

## Marion City Council to hold first meeting since Helene on Tuesday

October 14, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: From Staff Reports | Section: Government Politics | 143 Words OpenURL Link

On Tuesday, the Marion City Council will hold the first regular meeting since Hurricane Helene swept through McDowell County as a tropical storm.

The city council will hold its regular meeting at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the Marion Community Building at 191 N. Main St.

At the meeting, the council members will hear an update on Hurricane Helene recovery.

The council will also consider an agreement with McDowell County and the North Carolina Department of Transportation related to Hurricane Helene damage.

The council members will also consider the consent agenda, which includes: the Sept. 17 meeting minutes, the American Rescue Plan funding, the capital project plans and the city's longevity pay.

City officials will also look at a contract for engineering and professional services for sewer projects.

The meeting will also include a public comment period and City Manager Bob Boyette will give a report to the council.

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#### LOUISIANA CITY TO SERVE FREE MEALS ON TUESDAY

October 14, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: MIKE CONLEY nconley@mcdowellnews| Section: News| 357 Words OpenURL Link

The leaders of a city in Louisiana that has endured hurricanes and flooding will come to Marion to provide some much-needed supplies and Cajun food to people here recovering from Tropical Storm Helene.

David McDavid is the mayor of Zachary, Louisiana. This city is located 12 miles north of Baton Rouge and has around 21,000 people. In 2016, Zachary endured a massive flood which left a lot of damage to that city as well as nearby Baton Rouge and the surrounding parishes, McDavid said.

The city has survived hurricanes Andrew and Katrina and knows first hand what storms like that can do to a community.

"We understand the devastation and we know what it takes to rebuild," he said.

In the wake of Helene's devastation, the city of Zachary launched a relief initiative to assist those in need here. Community members in the city were encouraged to donate essential items.

McDavid said he, his police chief, his fire chief and an entourage of Zachary's city staff will arrive in Marion on Monday and set up at First Baptist Church of Marion. They will bring an 18-wheeler packed with supplies that they have collected. All of the supplies were donated by local businesses in Zachary.

The Zachary team also plans to serve free lunches and dinners for the local community at First Baptist Church of Marion on Tuesday.

"That's what we enjoy doing," he told The McDowell News.

The mayor of Zachary said he and his group will serve jambalaya to the people of Marion. They will have a smoker cooking meat, hot dogs and other tasty Louisiana foods.

The supplies and free lunch and dinner meals will be available only on Tuesday. McDavid said he and his group will have to leave on Wednesday for their next destination. They are also providing assistance to Montreat College.

McDavid said he and his team are looking forward to coming here and bringing some good food and supplies to Marion's people.

"We hope to give them a little sliver of hope," he said .

The church is at 99 N. Main St. in downtown Marion.

"We understand the devastation and we know what it takes to rebuild."

David McDavid, mayor of Zachary, Louisiana

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## Early voting in McDowell County starts Thursday, Oct. 17

October 14, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: FROM STAFF REPORTS | Section: Elections | 161 Words OpenURL Link

North Carolina is expected to be a swing state in this year's presidential election and will likely see large voter

For those who want to avoid long lines on Election Day, early voting is a good option to do that.

Early voting starts Thursday, Oct. 17, and ends Saturday, Nov. 2. Early voting hours on weekdays are 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Saturday voting (Oct. 19, Oct. 26 and Nov. 2) hours are from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The early voting site in McDowell County is the McDowell County Board of Elections, located at 2458 N.C. 226 S., Marion. There will be no early voting in Old Fort due to damage from Hurricane Helene.

Don't forget to take a photo ID with you to vote.

Election Day is Nov. 5.

To check your voter registration, visit www.vt.ncsbe.gov/RegLkup.

For more information on registering to vote or about this year's election, call the McDowell County Board of Elections at 828-659-0834 or 828-652-7121, ext. 1355 or email elections@mcdowellgov.com.

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### Rising star Alex Key organizes music festival for Helene victims

October 14, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: JERRY SNOW| Section: Mountaintimes | 322 Words OpenURL Link

WILKESBORO — The Appalachian Aid Music Festival will be held at the Carolina West Community Commons (102 Main St.) on Oct. 19 from 11 a.m. until 10 p.m. Proceeds will go to victims of Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina.

Traditional Country music star Alex Key was born and raised on a multi-generation farm in Wilkesboro and his team organized the music festival. Tickets cost \$20 and can be purchased online at www.eventbrite.com/e/appalachian-aid-music-festival-tickets.

Key has partnered with downtown Wilkesboro and Musicians Mission of Mercy to create the Appalachian Aid Music Festival.

The lineup includes: Key, John Paycheck (son of Johnny Paycheck), Wayne Henderson and friends, The Contenders (Jay Nash & Josh Day), Taylon Hope, Matt Bizzell, Holy Water and BRB, among others, according to eventbrite.com.

Food trucks will be at the Festival. Police, EMS, firefighters, doctors, nurses, first responders, lineme and corporate tree removers will enter for free with identification.

Key said the Festival is being put together over a span of a few days by "a handful of people working tirelessly" through Instagram (@alex key music).

"I'm so proud of my team and so grateful to those who are helping make Appalachian Aid Music Festival — Helene Relief Benefit happen to benefit the areas affected by Helene," Key said via Instagram. "All artists, including myself, will be so kindly donating their time and 100% of ticket sales will go straight to the people who need it ..."

Key is a recording artist now based in Nashville, Tenn. The album he released in August of 2022 "Neon Signs and Stained Glass" debuted No. 1 on Amazon music. Hit singles from the album include: "Tomorrow I'll Be Over You" and "Everything Must Go!"

Key accepted the JMA Male Country Artist of the Year Award at the Grand Ole Opry House on Aug. 23, 2022.

Key has more than 474,000 followers on TikTok (alex\_key\_music); 306,000 followers on Facebook (www.facebook.com/TheAlexKey); and 120,000 followers on Instagram (@alex\_key\_music).

Learn more about the 26-year-old Key on his website www.alexkeymusicgroup.com

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### Watauga Rec Center working to get fields operational, resumes indoor programming

October 14, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Mountaintimes | 762 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — The Watauga County Recreation Center reopened on Monday, Oct. 7, after Hurricane Helene left much of the rec center's grounds flooded with trash and debris just over a week prior.

Watauga County Parks and Recreation Director Keron Poteat said the rec center and its staff were "extremely fortunate" given the situation. If the water happened to have come over State Farm Road, Poteat said it could have entered the gymnasium, and they would be looking at an entirely different situation altogether.

"We did have some leaks, but there was nothing out of the ordinary inside the building," Poteat said. "We started coming in on Sunday to assess what was going on and to get some crew in here to start the process of opening."

