

## Louisiana city's leaders serve meals to McDowell residents in wake of hurricane

October 16, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: MIKE CONLEY nconley@mcdowellnews.com| Section: Local | 365 Words OpenURL Link

The leaders of a city in Louisiana served hamburgers, beans, sausage and jambalaya in downtown Marion on Tuesday.

"The goal is to come here and help the people and give them the three Hs: help, happiness and hope," said Zachary, Louisiana, Mayor David McDavid.

"We've been through this before with floods and hurricanes," McDavid added. "We understand what they are going through here."

Zachary is located 12 miles north of Baton Rouge and has around 21,000 people. The city has survived hurricanes Andrew and Katrina.

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, Fire Chief Danny Kimble, Police Chief Darryl Lawrence and an entourage of Zachary's city staff traveled from Louisiana to western North Carolina and set up a cooker at the First Baptist Church of Marion. The group also brought a trailer packed with supplies donated by local businesses in Zachary.

The Louisiana group cooked outside First Baptist Church on Tuesday at lunchtime while volunteers from the church assisted with serving food. The entire Blanton Family fellowship hall at First Baptist of Marion is filled with supplies for those in need after the Helene disaster.

Scores of people came for the free lunch and fellowship provided by the folks from Zachary.

One of them was Scott Wilson of the Montford Cove community. He was there with two of his young children. Some trees fell on his outbuilding, and he lost electricity. But with help from a generator, Wilson, his wife, and their children made it through the hurricane.

"That's nothing compared to people who have lost their homes, lives, all of their homes," he said.

Wilson said he works at the Marion Correctional Institution. He said he has coworkers who lost everything.

Other people who came for the meals were members of the construction and carpentry programs at McDowell Technical Community College. One of those students said his home was damaged in the storm. Others said they faced downed trees and washed-out bridges.

Marion Mayor Steve Little, who is a long-time member of First Baptist, welcomed and thanked McDavid and his team. The group also served dinner in Marion on Tuesday.

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## McDowell's football season finally resumes with tough MAC test vs. Asheville

October 16, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: JUSTIN EPLEY Sports editor | Section: Football | 610 Words OpenURL Link

On one hand, McDowell football coach Darrell Brewer is excited to see his team get back on the field following a monthlong hiatus for damage imposed by Hurricane Helene.

But on the other, Brewer knows his Titans have a tough test against a traditionally-strong Mountain 3A/4A Conference power in Asheville as they play host for a 7 p.m. Friday kickoff in Marion.

Going into the game, however, the excitement of getting to play again takes top billing.

"It's good to be back," Brewer said. "It's good for the kids and good for the community. When something like this happens, it's kind of like a whirlwind. It almost feels like starting the season over. It's been crazy.

"But it's good to get back to a little bit of normalcy in everybody's lives. It's one of those times when the winning and losing doesn't seem nearly as important as playing the game does, right now."

The Titans (1-4, 0-1 MAC) have their facilities and equipment in good shape following the storm as they prepare to host the Cougars (2-1), who are playing their MAC-opener.

"We were lucky here (at McDowell High School)," Brewer said. "You walk on campus here and look around, you wouldn't know anything has ever happened."

Asheville has, perhaps, as little play on film as any team in the state with just three games played so far this fall, and none in the conference. The Cougars are led by senior running back Kyheem Plummer, who has 350 yards and three touchdowns on 29 carries. He is complemented by fellow senior rusher Josh Ellis (25-232-3).

Asheville junior quarterback Meek Slydell has completed 18 of 31 passes for 170 yards and three touchdowns with two interceptions, finding receivers Kayden Ray (9-73-1) and Kareem Williams (3-58-0) most frequently.

Despite how little the Cougars have played, Brewer knows the key word: speed.

"They are very good at running really fast," Brewer said with a laugh. "They have speed everywhere. That's the big thing. And they do a good job of trying to isolate you and put you in some one-on-one situations where their speed can really hurt you.

"So, we're going to have to do a really good job defensively and try to get a lot of hats around the football. We have to do a really good job of trying to contain their speed."

Some of the leaders of the McDowell defense that will be key to the effort include Chamberland Andersen, Hunter Pittman, Joey Collins, Troy Hayes and Ty Adkins.

Offensively, the Titans, who are a bit injury-beleaguered so far this fall, are guided by junior dual-threat quarterback Danny Brown, senior Job Marsh, running backs Pittman and Jordan Barnett, and receivers Andersen and Oakley Keaton.

"What we've got to do is try to control the clock and run the football," Brewer said. "For us to be successful, we have to be able to keep the football and we have to move it. They're a big-play threat whereas we're a 'three yards and a cloud of dust' kind of team.

"So, we've just got to try to use the old ball-control (offense) and do a really good job of tackling on defense."

With high school football back in Marion after a month off, Brewer and the Titans are hoping to see a lot of support from a community and a county as a whole that was hit hard by the hurricane.

"It'd be good and big to have a big crowd out," Brewer said. "I think there will be a big crowd for both teams just because of everything that's happened. Like we say, it's almost like the start of a new season again.

"It's a weird kind of feeling, but we're looking forward to getting it kicked off."

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# Baxter IV fluid manufacturer says more than 1,000 employees are back at McDowell County plant

October 16, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: RICHARD CRAVER Staff Reporter| Section: Health Care | 453 Words OpenURL Link

Baxter International Inc. said Monday it has started sourcing IV fluids and peritoneal dialysis solutions from its global resources as it continues to assess the damages to its Marion manufacturing plant.

Baxter is the largest U.S. manufacturer of these solutions.

Baxter said it will use air and other methods of transportation "to get products to the U.S. as quickly as we are able" from its seven global plants.

The Food and Drug Administration announced Oct. 9 it has authorized temporary importation for five Baxter manufacturing facilities in Canada, China (two sites), Ireland and the United Kingdom.

"Temporary importation authorization across these sites includes 19 IV solution and dialysis product codes," the manufacturer said. "We are working closely with FDA to authorize temporary importation for additional Baxter manufacturing sites and products, which could provide additional inventory in the near term.

The North Cove manufacturing plant experienced significant flooding damage from the remnants of Hurricane Helene. The Marion campus remains closed for production.

It is Baxter's largest manufacturing facility with more than 2,500 employees.

"Our goal is to begin restarting North Cove production in phases by the end of this year," the company said in a news release. "We do not yet have a timeline for when we expect production to be fully restored to pre-hurricane levels."

Baxter said it has brought more than 1,000 employees back to work to contribute to cleanup and recovery efforts, as well as having about 1,000 remediation contractors on site.

"This week, we expect to have 3,000 people contributing to recovery efforts — with nearly two-thirds of those being Baxter employees," the manufacturer said.

"We also continued to serve 100-plus colleagues every day at our employee support center, where we offer food, water and toiletries, as well as access to showers, laundry facilities, computers and generators. Many of our employees still don't have access to power."

Baxter said the current cleanup and recovery priorities remain completing deep cleaning of the facility, including floors and equipment, as well as assessing the status of all equipment and production lines.

The recovery efforts are benefiting from a second temporary bridge at the site that is allowing additional truck and equipment traffic.

Baxter said it has transported more than 350 truckloads of finished product off site and is beginning shipments to customers.

"Our goal remains to return to 90% to 100% allocation of certain IV solution product codes by the end of 2024,"

Baxter said.

"We have requested that healthcare professionals limit new PD patient starts to pediatric patients (those under 18 years old) and other medically necessary patient exceptions may be considered.

"While our priority is to ensure our existing patients and customers get the supplies they need, we are looking for every opportunity to expand our support to address new patients as we progress toward recovery."

