jordyn Strupp, a senior studying political science and business management at ECU who is active with College Democrats on campus and at the state and national levels, said this year's presidential race feels like the "closest it's ever been in North Carolina."

Strupp, 21, who has been knocking on doors around Greenville since last month for N.C. House candidate Claire Kempner, said she believes Harris has a "really good shot" of winning the state.

She said that on campus, very few students - next to none - were still undecided about who they were voting for.

U.S. Rep. Greg Murphy, a Republican from Greenville, called attention to rising inflation, illegal immigration and "two major wars" abroad in a statement issued before Harris arrived. Harris is "tied to the hip of President Biden," he said.

"Her appearance is a reminder that we need to return President Trump to the White House. Eastern North Carolina knows Kamala Harris is not fit for the job and will vote accordingly," Murphy said.

Koinonia Senior Pastor Rosie O'neal noted in introducing Harris that everyone may not have the same political opinions.

"There are things on all sides that we don't agree with, but what I've asked you to do over the years is listen to the issues, then try to get a sense of the direction that the person would take our country in. Then, look at their service history, pray and ask the Lord," O'neal said.

Election Day is 23 days away

Harris warned the crowd before wrapping up Sunday that she is "running as the underdog" in North Carolina at this point. The latest polls show Trump still has a slight lead in North Carolina, which he won in 2016 and 2020.

"Remember always that your vote is your voice, and your voice is your power," Harris said.

The visit to Greenville is part of a sweep this week in Eastern North Carolina that will also include former President Bill Clinton. On Saturday, Harris met with Black faith leaders, politicians and supporters for a private event at The Pit Authentic Barbecue in downtown Raleigh, helping to pack several aid-relief boxes for storm-ravaged Western North Carolina.

North Carolina is one of seven major battleground states that Harris and former President Donald Trump have been crisscrossing in recent weeks. Early voting starts Thursday in North Carolina and runs through Nov. 2. Harris' Greenville visit came 23 days before the Nov. 5 election.

Trump held a town hall in Fayetteville on Oct. 4, where he blasted the Biden administration's response to the storm.

Harris and Trump, and their vice presidential picks - Democratic Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and Republican Ohio Sen. JD Vance - have included the Tar Heel State in multiple campaign stops this year.

Those visits have been ramping up in the last few weeks, with Vance holding a town hall Thursday with voters in Greensboro, and attending the Bank of America ROVAL 400 race at the Charlotte Motor Speedway on Sunday.

On Saturday, the Trump campaign announced that Vance will hold a rally in Wilmington on Wednesday.

And on Sunday, the Harris campaign announced that Walz will make stops in Durham and Winston-Salem on

Thursday as early voting begins, The News & Observer's media partner, ABC-11, reported.

As of Friday, the RealClearPolitics polling average showed that Trump has a very slim lead over Harris in North Carolina. The state has only supported Democratic presidential candidates twice in the last 50 years - former President Jimmy Carter in 1976 and former President Barack Obama in 2008.

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