For the week of Oct. 14 to 20, the rec center will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. All indoor programming, including fitness classes, swim lessons, childcare, and pickleball clinics, will return.

Poteat said the process for reopening began with county maintenance director Robert Marsh inspecting the flooded ball fields. He advised people to stay off them for the time being to allow them to dry and to keep people from pressing down on the mud.

Poteat said they hope to have the fields operational by April so that they can host a state-wide baseball tournament. They're also looking to salvage what they can of the youth soccer season.

"We have to have them up and ready," Poteat said. "We'll have teams from across North Carolina up here, and we want to make them look as good as we can."

Meanwhile, maintenance staff replaced windscreens at the tennis courts and worked to clear debris from the rec center grounds, including the playground. Poteat said App State students were also instrumental in clearing the fields, as many of them showed up to help without even being asked.

"They cleared a good amount," Poteat said. "That was super helpful and impressive; right off the bat, they were doing it."

However, other recreation facilities in other parts of the county did not fare as well. While the Old Cove Creek school came out of the storm relatively unscathed, Poteat said its septic system was severely damaged.

Furthermore, the basketball courts, tennis courts, playground, picnic shelter, and walking track on school grounds were decimated by the storm. Poteat said these areas now "look like the bottom of a river bed" and will have to be rebuilt at some point.

"On these beautiful days, the amount of devastation is even more stark," Poteat said. "You will have a beautiful day, but you look back and there's broken roads and broken homes. You just think 'how in the world are we going to rebuild, when is it going to be done?' Like with Cove Creek, that's probably a ways off. Of course, we want to build it back, but the priority for the county is going to be roads and schools."

The rec center, like many organizations and businesses in the county, is also facing staffing challenges, as folks have had roads and bridges on their commute washed out, experienced damage to their homes and students have been displaced due to their apartments flooding. Despite these challenges, Poteat said many were still out in the

community and lending helping hands where needed.

On the brighter side, guests will be surprised to see a new infusion of color to the rec center's interior decor after local artist Kent Paulette donated a vast collection of his work to the complex.

The collection features some of Paulette's most notable pieces, which include mountain landscapes, area landmarks, native animals, and pop culture references. Paulette's unique style is accomplished in part by utilizing water from local streams and creeks to create his paintings.

Poteat said the donation came about after she was looking for art to include in an auction to help generate seed money for the Deep Gap recreation area. Paulette offered his work and also offered to fill in the white space inside the rec center. All in all, the collection is worth approximately \$160,000.

"It's really super timely," Poteat said. "It's kind of a bright spot with all of the stuff that's been going on. I had no idea he was going to turn us into a museum."

In addition to the infusion of color, the rec center is also anticipating the arrival of new gym equipment worth \$64,000, which is also being donated. Poteat said the new equipment is "due to arrive anytime."

To stay up to date on happenings at the Watauga County Recreation Center, visit wataugacounty.org.

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### Ashe County art school honors native Florence Thomas

October 14, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: JERRY SNOW| Section: Mountaintimes | 311 Words OpenURL Link

WEST JEFFERSON — The Florence Thomas Art School and Gallery is now under the direction of co-directors Samantha Oleschuck (Community Engagement) and Jessa Gerrald (Operations).

The Florence Thomas Art School provides "resources for instruction, exhibition and experience in the fine arts and heritage crafts for Ashe County and the region," according to florenceartschool.org.

The non-profit honors Florence Young Thomas (1909-2007), who grew up in Ashe County. She studied art at the Morris School of Design for Women in Philadelphia. Her work vividly chronicles the Appalachian Mountains.

A year after she died at age 98, her dream of opening a non-profit school was realized on March 30, 2007. The school is part of her legacy, and will help generations of artists in Ashe County fulfill their dreams.

The Art School offers a diverse range of classes and exhibits in its downtown West Jefferson gallery, leaving behind a lasting testament to Florence's life in art, according to florenceartschool.org.

The Florence Thomas Art School offers workshops and evening classes in the fine arts and heritage crafts for beginner, intermediate and advanced students, according to the non-profit's website. Workshops usually run from 9:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. with an hour lunch break. Students under the age of 18 must get approval from FTAS and the workshop instructor.

Some workshops have been postponed due to the destruction left behind from Hurricane Helene. For the latest updates, go to florenceartschol.org

The Art School hosts exhibits. Mountain Mystique will be exhibited Nov. 5 through Nov. 30. It will feature artists: Sandy Adair, Marion Cloaninger, Brandon Idol, Deb Keirce, Jack McGill, Jennifer Murphy, Scot Pope, JoAnn Pippin, Dave Powell, Theresa Redmond, Cher Shaffer, Brenda Smith, Stephanie Titus, Erica Walker, and Dawn Wicklow.

The Art School, located at 10 S Jefferson Ave., is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. It is closed on Sunday. For more information, call (336) 846-3827 or email info@florenceartschool.org.

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## Apple Hill Farm offering tours for tricker treaters

October 14, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: JERRY SNOW| Section: Mountaintimes | 172 Words OpenURL Link

BANNER ELK — Apple Hill Farm is a memorable place to celebrate Halloween. Apple Hill Farm is preparing to host mini-tours on Oct. 26 for trick-or-treaters (\$17) and non tricker-or-treaters (\$15).

Guests can dress for the occasion in their Halloween best and collect treats while getting an up-close look at the alpacas, llamas, goats and other animals at Apple Hill Farm (400 Apple Hill Rd.).

Anyone who takes the Spookley's Trick or Treat Tour will learn details about the animals. The tour includes the reading of "Spookley the Square Pumpkin" and it will end by taking the Bully Prevention Pledge.

To learn more about the Bully Prevention Pledge, go online to www.pacer.org/bullying/pledge/.

The first tour will begin at 11 a.m. and last about 30 minutes. The last tour will start about 2:30 p.m.

Due to the damage from Hurricane Helene, Apple Hill had to temporarily close. Before making plans to visit the Farm, call ahead at (828) 963-1662 or email applehillfarmnc@gmail.com.

Tickets must be purchased in advance online.

For more details about Apple Hill Farm, go to applehillfarmnc.com

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### Tuscola football earns dominant win in first game since Helene

October 14, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Tyler Norris Goode | Section: Sports | 676 Words OpenURL Link

For a few hours Friday night, there was a break from debris piles, curfews and all the other awfulness Helene left behind in Haywood County.

Inside C.E. Weatherby Stadium, friends and classmates reunited with hugs and handshakes.

And after a sluggish first quarter, Tuscola pulled away and treated the home crowd to a 37-7 victory over visiting East Henderson.