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#### **BRIEFLY**

October 16, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Briefly | 257 Words OpenURL Link

US MILITARY: The Pentagon announced Tuesday more than 800 military personnel have seen their service records upgraded to honorable discharges after previously being kicked out of the military under its former "don't ask, don't tell" sexual orientation policy.

LISTERIA OUTBREAK: U.S. Agriculture Department officials have launched an internal investigation into how the agency handled reports of serious problems at a Boar's Head deli meat plant tied to a listeria outbreak that has killed at least 10 people and hospitalized nearly 50 in 19 states since May, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal said Tuesday.

OHIO VOTING: The Justice Department will send election monitors to Ohio's Portage County, where Republican Sheriff Bruce Zuchowski has been accused of intimidating voters. Last month, he said people with Kamala Harris yard signs should have their addresses written down so immigrants can be sent to live with them if the Democrat wins the presidency.

UNIONS: The number of petitions by workers to have union representation has doubled during President Joe Biden's administration, according to figures released Tuesday by the National Labor Relations Board.

FEMA THREATS: Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Criswell said Tuesday that FEMA personnel have resumed door-to-door visits as part of Hurricane Helene-recovery work in North Carolina, an effort suspended amid reports they could be targeted by militia.

HAITI: The second-in-command of the Kraze Baryè gang — one of Haiti's most powerful gangs — was injured in a shootout with Haitian and Kenyan police in their first major incursion into gang-controlled territory since a U.N.-backed mission began earlier this year, police said Tuesday.

#### Associated Press

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# The lingering impacts of Helene - Businesses small and large struggle to recover from storm's impacts

October 16, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC) Author: Randy Foster editor@cherokeescout.com| Section: News| 1213 Words Page: 1 OpenURL Link

The Tin Crow, a consignment store in Micaville on U.S. 19 East/N.C. 80 halfway between Spruce Pine and Burnsville, posted optimistically on its Facebook page on Thursday, Sept. 26. "The shop will be closed Friday, September 27th due to weather," said the statement, posted about 90 minutes before Category 4 Hurricane Helene made landfall near Perry, Florida. Helene was a tropical storm by the time it reached western North Carolina, but the National Weather Service called it a once-in-a-thousand-year storm for the region. Areas in and around Mitchell County received two feet of rainfall over a 24-hour period. In Micaville, usually placid Little Crabtree Creek and tributary Ayles Creek became raging torrents, scouring the landscape and leaving devastation in the storm's wake. The Tin Crow was gutted, all its inventory washed downriver. A ro

adfacing wall collapsed, as did the main floor and back wall. It didn't open Saturday. A shopping center across the highway was similarly ravaged. Casualties included Maples, a coffee shop with a 4.9-out-of-5 rating on Google, Underwood & Weld Co., fitness center Body Tribe, and Micaville Outpost, a general store with Appalachian-themed merchandise. Cars, pickup trucks and school buses were caught up in the flood, their wreckage mired in the mud. A storage tank was tipped on its side and wedged against a pile of debris. Micaville became the gateway to devastation on the approach to neighboring Mitchell County, which lost all contact with the outside world during the days that followed. Businesses on Locust Street in downtown Spruce Pine were flooded by the swollen North Toe River, as was the Ingles supermarket and gas station off Greenwood Road, to name a few examples. Once connections were restored, news of devastation reached the outside world and help started to arrive and a bigger picture emerged. Micaville was devastated, as was Spruce Pine and scores of cities, towns and communities throughout a 25-county swath of western North Carolina. But in Mitchell and McDowell counties, impacts had global implications. The world stage Helene did more than destroy local businesses. It interrupted two local industries with national and global implications - pure quartz operations near Spruce Pine in Mitchell County vital to global technology manufacturing, and Baxter Healthcare in Marion in McDowell County that produces the majority of IV products used in the United States. It was quartz that grabbed the attention of global markets. Online news site Axios ran with this headline: "Helene took out an N.C. town the entire tech world relies on." A disruption in Spruce Pine quartz had the potential to disrupt technology industries around the world. Spruce Pine quartz is valued for its high melting point, chemical inertness, low thermal expansion and purity. "It is uniquely prized for its chemical composition," according to Quartz Corp, which operates one of two quartz operations in Mitchell County. "High purity quartz sand has the distinct physical properties to become a successful crucible. Quartz crucibles are a critical component in the manufacture of photovoltaic cells and semiconductor chips. They are used to grow ingots that are then sliced and polished into ultra-thin wafers," according to Quartz Corp. On Oct. 9, Belgium-based Sibelco, which operates the larger of two quartz operations in Mitchell County and is the county's the largest private employer, announced it resumed shipments of the vital mineral and that all its workers survived Helene. Sibelco also established a foundation to help rebuild homes and businesses in the Spruce Pine area, where about two-thirds of the population is directly or indirectly involved in quartz production. Norway-based Quartz Corp., the county's 10th largest employer, shut down operations the day before Helene made landfall and remained closed. "H

urricane Helene has severely hit our Spruce Pine community which is currently facing multiple challenges from flooding, and power and communication outages," the company said in a news release. "It is a dramatic situation for the region. "Our focus is to ensure that our employees and their families are safe. It is with an immense relieve that we now have been able to make contact with all employees. In addition to this, our teams are joining the local task forces to try to restore the most basic services and bring further supplies to Spruce Pine. "Operations at our facilities were stopped on Sept. 26 in preparation of the event and we have no visibility on when they will restart. This is second order of priority. Our top priority remains the health and safety of our employees and their families."

IV supplies Mass casualties from backto-back Category 4 hurricanes in the South put a strain on the national supply of intravenous fluids to hospitals and dialysis centers, but Helene also disrupted production of IV products at the Baxter Healthcare plant in North Cove north of Marion that produces a substantial portion of those products for the nation. "Baxter's North Cove manufacturing site was significantly impacted by the rain and storm surge from Hurricane Helene, which was unprecedented in Western North Carolina and resulted in water flooding the facility," Illinois-based Baxter announced. "Baxter continues to scale production across its global locations and is working closely with FDA (Food and Drug Administration) on temporary importation of products to increase available inventory. Based on 1) the current status of our remediation efforts, 2) our expectations regarding our ability to reallocate capacity from other Baxter facilities, and 3) initiation of temporary importation on certain products, our goal is to restart North Cove production in phases and return to 90% to 100% allocation of certain IV solution product codes by the end of 2024." Other impacts Helene destroyed miles of railroad track used to transport quartz. CSX, a Class 1 railroad that serves major markets in the eastern United States, reported that its Blue Ridge Subdivision "is experiencing significant flooding and bridge damage, leading to a major outage." The week following Helene, crews were on scene repairing damaged sections of track and rebuilding sections that were destroyed. A repair crew work

er said the total cost would be hundreds of millions of dollars. Our State Magazine featured fall foliage tourism in its current edition and published articles about communities throughout the region. Ironically, its map of covered communities was nearly identical to maps of counties devastated by Tropical Storm Helene. Fall foliage tourism is a \$1 billion industry in North Carolina, according to an Appalachian State University study. According to the study, the typical family of four could spend anywhere between \$400 and \$1,000 on a trip. "That's no small chump change and such expenditures are critical to the success of businesses in the mountains, many of whom depend on fall tourism to balance their books," according to the report. While fall 2024 may be a bust, the influx of labor and recovery dollars to rebuild the region over the next year or two may more than make up for it.