Junior quarterback Jett Bartley tossed three touchdown strikes and rushed for another score, and senior Cooper Williamson rushed for a touchdown and 95 yards to lead the Mountaineers.

"It's big for our community," Tuscola coach Jonathan Crompton said. "You see the kids out here. You see their families and the cheerleaders and all the fans. Trying to get back to normalcy is a huge thing for our community. And obviously being able to get out here and get a win helps. It's always going to be a trying time when a tragic event happens, but our families and communities handled it well — helping each other."

Regardless of the game's outcome, Mountaineers' fans in the student section were just thrilled to see each other at an official school activity after more than two weeks away.

"It's just awesome to see familiar faces and know that everyone's OK," said Tuscola student Sofia Wijewickrama.

Hunter Sollie, a senior, added: "Being able to come out here, see our friends, check on everybody, see a football game — I think it's good for everybody. It's good for the community."

Schoolmate Meredith Bradshaw also appreciated the evening's significance.

"I've never been so happy just to see everybody and hug everybody and know that everybody's OK," Bradshaw said. "While we're at a football game and we're cheering on the boys, this game is just a little bit bigger than that."

The Mountaineers' players understood that, too. Nearly a month had passed since their last game, a 34-point rout of Swain County on Sept. 13, and they now get only a short break before taking on first-place Franklin Tuesday night at C.E. Weatherby Stadium.

But Tuscola fought through some rust — and any temptation to look ahead — while putting away East Henderson early in the third quarter.

On the second play after halftime, Bartley connected with speedy sophomore Isaiah Hyatt on a perfect 44-yard scoring strike down the left sideline to push Tuscola's lead to 23-0. Williamson then scored from 10 yards out less than six minutes of game-time later to further seal the outcome.

Meanwhile, Tuscola's defense pitched a shutout until the final two minutes — and senior linebacker Walker Bolden came up with a key third-quarter pick.

"We knew a game like this can be known as a trap game," Tuscola junior linebacker Bryson Haynes said. "We could get upset. But our coaches preached to us, and the preacher who came to the game and preached to us said that we just needed this as a county. We just needed a win to bring everyone back into normal a little bit. And I'd say

that's what really drove us to get the victory tonight."

In the opening quarter, the teams combined for more penalty yards (60) than they gained offensively (33). The only points on the board after 12 minutes came when East Henderson bungled a punt attempt on its opening drive, and a hard hit by Tuscola's special-teams unit knocked the ball out of the end zone for a safety.

Neither team was able to change the tally until Bartley found sophomore Bo West on the left side of the end zone for a 10-yard touchdown pass with 5:12 to go before halftime. Senior Christopher Wells tacked on the first of his five successful extra-point kicks to put the Mountaineers up, 9-0.

Bartley's other scores were a six-yard run right before halftime and a 70-yard pass to West after the game was well in hand in the fourth quarter.

East Henderson didn't get on the board until senior Lex Burns hit junior Isaac Schulz on a 5-yard pass with 77 seconds remaining in the final period.

The Mounties return to action on Tuesday with another home game. They'll host Franklin, who took down North Henderson 45-6 on Friday.

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# Pisgah football falls in thrilling return to gridiron post-Helene

October 14, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Aarik Long | Section: On Premise | 43 Words OpenURL Link

The Pisgah Bears football team returned to action for the first time since Helene ravaged Canton and left Pisgah Memorial Stadium with severe damage. The Bears were given a tough matchup in their return — facing off against West Henderson and falling 27-24.

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# Tuscola football earns dominant win in first game since Helene

October 14, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Tyler Norris Goode| Section: On Premise| 43 Words OpenURL Link

Following a pause to all sports in the aftermath of Helene, Tuscola football returned to action on Friday with a dominant 37-7 victory over Mountain 7 foes East Henderson. The Mounties were thankful to be back on the field and in the stands.

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### Pisgah football falls in thrilling return to gridiron post-Helene

October 14, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Aarik Long | Section: Sports | 1117 Words OpenURL Link

The Pisgah Bears football team returned to action for the first time since Helene ravaged Canton and left Pisgah Memorial Stadium with severe damage.

The Bears were given a tough matchup in their return to play — facing off against the reigning conference champions, West Henderson. The Falcons kept their conference record clean with a close 27-24 victory.

"We played well in spots," Pisgah coach Ricky Brindley said. "We had an opportunity to win the game. We just couldn't overcome some mistakes. They executed really well at times. It was two good football teams battling."

#### Fans line the fence

While Pisgah weren't able to get the victory on Friday night, they provided the fans with an exciting escape from the devastation around them.

"This community has been destroyed," senior Jake Lowery said. "It's been through a lot these past two weeks. Getting out here and seeing everyone rally behind us and getting to play in front of everybody and trying to bring the community back together was really special for us."

The game was played at Bethel Middle School due to the damages at Pisgah Memorial Stadium. For many of the players, including senior quarterback Aaron Clark, it was a return home to where they had played so many games from youth up through middle school.

"It was awesome," Clark said. "I've played here my whole life. It's my stomping grounds. It's me and a bunch of my teammates' old stomping grounds. We really enjoy playing here. We're really glad we made this our home field."

Many of the coaches, including Brindley, grew up and played on the same field, as well.

"This is a special place," Brindley said. "Having grown up here and went to Bethel, it was a big deal to me. I'm very proud to have been able to play this game on this field."

Parking was a hot commodity for the game, as fans lined the fences around the field and filled the limited bleachers.

"It was a great atmosphere. It was a great crowd," Brindley said. "I was really excited to see the amount of people that were here. There were a lot of people hanging on the fence."

That crowd was important, especially during the big plays late in a close game.

"It felt electric," Clark said. "It felt really packed. The fans were getting into it. It really fed us, especially towards the end when we started rolling. It was a really fun game to play in with the atmosphere the fans produced."

Down to the wire

The game on the field was a thriller. From the very start, both teams were trading haymakers.

The problem for the Bears was allowing the explosive play to the Falcons.

In the first quarter, West Henderson scored on runs of 46 and 65 yards. In the second quarter, the Falcons scored on a 51-yard pass. Their final touchdown was a 35-yard touchdown pass in the third quarter.

"We've talked about this as a staff and with our players," Brindley said. "Explosive plays can be devastating to a team. Certainly, tonight they were able to hit a few. They were backbreakers. You play well for several snaps and all of a sudden they break off a 55, 65, 75 yard run. That's hard. That's hard to overcome and play on that emotional rollercoaster."

But Pisgah's offense certainly hung with the Falcons throughout the game.

After the first West touchdown, both teams traded a pair of three-and-outs. The Bears then marched the ball downfield, capping the drive off with a 15-yard pass from Clark to Lowery to level the score.

"It was electric," Lowery said. "We're not at home. The stadium is condensed a little from what we're used to, but we still had Pisgah nation here. They showed out and showed up. It felt like there were a ton of people here. Them having our backs really felt good. Scoring that touchdown right in front of the fans on the fence and seeing them go wild was really cool for me."

With the Bears trailing 13-7 and all the momentum on the West Henderson sideline, senior Landon Pope lowered his shoulder on a run to the outside and ran through a defender.

"We needed something to get us going," Pope said. "With no school today, it threw us off our routine. I felt like that gave us some energy to start playing some football."

The Falcons took a 20-10 lead into the halftime break, but Pisgah came out swinging to start the second half.

Pope quickly got the Bears back in the game. On the second play of the half, the senior broke off a 72-yard run. A couple of plays later and he punched it into the end zone from a yard out to cut the deficit to 20-17.

"He's an animal. He's a moose," Brindley said. "What they were doing was difficult. But when we did get them blocked, it gave him lots of room to be able to operate. He played well. He ran the ball so hard. He was violent. The first tackler had a hard time bringing him down. I was very impressed with him."

He finished the night with 19 carries for 168 yards and a touchdown.

Going to the fourth quarter, the Falcons led 27-17. The Bears forced an early punt. Then, senior Kenyon Moore took over a drive — snagging back-to-back catches as the Bears marched toward the end zone.

"Kenyon was big. Kenyon always is," Brindley said. "He's such a threat. He forces people to have to keep a safety over the top. They're trying to take him away and they did a really good job of that. We were able to finally get him the ball some."

Moore was one of three players to haul in five passes, picking up a team-best 60 yards along the way.

A few plays later, Clark hit junior Matthew Mehaffey for a 26-yard touchdown pass.

Clark finished the night completing 16 of 29 passes for 168 yards, two touchdowns and an interception. He also added 50 rushing yards.

West got the ball back and marched down field, burning clock along the way. On fourth down deep in Pisgah territory, the Falcons went with a reverse. The run earned West Henderson a first down and allowed them to go into victory formation.

While Pisgah didn't grab the win, just getting back on the field was a victory for the entire community.

"It meant a lot to our kids — just having the opportunity to be able to play this game. You can't take it for granted," Brindley said. "It can be gone in the blink of an eye. It was great for our kids to be able to play tonight and to have that opportunity."

Pisgah will return to action next Friday when it hosts North Henderson, who lost to Franklin, 45-6, on Friday.

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### 'Where was God?' the accuser challenges. Grieving and loving through the storm

October 14, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Maureen Miller | Section: Life | 700 Words OpenURL Link

"So, you recently mentioned not being afraid, how God spoke through a children's song to bring comfort on the Wednesday just prior to this horrendous storm."

A snide laugh before adding, "But then Hurricane Helene hit less than 48 hours later. How, may I ask, do you explain that?"

This was how the conversation began, and it left me without answer.

My pause beckoned the barrage that followed.

"Where exactly was God when winds and rain washed away those homes, hopes, and dreams—that which you wrote about. hmm?"

Still, nothing, so he again took advantage of my silence. "He's got the whole world in His hands, huh? Really? The wind and the rain too? And how about those itty-bitty babies verse three speaks of? The sisters and the brothers from verse four? What about them? Haven't you heard the news? Many children, beloved brothers and sisters, were washed away."

A pause. Then, in a mocking tone I can't adequately convey. "His promise? 'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you...' Ha! Don't you know those rivers, those waters, did overtake more than 200 people, one of them being your friend's brother? What about them, huh? Your words, they were nothing but lies—misleading people, making them think they'd be OK. Truth is, they're not. They won't be. How does that make you feel?"

Speechless for one more moment, I almost allowed his accusations, his words, to settle, sink in, penetrate my broken heart, fragmenting it even more.

But then...

Squaring my shoulders, lifting my chin, I replied. "How do I feel? My heart's heavy, my words few. I fear if I stop long enough to allow myself to cry, really cry, I'll never stop, the devastation's so vast."

I took a breath. "But those words I wrote? They weren't mine. They came right from The Word, straight from God's Word. Therefore, no matter what you say, they're true—today, yesterday, and always."

Another inhale as I prepared to continue. "God does have the whole world in His hands. He does. Don't think for one moment He doesn't. He didn't cause this catastrophic flood. His grief over the loss is more than everyone else's combined. Truth is, He can't wait to reveal all He's making new, and until then, He's right here with us."

I sniffed, the tears beginning to flow, but rather than silence me, they fueled my courage.

"And while I'm talking about God, about His promises —those proclamations I wield when facing an enemy, even a Category 4 'Red' storm — He was present in it, and He's bringing comfort in this devastating loss. He will continue to use His people—those brothers and sisters, yes, even children He holds in His hands—to offer encouragement, much needed supplies, and..."

What? What will God use them — and me, too — to bring? Oh, yes...

"Hope. Hope and joy. He is and will continue to use us to bring this and more to those who are suffering in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. Just you wait for the stories."

One final deep breath, then, "They're coming. I've already heard some of them—testimonies of those watching as others were carried away by waters too strong, too swift. And guess what people are saying, what they're testifying to?"

This time, the one who, only moments earlier, came at me with accusations, remained silent. "They're saying that, in what should be the most terrifying of times, victims of Hurricane Helene are, with their final words, victorious. And you know how?

"Because they're calling out one word."

Right then, I saw it. My accuser flinched. After all, he knew what was coming.

But me? I smiled before I spoke, because I always smile, even through tears, at the mention of His name. And what I said caused him to recoil, disappearing from my presence.

"Jesus."

And, though nothing's changed — my heart still heavy with the grief of loss — I'll turn and do the next thing. Indeed, I'll appropriate another promise. It's an anchor, one I'll cling to until the end:

"You will go out with joy and be led forth with peace. The mountains and the hills will break forth with singing and the trees of the field will clap their hands..." (Isaiah 55:12).

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#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Maureen Miller, "Where was God?' the accuser challenges. Grieving and loving through the storm', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 14 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3952F101781C0">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3952F101781C0</a>



### Unscrupulous parties may seek to capitalize on Helene, county warns

October 14, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Ryan Kelly | Section: News | 648 Words OpenURL Link

Those affected by Hurricane Helene have been on the receiving end in the past two weeks of donations and supplies from residents in this community and across the state meant to help them through a challenging time.

Not everyone is sending care packages, water, socks, and the like — some see the aftermath of the storm and its devastation as a chance to make some quick money. Price gouging at the gas station or grocery store may be easier to spot than an unscrupulous contractor who may not, be authorized to work in North Carolina.