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## The oasis in Little Switzerland - Fire house offers comforts and essentials in post-Helene

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Jennifer Weiss sat off to the side inside Parkway Fire & Rescue Station 22 off Chestnut Grove Road in Little Switzerland on Oct. 4, a week after Tropical Storm Helene tormented Mitchell and 24 other western North Carolina counties. She had an ice pack wrapped around her arm, a fresh EpiPen injection coursing through her veins and a spare injector in her pocket - all donated. Weiss owns some AirBnB units about a mile from the fire house and was checking on neighbors' vacation homes, discarding about 30 pounds of spoiled meat, when she was stung "for no reason." Helene displaced countless yellow jacket nests throughout the region, and one yellow jacket stung her left arm, which swelled to twice its normal size. Over the past year she had become more susceptible to bee stings, she said. She waited until the next morning to seek help at the Little Switzerland fire house, one of many people seeking post-storm resources in this community of vacation

homes and rentals just off the Blue Ridge Parkway. "It hurts like hell," she said, uncomfortable both physically and in her predicament. "I'm one of the ones checking on people, not one of the ones who needs help," she said. An oasis The Little Switzerland fire house had been repurposed in the aftermath of the storm, said firefighter David Hughes. Its fire apparatus was parked up a dirt trail across the road to make room for an oasis. As soon as supplies arrived in Spruce Pine via big rigs (once the highways were repaired and cleared of debris) and airlifted in using Army CH-47 Chinook heavy-lift helicopters, the goods were filtered down to those surrounding communities that could be reached. A table was set up along High Ridge Road behind the Switzerland Inn to dispense food and water, but up Chestnut Grove Road, the fire house took it to another level. It already had a trailer-mounted generator while the Mitchell News-Journal provided a StarLink receiver to provide satellite internet service. Outside, huge water tanks dispensed non-potable water for people to use for washing and to flush their toilets, with pallets of bottled water for drinking. Inside the fire house bays, there were enough goods to stock a small-size Dollar General. And for people like Weiss, emergency medical triage was available. Within 10 minutes after she arrived, two medic crews responded to tend to her. N.C. 226, the main road to Little Switzerland, was blocked during the storm, forcing traffic to detour via the Blue Ridge Parkway, a scenic route that was also closed, but clearing the stretch to Little Switzerland was easier than repairing damage to N.C. 226. Spruce Pine was accessible but was dealing with its own problems - no power, no water, no sewer, and the needs of thousands of people to be met. Someone donated a gaspowered generator to Kim Heaton so that the 800 pounds of frozen meat from the hogs she raised and side of beef she bought would not spoil. All she had to do was pick it up in Marion. "That's what God has put in people's hearts," the elderly woman said. "I just want to say thank-you." The drive to Marion in neighboring Mc

Dowell County was normally 15 minutes, but after Helene, it was a 3-hour adventure using side roads, said David Hughes of Parkway Fire & Rescue. For those in the know, the fire house in Little Switzerland was a refuge of civilization - electricity to recharge their phones, cellular phone and data service to contact loved ones, shelf-stable food, bug spray, water, fruits and vegetables, clothing, tools, work gloves, baby formula, paper products, fleece blankets, toys and even hot showers. Carpenter Floyd Hargraves and his wife, Dakota Hargraves, stopped by the station with five-month-old baby Atticus in his mother's arms. They were there to replenish and contact the outside world. Maritza Harper volunteered to keep the restrooms and showers clean. Her husband died two years ago and her house burned down a year ago, so she was no stranger to tragedy. Grants paid for a new house, but on the day she was supposed to get the keys, she was at the fire house scrubbing toilets. She was at the station every day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. keeping the restrooms clean and safe. Donations of shower curtains and rods brought joy to her heart. The station also had pallet of MRE's - meals, ready to eat, similar to military field rations, including sweet and sour rice and chicken, pasta with garden vegetables and tomato sauce, and spaghetti with Italian style sauce and meat. Communicating all that was limited to word of mouth, however. Without internet, cellular service or electricity, many locals knew they could get cellular service just off Blue Ridge Parkway near Gillespie Gap, elevation 2, 805 feet. Crowds gathered there, contacting the outside world, not realizing the bounty available

nearby at the fire house. The transition back Hughes was preparing the Little Switzerland fire house for more normal operations on Oct. 4, eight days after Helene. After a week of around-the-clock service to the community, the volunteer firefighters had their own lives to get back to. A crew moved pallets around to make room for

the fire engines. The plan to was maintain minimal service, including potable and nonpotable water, on a self-serve basis, with the rest of the supplies moved to more central locations. But Hughes was also eyeing the long game. The fire house is a twolevel building. Its climate-controlled lower level has reinforced concrete walls 2-feet thick and a 12-inch reinforced concrete ceiling. It's equivalent to a bomb shelter. Half the lower level stores equipment, but the fire house is using the other half to store surplus water and MRE's - all with 2033 expiration dates. Maybe the community would need these supplies or maybe the supplies would be shipped to eastern North Carolina, the part of the state that normally suffers hurricane impacts and which this time provided help to the west.

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# Dogwood Health Trust donates more than \$30 million for Helene relief funding in WNC - Additional support will help with recovery, rebuilding efforts

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Section: News 700 Words

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Asheville, N.C. - Today, Dogwood Health Trust donated more than \$30 million in initial relief funding for the unnatural devastation across Western North Carolina (WNC) from Hurricane Helene. This funding responds to short-term, immediate needs and was approved by a unanimous vote by the full board of directors at an emergency meeting on Oct. 3. In this initial relief funding, Dogwood is prioritizing support for local organizations that will help local people and organizations now and in the days to come. Staff members are also actively working with local, regional and national partners to attract additional capital to the region and joining partners to advocate for state and federal appropriations.

Dogwood's initial support is organized in three areas: (1) supporting organizations that can quickly deploy resources and respond to urgent needs of people and geographic areas most affected; (2) supporting assessment, navigation and legal services associated with FEMA response; and (3) maintaining critical health services across the region.

"Hurricane Helene has affected the people and communities of Western North Carolina in unimaginable ways," said Dr. Susan Mims, CEO of Dogwood Health Trust. "Our response includes this funding for short-term relief, and we will be here for long-term recovery and rebuilding as well. We are working with our funded partners to get resources to all our neighbors in need throughout the region." "Several networks of organizations were created from Dogwood's previous investments that are now helping us deploy resources for health care, legal services and healthy food distribution. We are fortunate to have this nonprofit infrastructure in place," Mims added.

A lead grant of \$10 million will go to the Emergency and Disaster Response Fund at the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, which is positioned to grant smaller amounts to human service and community-based organizations throughout the region quickly. Criteria and an application are available on their website.

More than \$20 million will be given to support direct service nonprofits and organizations with deep connections to local communities throughout Western North Carolina. These funds will be used to support community needs and the employees working in these organizations tirelessly each day, including:

Deploy resources and respond to urgent needs of people and geographic areas most affected MANNA FoodBank - to support food distribution, disaster response and ongoing operations. MANNA's primary location was destroyed by flooding, but they are actively responding to community needs at locations like the WNC Farmers Market.

Impact Health - to help support their 60 human service organizations (HSOs) with daily operations across the region. Many are focusing on purchasing and distributing food from local farmers to people in need.

The AMY Wellness Foundation and Gateway Wellness Foundation - to support and regrant dollars for on-the-ground recovery efforts in Avery, Mitchell and Yancey counties (AMY) and Burke, McDowell, Polk and Rutherford counties (Gateway).

WNC Communities - to support local farmers and help coordinate their distribution of fresh, nutritious foods to local community members.

Assessment, navigation and legal services for FEMA response Pisgah Legal Services - to help residents access legal services and navigate filings with FEMA across WNC. Filing can be complex, so it is important that affected community members receive legal support from local Pisgah staff in their communities. Pisgah now has offices

throughout WNC and a mobile Justice Bus as a result of former Dogwood funding.

The Centralina Foundation - to support Councils of Government in WNC in coordinating assessments for FEMA response and the needs of local governments.