"The North Carolina Licensing Board for General Contractors advise and urge citizens to be vigilant and take necessary precautions when hiring contractors for repair and reconstruction work to avoid becoming further victimized by scam artists posing as legitimate contractors," the board wrote noting the warning was co-signed by the N.C. State Board of Examiners of Electrical Contractors, N.C. State Board of Examiners of Plumbing, Heating, and Fire Sprinkler Contractors.

"We know that in times of disaster, there are scam artists looking to take advantage of storm victims. The last thing we want is for someone who has been a victim of the disaster to be victimized a second time by a fraudulent contractor," they said.

"Scammers and unlicensed contractors can take advantage of vulnerable citizens following natural disasters. I saw it on a number of occasions working for a municipality following hurricanes," said Surry County Public Information Officer Nathan Walls, recalling time spent working in the Southeastern parts of the state before arriving in Surry County.

"Citizens can contact the County Permitting & Inspections Office to verify if contractors are licensed before starting any work on their property; citizens should not pay contractors upfront before the work starts either, because there have been scammers throughout history that walk off with the money and the citizen never gets the money back," Walls said.

"If your home or property has been damaged by disaster, do not let unscrupulous individuals take advantage of you during this vulnerable time," the National Association of State Contractors Licensing Agencies advised.

"Get proof that the contractor you may be working with is licensed. Some out of state contractors and unlicensed contractors want to help with rebuilding in disaster areas; however, it is illegal and punishable as a felony to perform contracting work in a declared disaster area without a contractor's license."

They suggest not rushing into repairs, "no matter how badly they are needed. Get at least three bids and do not hire the first contractor who comes along. Be cautious about door-to-door offers or repair services or flyers that are left at your door."

Even for the smallest job the association said homeowners need to require proof of a contractor's license or registration for the type of work that needs to be done beforehand. To prevent any hiccups on the backend with the final billing versus pre-work quotes, they said get a written contract that details every aspect of the work plan.

"Any guarantees made by the contractor should be written into the contract. The guarantee should clearly state what is guaranteed, who is responsible for the guarantee and how long the guarantee is valid. Avoid verbal promises, agreements, or contracts," the group advised.

For those who require work done on their homes, they want to get the ball rolling as quickly as possible, but the group warned, "Don't let the payments get ahead of the work. Keep records of all payment and receipts and avoid on the spot payments in cash. The safest method of payment is by check."

Citizens should verify if a contractor is licensed and reputable with their County Permitting & Inspections Office first before embarking on any work on their property — take the time to check and verify, because as Walls said, "It can save you a lot of money and a world of hurt."

Surry County Permitting and Inspections can be reached at 336-401-8300.

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### Autumn Leaves Festival delights thousands

October 14, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Ryan Kelly | Section: News | 702 Words

OpenURL Link

Over the weekend, the 5K on the Greenway got a lot of people up and moving early, but for many others it was the annual Autumn Leaves Festival where folks from far and wide could get in quite a few steps to burn off calories from an Amish donut, collard green sandwich, and other fried delights while scouring vendor stalls for deals and new finds.

Mount Airy was overdue for some sunny skies after Mayberry Days welcomed the tropical remnants of Helene to town along with many other guests a few weekends back. Thankfully, there was no such foul luck this time and the streets were full through all three days of the festival.

The first evidence of the impending festival showed up Thursday for those coming in or passing through downtown Mount Airy. When the food vendor stall popped up that morning across Main Street from the post office with signage proclaiming that funnel cakes would be there soon, it was as though a switch were flicked and the transformation had begun.

Later that evening, after the sun had fallen, Main Street was a ghost town with no cars and few people on foot as the roads had been closed for the vendors to prepare stalls and unload their wares. Their stalls looked like a camp site with two long rows of tents going down each side of the road; it was truly the calm before the storm.

Friday morning it was obvious by the buzz in the air downtown, extra traffic, and everywhere someone smiling, waving, beckoning you to pay for their cheaper-than-the-parking-lot-next-door parking space — often for a good cause mind you, not just a cash grab just for the sake of it.

That rampant consumerism was happening up on Main Street with vendors familiar to those shoppers and browsers who make ALF a regular visit, but new faces too including lots of new places to fill one's face with food.

Main Street was stuffed with people and vendors from West Pine Street through Independence Boulevard to the Main Stage parked as usual in center of the banking district. ALF's arms have gotten longer in recent years, and it felt like the festival this year had more fully grown into the extra space that moving the boundaries down Independence Blvd to North South Street afforded.

Located in that additional space this year was the local =bandstand which gave those in that leg of the journey a place to enjoy live music or dance as was the case on Sunday afternoon traditional Hispanic dancers put on a show. With lots of vendors, food trucks, and some well-placed picnic tables that space felt intentionally designed and afforded a place for people to linger and relax — which was a good thing because there was a lot to do down that way.

Frankly, one really does need a place to sit down for a snack or to catch their breath if any real work is going to get done on the shopping front.

There are different schools of thought when it comes to ALF shopping including Stephanie James from Cana, Virginia, who was doing a little haggling on Sunday. What has worked for her in years past is to come through early on Friday and take a look, "But then, I swoop in on Sunday afternoon and you can sometimes, sometimes, wheel and deal a little bit on prices."

James got \$10 knocked off a \$45 listed priced and walked away a winner. "A little smile goes a long way," she said.

That notion of making more than one visit to ALF during the three-days is not wholly uncommon; some like to come back and walk through in the evening when the crowds may have thinned a little. That is music to vendors and downtown business owners' ears as the more feet on the ground means more potential to make a sale or make a connection that is the groundwork for a later sale.

Therein is the power that comes in part from the longevity of the Autumn Leaves Festival, coming up soon on 60 years. With vendors choosing to come back year after year and visitors making it an annual trek, ALF remains a destination spot for artisans, shoppers, and foodies alike.

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## Cardinals record first shutout with 49-0 victory over Falcons

October 14, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Cory Smith | Section: Sports | 943 Words

OpenURL Link

PILOT MOUNTAIN — The East Surry Cardinals gave their home fans a show in their return to David H. Diamont

East Surry forced four takeaways in the Oct. 11 game against Forbush and turned each one into points. The Cardinals blocked a punt then recovered it for a touchdown, recovered another fumble and grabbed two interceptions in the 49-0 victory.

Friday's Foothills 2A Conference win marked the Cardinals' first shutout of the season, while the Falcons were shut out for just the second time in 2024.

The Cardinals (4-2, 2-0 FH2A) have forced an interception in all six games this season, and the Oct. 11 game was their first with multiple picks. The win over the Falcons was the Cards' second game of the year with multiple fumble recoveries, as well as the team's second game with a punt block.