Maintain Critical Health Services WNC's seven local Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) - to support their continued operations so community members can access the clinical health care they need across WNC. Dogwood will make more funding announcements in the coming weeks for recovery and rebuilding efforts, including responding to the needs of small businesses, among other opportunities. More information about how to submit future funding ideas to Dogwood will be shared on www.dht.org soon. Many Dogwood staff are still affected by the hurricane, so time is needed for our organization to get back to full capacity. Dogwood Health Trust is a private foundation based in Asheville, North Carolina with the sole purpose of dramatically improving the health and wellbeing of all people and communities in the Qualla Boundary and the 18 counties of Western North Carolina.

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## Post-Helene relief

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The Parkway Fire & Rescue Station 22 has been busy with offering comfort and essentials in post-Helene Mitchell County. Volunteers assembled quick meal packs complete with wet wipes and clean wash cloths for residents to take along with a snack pack. Station 22 stocked enough goods and supplies to stock a small size Dollar General. A diesel-powered generator delivered electricity to Station 22 on Oct 4, a week after the area was devastated by Tropical Storm Helene. Beside it are supplies of potable and non-potable water and other supplies. In addition, N.C. Army National Guard troops screened motorists driving on Blue Ridge Parkway, most of which was closed but a small portion was reopened as the only access to Little Switzerland.

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# After the storm: Cleaning up

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Downtown Spruce Pine Like all her 14, 903 neighbors, Mitchell News-Journal editor Mariel Williams has been without electricity, water and cell phone service since Tropical Storm Helene devastated Mitchell County.

Across the street from the newspaper office is the railroad and sidings that serve the county's industries and, beyond the tracks, the North Toe River that swelled and inundated downtown.

The newspaper office was closed as Helene approached, its indispensable computers and irreplaceable archives transported to the regional office in Franklin.

But the newspaper office was relatively spared by Helene - just 2 inches of water inside the building. Volunteers helped pull carpet and remove waterlogged baseboards on Oct 4. The next block down, the elevation dips and restaurants and businesses there were inundated. Lumber, drywall, kitchen equipment, dishes and ruined merchandise were piled nearly 6 feet high in the center of Locust Street.

The scene David Hughes is a volunteer fireman at Parkway Fire & Rescue. Firefighting runs in the family. His son Kevin is the Parkway chief whose day job is fire captain in nearby Marion.

Before Hughes retired, he was a county magistrate and equipment salesman for local industries including quartz mines and a factory that makes IV bags - two industries that are the largest private employers in the area and that have national and global impacts.

The way he described it on Oct. 4, highways connecting Mitchell County to its own communities, much less the rest of North Carolina, were blocked for days before the first big rigs arrived with supplies.

N.C. Army National Guard troops were arriving and Army CH-47 Chinook helicopters brought in pallets of drinking water, food and medical supplies. Distribution points were set up at fire houses, churches, key intersections and many seemingly random spots that nevertheless made sense to local residents.

The path to neighboring Marion, normally a 15-minute drive via N.C. 226, was a 3-hour trek, maybe - with Hughes listing off a detour of local roads only local people would know that might be cleared of fallen trees, with undermined portions given hasty patches of still-warm asphalt.

Parkway Fire & Rescue Charlie Hunt is a Spruce Pine lawyer who made his way to Parkway Fire & Rescue outside of Spruce Pine to fill gallon containers with non-potable water to wash and flush his toilets.

He felt lucky - he lost some trees, some of the thousands around the county lost in the storm, but his home escaped damage. He was in good spirits.

Inside the fire house, N.C. Wildlife Sgt. Dustin Ethridge and Officer Eric Gleason were taking a break after doing welfare checks throughout the county.

Ethridge marveled at how tough people are in Mitchell County. One elderly couple only had bottled water and Vienna sausages but told him they were fine and urged them to help others. One volunteer firefighter reported for duty despite having stage 4 cancer and missing chemotherapy treatments.

Uphill from the Parkway fire station is a flat piece of property that was being used as a helipad. It was being converted to house 450 relief works and included private, secure sleeping compartments and a general purpose tent. This was going to be a long-term challenge for Mitchell County.

A giant U.S. flag - 40-feet by 30-feet in dimension and weighing 200 pounds - had been pulled down in advance of Helene and was re-hoisted a week later. The flag was dedicated to the late Seth McKinney. A plaque at the site commemorates a poem he wrote just before the teenager collapsed and died at school.

Spruce Pine In town at Spruce Pine Fire & Rescue, crews rested and recharged. Two trays of fresh cinnamon rolls were laid out on a table. A hand washing table outside the main entrance featured warm water - a luxury given the times. The building had electricity and internet, and District 47 State Sen. Ralph E. Hise, Jr., who lives in Spruce Pine, was eating a sandwich from a bagged lunch.

"I'll bet I'm the only state senator you've ever met who hasn't had a bath or shower in a week," he said. He was using the fire station as his base of operations. It was one of the few places where he could be reached by phone. Calling out was another matter, though. Reaching someone local who also had cell service was unlikely, but at least they could call him.

Spruce Pine Mayor Phillip Hise stopped by. He is Senator Hise's uncle. A water plant operator before he became mayor, Phillip Hise was trying to get water service restored to the town's customers, but outflow from the reservoir was a fraction of normal.

"We may need scuba divers to clear a blockage," he said, adding that the reservoir was covered in a thick layer of fallen trees. That was the good news.

The bad news was that the town's sewage treatment plant was destroyed.

"It can take four years before we have a new plant operational," Senator Hise said.

Hise has been through floods before - his mother lost her house in 1998 and he was mayor when fire ravaged the area, but nothing compared to Helene.

It took years for the area to fully recover from the 1998 flooding, he said, and Helene was far worse.

"I don't know what normalcy is any more," he said.

The National Weather Service reports that Helene was a once-in-a-thousand-years weather event for Mitchell and surrounding counties.

Help was slow to arrive following Helene, in large part because there was no way to get word out about local devastation, he said, but was sufficient once it started to arrive.

The death toll was unknown, he said, and the community lost one of its two funeral homes. Help from the east Firefighters from as far away as New Bern near the coast made their way to Mitchell County to relieve local fire crews and free them up to do other work, like clearing fallen trees from the Blue Ridge Parkway. The scenic route was closed with no timeline to reopen, but N.C. 226A, the normal road to Little Switzerland, was impassible and a nearby section of Blue Ridge Parkway was the only alternative.

Also from New Bern was John Wafford, director of disaster relief from the North Carolina Assemblies of God Church. He was helping organize a Convoy of Hope delivering a three-to-five-day supply of food and water - 35, 000 pounds in all, along with portable generators.

Groceries The Walmart was open a week after Helene, operating off generators and selling from on-hand stocks but limiting customers to 15 at a time and accepting cash only. And cash was in limited supply until ATM service was

restored at local banks.

As resources arrived, portable showers and clothes washing facilities were installed in the Walmart parking lot, but service was limited without a water supply.

But the Ingles - one of the large, newer ones with a gas station - was inundated and its roof collapsed. Hughes wondered whether it would ever reopen. Across the street just off the riverbanks, above-ground petroleum tanks were knocked over by raging waters of the North Toe River.

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## • Citation (aglc Style)

Randy Foster editor@cherokeescout.com, 'After the storm: Cleaning up', *Mitchell News-Journal* (online), 16 Oct 2024 8 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C38CC25774B708">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C38CC25774B708</a>>



## FEMA: Apply now for financial aid

October 16, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC)

Author: Rachel Hoskins rhoskins@thefranklinpress.com | Section: News | 928 Words

Page: 1 OpenURL Link

Mitchell County was among 27 North Carolina counties that suffered widespread flooding, landslides and destruction, due to the Tropical Storm Helene, which moved inland after coming ashore in Florida on Sept. 26. N.C. Governor Roy Cooper requested a Federal Major Disaster Declaration for WNC, which was approved by President Joe Biden, leading to the influx of federal help for the area. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) said qualified homeowners, renters and small business owners in Mitchell County whose homes and businesses suffered from storm related damaged are eligible to apply for federal disaster relief funding.

La Tanga Hopes, FEMA Media Relation Specialist, said that "anyone incurring damage can ask questions and complete their application at disasterassistance.gov."

If qualified, FEMA provides Serious Needs Assistance. It is an upfront, flexible payment or approximately \$750 to help cover essential items like food, water, baby formula, medication and other emergency supplies. It is not a loan. There are other forms of assistance that you may qualify for. Serious Needs Assistance is an initial payment you may receive while FEMA assesses your eligibility for additional funds. As your application continues to be reviewed, you may still receive additional forms of assistance for other needs such as support for temporary housing, personal property and home repair costs.

Hopes said the \$750 in initial relief is "simply a lifeline to keep your head above water," and that it's different than the money used for rebuilding and for long term disaster recovery.

"Once you're settled and safe, we can talk about disaster recovery process," Hopes said. "One myth is that people will have to pay back to \$750. If they receive a cash grant from FFEMA, they won't have to be paid back and isn't income driven."

Hopes said people should apply with their insurance company first, then apply with FEMA.

"It's not like people just complete their application and receive money in hand," said Hopes. "There are eligibility requirements, and you must share how you incurred damages."

Hopes said people can't "double dip" to receive funds from two different sources for the same reason, using the example of receiving FEMA funds and then claiming those same damages with their insurance.

FEMA has opened three, Disaster Recovery Centers in WNC with Asheville and Marion being the closest centers to Mitchell County. On Monday, Hopes said there are plans is to open more in WNC as needed, although she did not have the schedule of where additional centers would be open.

Lack of power, internet and phone services is making it difficult for many residents to apply for help. In Mitchell County cell phone and internet access is available at area fire departments and at the Buladean Community Center. The Spruce Pine Library is open weekdays from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. and has internet services available.

The deadline to apply for FEMA aid is Nov. 27.

Information you need to file a claim:  $\cdot$  Phone number  $\cdot$  Address (both during the disaster and current location)  $\cdot$  Social Security number  $\cdot$  Notes listing the extent of damage. This can be a general list.

· Banking information for those interested in receiving a direct deposit · Insurance company name and policy number · Amount of annual household income.

FEMA also recommends taking pictures and making lists to document the damage. This can help streamline the process both when working with homeowner's or renter's insurance and with FEMA inspectors.

Hopes said people should check appliances and anywhere in a home that took on water before filling out their application, saying that small issues can become big problems.

Four ways to apply for FEMA aid: · Visit DisasterAssistance.gov. · Download the app through Google Play or the Apple App Store, or by texting ANDROID or APPLE to 43362 (4FEMA.)

 $\cdot$  Call 800-621-3362 from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., seven days per week  $\cdot$  Visit the closest FEMA Disaster Recovery Center to apply in person.

After applying, FEMA may ask individuals to work with a FEMA inspector who can gather more details about the losses sustained in the storm. Once an application has been processed, the applicant will receive a letter via mail or email, depending on the method the applicant chose.

Letters will detail what aid was approved and how help that is awarded is required to be utilized.

Often, Serious Needs Assistance in the amount of \$750 is the first money individuals receive while their application for potential other help is making its way through FEMA's system. That money is meant to help with immediate problems.

Appeals process If a FEMA application is denied, applicants have up to 60 days to file an appeal.

Appeals can be filed in several ways: · Through an individual's DisasterAssistance.gov account · Directly through a Disaster Recovery Center · Faxed to 800-827-8112 and marked "Attention: FEMA - Individuals & Households Program."

· Mailed to: FEMA - Individuals & Households Program National Processing Service Center, P.O. Box 10055, Hyattsville, MD 20782-8055 The denial letter will include details on what applicants should send with the appeal, and those requirements can vary case by case. Typically, individuals should receive a response within 30 days, but it can take up to three months to receive a final response. Those who need help understanding their letter or the appeal process can call the same FEMA helpline listed above.

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## Sorrow in Relief - Mitchell death toll rises to 6

October 16, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC)

Author: Mariel Williams editor@mitchellnews.com Section: News 662 Words

Page: 1 OpenURL Link

County Manager Allen Cook confirmed last week that six people died in Mitchell County as a result of Hurricane Helene. Four of those drowned in floodwaters and two others died as a result of accidents related to the storm. Cook would not officially release names of the victims, but family members have released statements saying that Alison Wisely and her children Felix, 9, and Lucas, 7, were washed away along with Alison's fiancé, Knox Petrucci. The family reportedly died while trying to evacuate their home on Relief Road Extension in north Mitchell County. "It's so sad," friend Michelle Mejia said. "But their lives were so full of joy." Daniel Davis, fire chief at the Bradshaw Volunteer Fire Department, said that Wisely and Petrucci's neighborhood suffered some of the worst flooding in the county. "The flood has been catastrophic - people lost the

ir whole homes, their vehicles," Davis said. "The worst parts of the county would probably be going down Huntdale and then Relief Road." Mejia has been salvaging mementos of the family's life from their flooded home, including Wisely's wedding dress. Wisely and Petrucci had planned a wedding for Nov. 9. "Aly & Felix had a familyfriendly podcast about cryptids and paranormal called 'Beyond Legends,'" Mejia said. "Lucas was learning Spanish and so every weekend they visited me at the farmers market we spoke Spanish. Aly bought flowers to dry for her November wedding at the very last market from my good friend, and I found them in a tree in her front yard." Wisely and Petrucci were beekeepers and members of the Toe Cane Beekeepers Association. Petrucci was a manager at Honey & the Hive in Weaverville, and Wisely worked at Carolina Memorial Sanctuary. "When Hurricane Helene took our Alison, Knox, Felix, and Lucas from us, it shattered our worlds, leaving a void which cannot be filled," their families said in a statement on GoFundMe.com. "Yet, in the midst of this profound grief, your donations, kind words, and gestures of support have been a lifeline." Relief Road Extension connects Mitchell County with Yancey County. Davis said that although the road is still in bad shape it has been reopened to traffic. Mejia said it looks like water rose to about two f

eet from Wisely and Petrucci's ceiling. However, most of their pets were rescued after the storm. Friends and neighbors are still looking for their female red hound, Moonpie, and community members are asked to keep an eye out for her. The Bradshaw department serves a population of around 1, 700 in the Tipton Hill, Bailey Settlement, Poplar and Huntdale areas. Davis said the area still has a lot of recovery work ahead of it. "They said there isn't going to be power in these parts for about four months," he said. "We have been overabundant with supplies, but so far people have been going through them as fast as we can put them out." Bradshaw VFD has a number of resources available to community members still without power or water, including showers. "A lot of people from Ohio, Kentucky have been bringing in resources like supplies," Davis said. "They've been helping us cut trees out of the road, clearing roads and stuff to get people access." Meanwhile, community members are still mourning what they have lost. "Stay strong, and we'll get through this together," Davis said.

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# Misinformation could cause victims to miss Nov. 27 aid deadline - Our Opinion

October 16, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC)

Section: News | 469 Words

Page: 5 OpenURL Link

One of the most difficult aspects of dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Helene has been the lack of reliable communication. Many parts of the tri-county area still don't have either cell or landline phone service. This has been tragic, as flood victims had no way to call for help, and it continues to be frustrating as survivors try to access assistance. But lack of reliable communication can lead to rumors spreading like wildfire, and it's important to be careful about what stories we believe and spread to neighbors. This is especially important because the deadline to apply for aid from the Federal Emergency Management Agency is Nov. 27. Don't tell your neighbors stories that you can't confirm that might lead them to miss this deadline and be unable to rebuild their homes.