Forbush (2-5, 0-3 FH2A) was held to 2.2 yards per carry. Josh Key led East Surry with three tackles for a loss, while Porter Gibson, Hatcher Hamm, Jackson Key and Aaden Wright each added one TFL. Braden Snow had East's punt block, and both he and Gibson recovered a fumble.

The visiting Falcons had some success in the air as quarterback Tyler Winters completed 13-of-24 passes for 140 yards. However, the QB was picked off twice — first by Hamm, then by Stevie Keener.

Forbush also turned the ball over on downs twice and punted once.

The Cardinals' offense has also been rolling during the team's recent three-game winning streak. The streak began with a 48-3 win over South Stokes on Sept. 12. East went more than three weeks between games due to its bye week then a postponement due to Hurricane Helene, but picked right back up with a 61-14 win at Wilkes Central on Oct. 4

East has scored 104 unanswered points dating back to the second quarter of its win over Wilkes Central.

Friday's matchup with Forbush was East Surry's first home game since the season opener on Aug. 23. The Cardinals' opening drive ended with a punt, but Hamm's interception put the offense back on the field. The Cards proceeded to score on each of their next six possessions.

East Surry rode its ground game for 337 rushing yards. The Cards have surpassed 330 rushing yards in three games this season after doing so just three times across the entire 2023 season.

The Cardinals have averaged at least 12.5 yards per carry and scored at least five rushing touchdowns in each game of their recent win streak.

Troy Watson followed up his 193-yard performance on Oct. 4 by carrying 12 times against the Falcons for 151 yards and two touchdowns. Also finding the end zone twice was Noah Felts, who finished with three carries for 78 yards and two touchdowns. Hamm, who ran for 27 yards, was the only other Cardinal with multiple carries.

Six Cardinals recorded one carry each, including freshman Jon Hutchens who ran in his first varsity touchdown in the fourth quarter.

Carter Motsinger complimented East's ground game by completing 3-of-6 passes for 49 yards. Motsinger found Stevie Keener for an 8-yard strike in the second quarter — Keener's sixth receiving touchdown of the year — then the pair connected again for a 2-point conversion in the third quarter.

Zach Keener added one reception for 33 yards, and Braxton Davis had one reception for 8 yards.

East Surry is one of two FH2A teams still unbeaten in league competition. East is 2-0, and defending Foothills 2A Conference Champion North Surry sits at 4-0. Surry Central and West Wilkes sit in third place at 2-1, followed by Wilkes Central at 2-3, Forbush at 0-3 and North Wilkes at 0-4.

East Surry will travel to North Wilkes on Oct. 18. Forbush goes on the road the same day to face Surry Central.

ScoringForbush -0, 0, 0, 0-0

East Surry — 7, 20, 15, 7 — 49

1Q

3:44 ES Touchdown — Noah Felts 4-yard rush (Braden Snow PAT) — 0-7

2Q

7:29 ES Touchdown — Troy Watson 23-yard rush (Braden Snow PAT) — 0-14

4:33 ES Touchdown — Noah Felts 56-yard rush (Braden Snow PAT) — 0-21

0:04 ES Touchdown — Stevie Keener 6-yard reception on Carter Motsinger pass (2-point conversion failed) — 0-27

3Q

6:50 ES Touchdown — Troy Watson 9-yard rush (Braden Snow PAT) — 0-34

3:07 ES Touchdown — Porter Gibson fumble recovery on Braden Snow punt block (Stevie Keener 2-point conversion reception on Carter Motsinger pass) — 0-42

4Q

5:57 ES Touchdown — Jon Hutchens 8-yard rush (Braden Snow PAT) — 0-49

Offensive StatsForbush Falcons

**TEAM** 

Pass: 140 yards on 13 completions

Rush: 71 yards on 32 carries

Total: 211 yards

**INDIVIDUAL** 

Passing: Tyler Winters 13-of-24 for 140 yards, two interceptions

Receiving: Joseph Barnes six reception for 64 yards; Alex Clevenger three reception for 42 yards; Hayden Bales two receptions for 20 yards; Alan Benitez one reception for 10 yards; Giovanni Valerio-Real one reception for 4 yards

Rushing: Giovanni Valerio-Real 19 carries for 52 yards; Skylar Kimber two carries for 10 yards; Tyler Winters 11 carries for 9 yards

Kicking: N/A

**East Surry Cardinals** 

**TEAM** 

Pass: 49 yards and one touchdown on three completions

Rush: 337 yards and five touchdowns on 27 carries

Total: 386 total yards and seven touchdowns

**INDIVIDUAL** 

Passing: Carter Motsinger 3-of-6 for 49 yards, one touchdown

Receiving: Zach Keener one reception for 33 yards; Stevie Keener one reception for 8 yards, one touchdown; Braxton Davis one reception for 8 yards

Rushing: Troy Watson 12 carries for 151 yards, two touchdowns; Noah Felts three carries for 78 yards, two touchdowns; Hatcher Hamm six carries for 27 yards; Luke Bruner one carry for 24 yards; Chris George one carry for 15 yards; Stevie Keener one carry for 15 yards; Carter Motsinger one carry for 14 yards; Jon Hutchens one carry for 8 yards, one touchdown; Nathan Kiger one carry for 5 yards

Kicking: Braden Snow 5-of-5 PATs

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# Western NC residents say - Helene left 'highly toxic' mud

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Catherine Muccigrosso; Staff Writer | Section: News | 644 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

As historic floodwaters recede in western North Carolina, the destruction left behind from former Hurricane Helene also involves dealing with massive amounts of mud that some residents and business owners fear is toxic.

Helene leveled the Biltmore Village where Origami Ink has been "completely destroyed," the gift shop said on its Facebook page last week. The flood waters reached the second floor, "literally smashing everything to bits and leaving everything coated in toxic mud," Origami Ink said.

But as of Wednesday, federal and state officials would not confirm that the mud from Helene is toxic.

As part of the state and federal storm response, North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality and other state agencies are working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to identify and address potential contamination in the affected region, the agencies said in a joint statement to The Charlotte Observer.

"Given the widespread impacts of the storm and flooding, generally speaking, the public is advised to treat areas that have flooded and any substances of unknown origin with caution," the agencies said.

Western North Carolina residents are urged to use caution during cleanup, especially if there is a noticeable chemical odor or spilled container of a hazardous material and to ask the local health department or fire department for help.

More guidance is available online at deq.nc.gov and the NCDHHS websites.

Federal and state agencies did not make an official available for interview.