It's easy to make up rumors about FEMA because, like any extremely large federal organization, it operates under complex bureaucratic rules that make everything it does confusing. But it's important to remember that FEMA is a complicated, frustrating bureaucracy precisely in order to prevent the abuses of power that it has been accused of.

While it's always a good idea to pressure lawmakers to find ways to make bureaucracy less slow and more effective, as a general rule, extremely large organizations either operate with a lot of rules and red tape or they operate with a lot of corruption. The long forms, the boxes each applicant must check in order to qualify for aid - these are all ways to keep individuals from abusing their power or inside knowledge of the organization for personal gain.

There is no evidence that FEMA employees are seizing donated goods or confiscating personal property. If they are seizing donations, they're doing a very bad job of it - every distribution site is still filled with piles of food and supplies contributed by concerned citizens, nonprofits and government agencies.

Applying for federal aid does not give the federal government the right to seize your land. And federal aid will not be limited to \$750 - that is merely the amount that is available immediately. Getting more than that will take more time, and more paperwork.

Again, the time and paperwork are not there to keep storm victims from getting the money, it's to make sure money meant for victims is not stolen before it gets to them. Unemployment assistance available Mitchell residents who lost income due to Tropical Storm Helene may be eligible for Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA). File a claim online at the N.C. Department of Commerce's Division of Employment Security webpage at des.nc.gov or call 888-737-0258. The Spruce Pine Library, 142 Walnut Ave., is open weekdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Internet services are available. Limited computers are available but patrons can bring their own computers to connect to the library's internet.

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# My heart breaks for WNC

October 16, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC) Author: Mike Causey; Insurance Commissioner | Section: News | 362 Words Page: 5 OpenURL Link

As North Carolina Commissioner of Insurance, my heart breaks for the families impacted by this terrible storm. I hope you and your families are currently safe. Hurricane Helene devastated much of western North Carolina, other parts of the state, and the neighboring states of Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina and Florida. The mountains were hit hardest, with severe flooding and landslides, leaving many communities in ruin. Special Agents from the Department of Insurance's Criminal Investigation Division are on the ground and have been since the flooding began. A special thank you to the 12 agents that went door to door to homes and businesses evacuating people to save lives. Sadly, too many people have already lost their lives to this storm and floodwaters. The Department of Insurance is coordinating with law enforcement agencies, emergency

management, fire departments, rescue squads, charities, churches and civic groups to do everything we can at the state and local level to assist the victims. NCDOI will be coordinating on ways to reach those on the ground with insurance claims and other needs in the coming days and weeks. Check the Department of Insurance website for updates: www.ncdoi.gov/helene You can also donate to the North Carolina Disaster Relief fund at: https://pay.payitgov.com/ncdonations Most importantly, if you are safe, please check on your friends, family members and neighbors. If your community buildings, churches and other buildings are unscathed, please consider opening it up to allow first responders, emergency personnel, or the community to use as a base of operations. Let us act immediately to help our neighbors. The Department of Insurance is receiving reports of damage and insurance claims in areas of need. Please call 911 for immediate emergencies or report to local authorities first, then to Emergency Management. For assistance with insurance matters, contact the Department of Insurance's Consumer Services Division at 855-408-1212. We are coming together to help rebuild and restore our communities. Every human being, pet and livestock needs to be accounted for and make sure they're safe. Please pray for our first responders, volunteers and public officials leading this rescue and recovery mission at this critical time. May God bless each and every one of you.

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## Green Mountain faces a flood-damaged future

October 16, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC) Author: Mariel Williams editor@mitchellnews.com| Section: News| 943 Words Page: 1 OpenURL Link

As Nick Whitson walks through his family's flood-devastated properties in Green Mountain, a question recurs: What can be saved? But for Whitson, "can" is the wrong word. His family has run O.C. Whitson and Sons, a furniture and general store, for six decades, and no matter what, he intends to reopen. "It's my life," Whitson said. "We've had it 63 years, [and] I'm 66 years old. You can't walk away from your life." Next to the store is Whitson's mother's home, a house that dates back to 1896. Like the store, the house filled up with mud and water but plans for remodeling it are already underway. "I'm gonna save it," Nick Whitson said flatly. The morning of the flood, Nick Whitson saw the river cross State Hwy. 197 and ran next door to get his mother, Parzady, and bring her into the second floor of the old store. "It was six foot deep in her house and six foot deep in the store," he said. "We grabbed her and got her upstairs and just sit there and watched - that's all you could do." Down the road from the family store, Nick's older brother, Rick Wilson, was fleeing his home as well. Situated at a lower level, Rick's house would be a total loss. "[I] didn't think it would be that big," Rick Whitson said. "We come out of the house when the water hit the top step of the kitchen." Rick Whitson and his wife had to wade through almost waist-deep water to get out of their home. "We walked round behind the house through the water.. then we crawled through the woods," he said. "When we got to the woods my wife crawled, mostly." Down the road at the store, Nick Whitson watched the flood for nine hours. A bridge just upstream from downtown Green Mou

ntain held out for most of the flood but finally gave way. "It tore that bridge down, it was so fast--there was so much timber in it," Nick Whitson said. "There was so much timber behind it the water was shooting over it - you looked one time; it was there; the next time it was gone." Nick Whitson said the bridge may have washed away around 2 p.m., but he is unsure of the time. The destruction of the bridge created a wave the swept through the township. "The water with all the swirls and wash and debris - it hooked through my back door and came out the front windows," Nick Whitson said. Nick Whitson said he was fairly confident that the water would not rise to the second floor of the old store. "I didn't think it would, [but] I didn't think it would be above these steps," he said, gesturing toward the raised entrance to the first floor of the store. The second floor of the store has a back door, and if necessary, the Whitson family could have scrambled up into the woods. "If it got up in there, we were going to put mom in the wheelchair and head up the holler," Nick Whitson said. "There's an old barn up the holler we were going to get in, but it peaked at 3 o'clock." At age 96, Parzady Whitson's blue eyes are calm when she remembers the day of the flood. "I was out of the way, and I was thankful," Parzady Whitson said. "And I'll tell you what, I've been treated awful good." The family, with the assistance of volunteers, have cleared two feet of mud out of O.C. Whitson & Sons. Although not as old as Parzady's house next door, the store has been a Green Mountain institution for almost 100 years. "My dad and mom run [the store] 30 years, and me and my sister's had it 33," Nick Whitson said. "It was built in 1927; third-generation Howells run it, and they sold it to my dad in 1961." V

olunteers from all over have come to help dig the mud out of the old building. "I've had people from New York, California, Florida, Texas, Louisiana, Ohio," Nick Whitson said. "Had a bunch of Amish young people come - I never seen people work like that. We've had people from Kentucky.. Illinois, Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Asheville - as bad as [flooding in] Asheville was, they came out and helped." Although the furniture and appliances inside were destroyed, Nick Whitson is ready to ready to repair and restock, and he is optimistic about the strength of the Green Mountain community. "I don't care what the media says - these people ain't falling apart, they're falling together," he said. But Rick Whitson, after 70 years in Green Mountain, is less certain about what his own future is going to hold. "This is the third [flood] we've been through," he said. "The first one, in '77, got the first step out here at the store, [and] it ran in my basement. In '95, it got to the first step of the house." But Hurricane Helene was different. This time, the river flooded Rick Whitson's house to within four inches of the ceiling, and that might be the final straw. "My wife don't want to live here anymore," he said. "And that's all I'm going to say."

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## Buladean Community Center serving as relief, supply center

October 16, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC)

Section: News 333 Words

Page: 2 OpenURL Link

The Buladean Community Center is open as a relief and supply distribution center for those affected by Hurricane Helene. The health clinic is open every day except Sunday, with a doctor on-site. Hours vary. Wi-Fi is available with time limits. A community-wide church service will be held Sunday from 10 to 10:45 a.m., sponsored by area churches. Hours of Operation: · Weekdays - 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.; community meal served 4 to 6 p.m. · Weekends - 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.; community meal served 12:30 to 2 p.m. The center is located at 12190 NC 226 in Bakersville. Access is clear from Unicoi, Tenn., via TN 107/NC 226. Access from Bakersville is clear by taking NC 261 to Fork Mountain Road and then to NC 226. The Buladean Community Center Food Pantry opened the Sunday after the storm in response to community needs and then expanded into a fully equipped distribution center, operated by the Buladean Community Foundation (501c3) and many volunteers.

Supplies on hand include:  $\cdot$  Food, water, clothing, household goods, hygiene products, cleaning supplies, over-the-counter medication, and ice  $\cdot$  Tools, fuel, camp stoves, propane, and animal feed  $\cdot$  Limited rentals are available for full gas cans, chain saws, oxygen tanks, propane tanks, and generators for those with medical equipment requiring power. Limited Wi-Fi is available to the public.

Meals are served by the Buladean Community Foundation on weekdays from 4 to 6 p.m. and on weekends from 12:30 to 2 p.m. The foundation is coordinating with the Buladean Volunteer Fire Department to use volunteers for tree removal, road and property cleanup, and distribution deliveries. Contact the center if a loved one in the Buladean community needs goods delivered. Updates can be found here: · Buladean Community Food Pantry · www.facebook.com · Buladeancommunitycenterfoodpantry/ Supply donations are received from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and the needs lists are updated daily on the Facebook page. Volunteers are needed daily from 8:15 a.m. to 6:15 p.m. Tax-deductible donations can be sent here: https://square.link/u/aKGCqVTX

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## Seeking rest in the midst of a storm

October 16, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC) Author: Rachel Hoskins; Regional Publisher | Section: News | 542 Words Page: 5 OpenURL Link

Weary. That's the word that came to mind as I looked in the eyes of the Trooper directing traffic on Friday. It was the same look I saw in the eyes of linemen stringing electrical cables, of volunteers sorting through donations of food and clothing, on the faces of my colleagues. Dog-tired weary. For Mitchell County it was day 14. Fourteen days since Tropical Storm Helene delivered a gut-wrenching punch to WNC. Fourteen days since the lights went out, the water faucets dried up and phones went dead. Fourteen days since homes, businesses, roads, dreams - and people - were washed downstream. The grief and loss is almost too much to bear. So too is the unknown. People stranded by washed out roads and bridges, downed power lines and cell phone towers making communication impossible, leaving isolated people wondering if anyone knows they are there.

Chores that were performed on autopilot- shopping for groceries, washing clothes, cooking dinner - simple everyday chores, have now become exhausting. While bottles of water line the walls of every relief center in the county, it's not the same as turning on the faucet. Collecting water has turned another simple chore into an energydraining task. Darkness creeps in early in the mountains. Without power, families gather around oil-burning lanterns to stave off the shadows left behind by fallen trees. They rush to get work done during daylight hours - moving trees, cleaning yards, mucking out mud, sorting thru water-stained memories, or sitting quietly in their homes, alone.

Today is day 19. For many, utilities and water/sewer services are still days, if not weeks, away. "Back to normal" seems out of reach. But progress is being a made. Literally thousands of linemen are working to rebuild transmission systems that result in lights dotting the mountainsides.

Town and county crews, aided by FEMA and emergency response experts and DOT crews, work around the clock to get water flowing into homes and businesses and roads rebuilt.

Firemen, EMT's, National Guard troops, rescue workers and volunteers continue to comb the mountains and hollers checking on people, delivering much needed supplies: water, food, medicine, a human connection.

Volunteers and residents muck out, clean up, and look for ways to shore up and rebuild damaged homes and businesses while checking on neighbors. Donations continue to pour into the county and well-stocked relief centers beckon people to come and get what they need. "Save your money for the weeks ahead. Fill your pantries here. Let us help you."

But how do you hand out what people need the most - rest. Rest from the endless lifting and sorting of donated supplies. Rest from the aching muscles brought on by shoveling mud and carrying tree limbs. Rest from walking miles of washed-out roads and riverbanks. Rest from the overwhelming sense of loss and loneliness. Rest from the dogtired weariness that comes when the adrenaline rush ends and reality sets in. Maybe it's found on Sunday morning as congregations leave the comfort of sanctuaries that are overflowing with love and support of strangers and move into the parking lots beside the still waters that 19 days ago changed their lives. Maybe, just maybe, a little bit of rest can be found in the healing power of calm mountain waters.

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# Letter to the Editor

October 16, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC) Section: Letter | 328 Words Page: 5 OpenURL Link

Building a stronger community together In the wake of Hurricane Helene, we've faced incredible challenges. Our town has been hit hard-roads destroyed, power outages, and water shortages. But amidst these trials, I've been truly inspired by the resilience of our community and the overwhelming support we've received from both near and far. We are making progress every single day. Water from Beaver Creek Dam has finally reached our plant, though filling the tanks is taking longer than anticipated. As the water starts to hit the lines, we'll be able to identify and address leaks, but until then, patience remains critical. On the power front, Duke Energy is optimistic that full restoration to Spruce Pine is just around the corner, and we're already seeing lights come back on in parts of town. The destruction to our roads is significant, but work is already underway, and we see signs of improvement with each passing day.

None of this progress would be possible without the dedication of our town and county employees, volunteers, and emergency crews, who are working tirelessly to restore essential services. Their commitment to the people of Spruce Pine is nothing short of heroic. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to everyone involved in these efforts.

I'd also like to acknowledge the national media for bringing attention to Spruce Pine's story. The importance of our town, especially in light of its role in the global tech supply chain, has been highlighted to a broader audience, thanks to their coverage. While we continue to make progress, there is still a long road ahead. Your continued support is invaluable. If you'd like to contribute to our recovery efforts, please visit www.DiscoverSprucePine. com to donate. Every contribution helps us get one step closer to full recovery. Thank you for standing with us during this challenging time. Together, we are not just restoring Spruce Pine-we are building a stronger, more resilient community for the future. Spencer Bost Executive Director, Downtown Spruce Pine

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# Readers submit images from Hurricane Helene

October 16, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: Christian Gardner christian.gardner@averyjournal.com| Section: Mountaintimes | 25 Words OpenURL Link

AVERY COUNTY — Readers submitted photos from the flooding aftermath from Hurricane Helene via social media to provide their local perspective of the storm's impact.

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Christian Gardner christian.gardner@averyjournal.com, 'Readers submit images from Hurricane Helene', *Mountain Times, The* (online), 16 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3E9C8B016EDA8>



## Flood + election: steps taken to ensure voters can still get to the polls

October 16, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Aarik Long | Section: News | 751 Words

OpenURL Link

This year's election, like everything else, has been impacted by Helene's widespread devastation in Western North Carolina — from flooded voting sites to getting voters to the polls.

The North Carolina State Board of Elections stepped in with a resolution last Monday that provided local county boards in 13 counties with more flexibility in dealing with tough circumstances.

"It's greatly appreciated by me," said Haywood County election director Robbie Inman. "It shows understanding, foresight and wisdom."

The state board also requested state legislature provide \$2.1 million for election operations in those 13 affected counties. The legislature expanded the measures to 25 counties and provided \$5 million.

The unanimous decision of the bipartisan state board allows county boards to make changes to election locations without having to get approval from the state.

"It's not mandatory," Inman said. "It just gives you enough latitude without having to constantly report and ask for permission. It's happening so quickly and rapidly that we need this latitude right now."