Testing for potential contamination

DEQ has received reports of concerns about potentially toxic mud downstream in Madison County near Marshall from damaged IPEX's Silver-Line Plastics plant in Asheville. Marshall, with less than 800 residents, is on the French Broad River about 20 miles north of Asheville.

In response, inspectors have visited the site and found no injuries were confirmed related to potential exposure in this area, according to the federal and state agencies.

Silver-Line is not listed as a hazardous waste generator in DEQ permitting records.

"They have an air permit with the local air program in Buncombe County and did not have significant quantities of hazardous chemicals," DEQ and EPA said.

How to handle cleaning up the mud?

Flood water can bring microorganisms from sewage and other sources inside buildings, according to the EPA. During flood cleanup, exposure to microorganisms can cause allergic or irritant effects, or in some cases even infectious diseases.

The EPA urged residents are urged to wear an N-95 respirator, sealed goggles, gloves, pants, long-sleeved shirt,

and boots or work boots.

NC DHHS also advises residents to clean their hands with soap and water before preparing food or eating after contact with flood waters.

"Never assume that a water-damaged house is safe," NC Department of Health and Human Services said in a statement to the Observer on Tuesday.

"Going into a building that has been flooded, even after the water is gone, can present a wide variety of hazards that can cause injury, illness or even death," the agency said.

Origami Ink Shop owners Cathie and Jonathan Robbins have been digging through the mud daily looking for anything salvageable. "Cathie and I have been doing most of it ourselves since we could not risk the health of any of our customers who have offered to pitch in," Origami Ink said Saturday on Facebook.

The store, which sells stationery, fountain pens and gifts, set up a Go Fund Me page Saturday to help rebuild. Origami Ink officials did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Catherine Muccigrosso: 7043585198, @CatMuccigrosso

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## Bizarre dead-body - rumors impede Helene disaster response, NC county spokeswoman says

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Joe Marusak and Adam Wagner; Staff Writer | Section: News | 656 Words Page: 5A OpenURL Link

False social media rumors are hurting the emergency response to the Helene disaster in Western North Carolina, the spokeswoman for hard-hit Buncombe County said Thursday.

"1,000 unidentified bodies" at the Asheville hospital, one rumor claimed this week. "Buzzards everywhere."

Two-thousand people trapped in a Candler church, another since-debunked rumor stated.

And a photo shared online showed people in a supposed N.C. mountain mudslide during Helene. The slide happened elsewhere in the world and not during Helene, Buncombe County spokeswoman Lillian Govus said Thursday.

"Those are not true," Govus said, replying to a question from The Charlotte Observer and The (Raleigh) News & Observer during her county's daily Helene disaster-response news conference on Zoom.

"And those hurt, because ... we have to redivert resources and make sure that our emergency personnel check that off the list. And it may be the fourth time that we've done that.

"... It takes away time and resources from us being able to do those critical lifesaving maneuvers in our community," Govus said.

"Verified information is critical at this time," she said. "But as we are trying to disseminate accurate, correct and truthful information in real time," investigating outlandish rumors "is a really big obstacle for us to overcome."

"So I would ask that if you are so compelled to share information on social media, that those sources be from the county, the city of Asheville, the agencies that are supporting us at the federal level, at the state level with North Carolina Emergency Services, and verified individuals."

Kody Kinsley, secretary of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, called the social media rumors of hundreds of bodies piled up "disinformation."

"It's just not true," he said Thursday.

"We don't have a big backlog of work here," Kinsley said. "There's no large number of decedents that we're processing."

As of Wednesday afternoon, North Carolina was working on identifying four bodies, he said.

The state has now confirmed 115 deaths from Helene, and the sheriff of Buncombe County has counted 72 just in his county, The News & Observer reported.

"Our search and recovery has not ceased," Buncombe Sheriff Quentin Miller said. "We've been trying to do that 24/7. We cannot stop. We must continue to move forward."

Reporting human remains during Helene cleanup

If someone finds human remains while cleaning up debris, Kinsley said, they should call their local law enforcement's non-emergency phone number. Those local officials will work with the state team to gather the remains and start processing them.

To help identify bodies, DHHS has shifted medical examiners from the eastern part of the state to the west. When a body is found, Kinsley said, it is collected by one of six fatality recovery teams working in the storm-damaged region.

Next, the body is taken to a central processing site where examiners first try to identify the person. When they were found in their home or were carrying identification, that's easier. But sometimes, Kinsley said, identification requires DNA work or assistance from North Carolina's State Crime Lab.

After a body is identified, the examiners work to determine whether the cause of death is storm-related. In the case of a drowning or the victim of a landslide, that's obvious.

Other times, it's more difficult, Kinsley said, as in the case of someone who is found in a home and could have died from either blunt force trauma or a heart attack.

Those cases require more extensive work from forensic pathologists.

DHHS tries to let families of storm victims know what happened as soon as it can, Kinsley added.

"We very quickly inform the family and then after that we add them to our storm total. And then we continue to process the remains to return them to the family," Kinsley said.

News & Observer reporter Virginia Bridges contributed.

Joe Marusak: 704-358-5067, @jmarusak

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### Largest Spruce Pine quartz mine restarts after Helene battered mountain town

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Brian Gordon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 532 Words Page: 5A OpenURL Link

Two weeks after shutting down its Spruce Pine facilities ahead of Hurricane Helene, Belgian mining company Sibelco announced Thursday it has restarted operations in the Western North Carolina town that contains the world's highest-purity quartz.

"Both production and shipments are progressively ramping up to full capacity," the company said in a statement, though it did not share how long this progress would take. Last week, Sibelco said its initial assessment of the sites had revealed only "minor damage," but power remained out even a week after the storm.

Heavy rainfalls from Helene flooded the North Toe River and battered Spruce Pine, a mountain town in Mitchell County with around 2,000 residents. In the storm's aftermath, many nationwide inquired about the status of the local guartz mines that are critical to the supply chains of semiconductors, solar panels, and other devices.

Few, if any, other places on earth match Spruce Pine quartz for quality. A lack of water in the region around 380 million years ago helped produce an ultra-pure crystalline mineral, and when it comes to manufacturing the semiconductor wafers that get cut into chips, purity is essential. Even a tiny impurity, such 50 parts per billion, can ruin final products.

"The more perfect the atomic structure in your silicon, the more easily and freely electrons can flow around," wrote author Ed Conway in his 2023 book "Material World," which dedicates a section to the Spruce Pine mines.

During most of the 20th century, local miners extracted mica and feldspar from the Mitchell County sites. Over the past three decades, new technological demands have made high-purity quartz one of North Carolina's most important exports.

Between 2019 and 2023, Sibelco said its Spruce Pine sites produced almost 60% more high-quality quartz. And last year, the company announced it would invest \$200 million into the site by 2025 to double production. It is now the largest employer in Mitchell County, according to the N.C. Department of Commerce.

The company sells its quartz under the brand name IOTA. Its mines are north of downtown in an area called the Spruce Pine Mining District. On Google Maps they look like wide, white sandy beaches.

Sibelco is one of two quartz mining operations in Spruce Pine, with a competitor named The Quartz Corp forming in 2011. While Sibelco is headquartered Antwerp, Belgium, The Quartz Corp is based in Spruce Pine.

In an Oct. 2 online post, The Quartz Corp said its initial plant inspection suggested "that damage is mostly concentrated around ancillary units."

"It is still too early to assess when TQC will resume operations as this will also depend on the rebuilding of local infrastructure," the company said.

The News & Observer reported roads and rail lines around the town suffered significant damage when the storm passed through on Sept. 27.

Despite its continued closure, The Quartz Corp said supply shortfalls are not likely.

"We operate a long supply chain and like many organizations we added more focus on our resilience planning post-Covid," the company said, noting it has backup stock of finished products.

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## Helene gave them a chance to meet Kamala Harris. They didn't expect a follow-up call.

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Tammy Grubb; Staff Writer | Section: News | 655 Words Page: 2A

OpenURL Link

Politics wasn't on the radar when Justin Thompson and his wife loaded their 8-month-old son into the family car to leave Asheville on Sept. 28 for a safer place to stay after Helene.

A random connection landed them a meeting with Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee for president, when she visited Charlotte on Oct. 5, he said. But it was the call from the vice president on his cell phone Friday that really took him by surprise.

It was a quick call, said Thompson, 33. She was just checking in to make sure they were OK.

"We were out, and it took me off guard," Thompson said, recalling the conversation. "Hey, it's Kamala. How are you?"

He supported Harris for president before the storm, Thompson said, but his experience over the last week has "further reinforced" his decision that she's the right person for the job.

Finding a road to safety in Charlotte

Thompson and his wife, Rebecca, headed to the basement with their son Carter when Helene hit the north side of Asheville around 7 a.m. Sept. 27, he said. It was "pretty scary," he recalled.

The next day, they found over a dozen trees in the yard, including one that hit a neighbor's house and another wrapped in power lines at the neighborhood's entrance, he said. They were fortunate not to have flooding, but they ran out of supplies, he said.

Without a way to buy food and no water, they decided to leave for Charlotte, where he and his wife have family, Thompson said.

"That took a while. Our neighbors talked about it for a little bit (and contacted Duke Power), and then they went in and took the power line out and chopped (the tree) up," he said. "It was fortunate for us, because that was the only way we had to get out."

Because they didn't have cell service, they didn't realize how bad the damage was in other parts of the city until they crossed the French Broad river and saw the flooding, he said.

"It was devastating, very sad, to see the city that you love and contribute to - I feel like we've spent so much time there, grown up there - and to see it in that condition is very sad," he said.

After trying multiple ways to get out of town and finding roads blocked, they managed to get through on Interstate 26 to Gastonia and then Charlotte, he said.

They were "very fortunate" compared to "the folks who were not able to leave and have been struggling and going through a lot," Thompson said. "Focusing on the broader community outside of Asheville - all the small towns in Western North Carolina - everyone was impacted, so I really want to make sure that relief and attention is on the wider focus and not just Asheville."

#### Meeting the vice president

A few days later, a close friend who works in North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper's office and had also evacuated to Charlotte asked them if they wanted to share their story with the vice president during her Oct. 5 visit, he said.

"It was an incredible experience," Thompson said. "It was very intimate. It was just us and one other family."

Harris and Cooper shared updates on the response by FEMA and state resources to the storm in Asheville and the wider Western North Carolina community, Thompson said, and he got to emphasize to Harris how important federal support was going to be for the small businesses that make up the backbone of Western North Carolina's economy.

"That's going to make or break the recovery at this point, in my opinion at least," said Thompson, who works for community development financial institutions that support small business investment.

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# Lawmakers expect to pass more Helene relief this month

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Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan; Staff Writer | Section: News | 592 Words

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RALEIGH The first wave of Hurricane Helene relief funding for Western North Carolina is now law. Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper quickly signed a \$273 million disaster relief bill on Thursday, the day after the Republican-controlled General Assembly sent him the legislation. The bill passed the House and Senate unanimously.

Lawmakers are already planning for the next round of relief. Senate leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore announced Wednesday that the legislature would be back again soon - Oct. 24 - to pass another bill.

What will that look like?

They are still figuring it out. Here's what we know about where things stand and how you can contact the General Assembly about needs for Helene-devastated areas.

Apply to the NC General Assembly for relief

People in Western North Carolina can share their needs directly with the General Assembly. The legislative website has a form you can fill out at ncleg.gov/form/helenerelief that asks for what kinds of needs are being requested, what county you live in and which lawmaker represents you.

Billions in the state's rainy day fund

The rainy day fund, or Savings Reserve Fund, had \$4.75 billion in it before the Disaster Recovery Act became law on Thursday.

Republican Sen. Kevin Corbin of Macon County thanked God for the rainy day fund on Wednesday as the Senate was debating the relief bill.

"We have over \$4 billion in the rainy day fund, because in Western North Carolina, we had a rainy day. That's what it's for," Corbin said.

The Office of the State Controller releases a weekly Cash Watch that shows the state's money, including the balance of the Savings Reserve.

Moore told reporters after the House passed the first bill that the second bill is likely to be funded from the Savings Reserve, too. He noted that the state also has about \$700 million in a disaster response fund.

He said that in determining how much to fund, they want to make sure the state can get a match from FEMA so the state pays 10% to the federal government's 90% in relief.

What they're waiting for

Leaders didn't want to wait until an already scheduled November session to pass more relief.

"Whatever information we have, we have, and we'll act on it," Moore said.

"It's a new territory here," he said.

Berger said that between now and the Oct. 24 session, "we're going to be collecting suggestions from folks. There are some things that are out there that will not be reimbursed by FEMA. I think we're going to start getting some information about those sorts of things, and what we will need to do in terms of the state funding and state response."

Berger said after 2018's Hurricane Florence, lawmakers came in and quickly appropriated money, then came back a month later with the "main appropriation." He said he didn't think the legislature would be ready for that in October.

Berger said lawmakers will need more advance notice, so it would be more likely for a larger bill to pass during the session that beings Nov. 19.

"I've encouraged the members (of the Senate), and I would encourage - we're reaching out to the executive branch as well - to get us your list, so that we have time to scrub the list, to make sure that it's something that we can build support for," Berger said.

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