While Inman has focused on ensuring the election still goes off without a hitch, he is facing his own challenges. His home was flooded during Helene, and like many others in Haywood has put community first.

"It's nothing about it good," Inman said. "But I have a responsibility. That will be the first thing I accomplish. I'll deal with the personal losses after this is over. Thankfully, I have alternatives. I don't have time to think about it right now."

#### Precinct moves

Both precincts in Clyde will be relocated due to flooded voting sites. North Clyde will move to Clyde Elementary School from the education center. South Clyde will move to Clyde town hall from the Clyde Fire Department.

The Big Creek precinct — a remote community near the Tennessee line — was going to be moved to Jonathan Creek initially due to road damage. But an alternate path has been found.

"The building is fine. We can get down there with what we need," Inman said.

While Big Creek only hosts a couple of dozen voters, they still matter in Inman's eyes.

"Those voters are just as important as if they were on Main Street," Inman said. "They're on my mind."

Keeping Big Creek's precinct where is saves voters a 20-plus-mile trip both ways along back roads — since I-40 is closed — to cast their ballots.

"That has to be the very first thing we consider. Is it possible to keep it there without changing anything and keep it as stable as possible. We have to be sure the voters are safe, and we can do this in a way that everyone is safe. We don't move anything unless we have to," Inman said.

Typically, the relocation of a precinct would require a unanimous vote and the approval of the state. The new flexibly means any relocation only requires a majority approval by the local elections board and must be a bipartisan decision.

## Early voting

In Haywood County, there won't be any changes to early voting sites. Early voting starts Thursday and runs through Saturday, Nov. 2. Hours are 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. until 3 p.m. on Saturdays. Three early voting sites are the Haywood County Senior Resource Center off Russ Avenue in Waynesville, the Canton Library and Clyde Town Hall.

Among the accommodations is the ability of the state elections board to bring in temporary voting facilities as needed, though it appears Haywood will not have to use that option.

The resolution gives counties more flexibility in designating workers for early voting if some workers are unable to be present due to issues caused by Helene. Local boards can bring in workers from other counties or shift them between precincts.

#### Mail-in ballots

The state bill also granted flexibility for mail-in ballots. Voters can now return their ballot to any county board of elections in the state — a recognition that flood refugees may be staying elsewhere but still want to vote in their home county. They can also return the ballots in-person on Election Day at a precinct, something not previously allowed.

Voters can still return ballots at early voting precincts, as previously allowed.

The deadline for mail-in ballots is still 7:30 p.m. on Election Day.

Election officials are also trying to identify any mail-in ballots that may have been lost in the storm when mailboxes washed away. Any voter who is concerned about the status of their ballot can check BallotTrax to see where their ballot is in the mail cycle.

Those voters can also call their local board to request to cancel the original ballot and request a new ballot.

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# Letters to the Editor: flood victim builds shelter from tarp and plywood, too many to even thank + Lake J cross still shines

October 16, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer| Section: Letters To Editor| 1048 Words OpenURL Link

They sent two of us to deliver canned goods and other flood relief supplies to a trailer park along the Pigeon River in Clyde three days after Helene.

The Pigeon crested to almost 26 feet, flooding the homes and trailers along Broad Street, which follows the river. When we arrived, it was clear the trailers were abandoned. On each trailer there was a yellow "Condemned" notice.

So, we drove down the road and saw a homemade plywood-sided tarp tent underneath a majestic oak tree near a flooded-out first floor of a two-story home. There was a campfire in front of the tent.

We stopped and a man who looked in his 60's came out. We offered him our canned goods and paper supplies. He willingly accepted and indicated he had no plans to leave his property.

As we drove away, I realized how soft my affluence has made me. Earlier on the way to Clyde I lamented my status without TV, internet or phone and spotty text service since the storm.

I'd been through many hurricanes in Florida with similar communication issues but I always came back to my intact home after working shelters.

Many people in WNC are struggling right now. They're dealing with a life-changing disaster that has taken so much; their home, their possessions, cars.

Helene has caused profound suffering. Many have lost everything. They are digging deep and finding inner strength they didn't know they had. Like the man in the tent.

When some of us go four-five days without TV, internet and phone, we consider it a difficulty. Then we learn others have no power and water for weeks, or maybe their homes are gone. Some have lost loved ones. Then we realize no TV is no problem.

Our world today has made life too easy for many of us. It's so comfortable it's difficult to deal with a disaster of unimaginable consequences. But many people in western North Carolina have figured out how to adapt.

The Headspace meditation coach I follow online says to have courage with what happens. To find an underlying sense of contentment, no matter how the body or mind feels at any given moment, when happiness is out of reach.

Like the man	in t	he	tent.
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He shows real toughness.

Patrick Johnson

Waynesville

Win-win

My husband and I live in Knoxville. We love Waynesville and visit often.

We contacted our vacation rental host twice to make sure it was safe and we wouldn't be a nuisance if we kept our reservation.

We've bought groceries, settled in, and plan to eat out and shop while we are here. Everyone wins.

Robin Brock

Knoxville

Thanks to many in this sad time

There are so many people to thank, for a variety of reasons. Obviously, in the wake of Hurricane Helene, we want to say how proud we are of the Waynesville Police Department and our son, Officer Ian Miller, in particular.

They're working around the clock, and we are so grateful. We're thankful, too, for all our first responders. Thank you to Michaels (craft supply), for giving kids an opportunity to express their gratitude for these hard working people, including linemen.

The "letter writing" station at your entrance is a wonderful idea. How encouraged the recipients of these notes must feel, and how good to give children the opportunity to share about the differences these people have made.

To all the churches, organizations, and individual volunteers working diligently to bring healing to Haywood County and beyond, we love you and we're honored to serve beside you. These are troubling times, but we will come forth stronger and better prepared.

A special thanks to Presnells and Duckett's Market for providing produce for the Grateful Table to make hot meals for displaced families.

Keep encouraging one another. Gratitude breeds gratitude, and we all need this as our community grieves.

Finally, we are so grateful for Foggy Mountain Veterinary Services — for Dr. Holly Parsons and Dr. Danielle Lewis, as well as their faithful assistants — and our ferrier, Ben Clark.

All these fine folks cared for our wonderful 32-year-old Missouri Fox Trotter Mick, for many years. Though he left us recently, their kindness and compassion is a beautiful thing during this sad season. We are very thankful for you all.

Maureen Miller

Waynesville

The Junaluska Cross prevails

It was J. R. (John Raymond) McCrary of Lexington, N.C. who first suggested that an electric cross be erected on the grounds of Lake Junaluska" according to a letter from W. A. Lambeth, president of the Lake Junaluska Assembly dated Sept. 5, 1941.

The Junaluska Cross was installed on a promontory over the water where it could be seen from every direction. It became an iconic landmark and significant attraction admired not only by visitors and special groups, but by people passing on the highway and Southern Railway Trains.

At the close of the first season, the lights on the Cross were turned off. However, as stated by Mr. Lambeth "before 10 nights had passed, there was a letter from the train crews of Southern Railway, running between Asheville and Murphy saying, they wished the Assembly would keep the lights burning on the Cross every night, because it made

them think of their duty to their company, the traveling public; and a personal inspiration to the crew and passengers when they saw it while passing by.

Since then, the Cross has been lit at all times. People come from near and far to see the Cross and take photos, many of which posted on the Internet decades after the first electric Cross was erected. Indeed it has been — and still remains a "beacon of light."

To further add my personal notes to the information above, considering recent Hurricane Helene of Biblical proportions causing loss of lives and maelstrom destruction of bridges, roads, homes, churches and businesses; clearly it is a miracle that the "Junaluska Cross is still standing."

Therefore, not only has this historic Cross first suggested many decades ago by John Raymond McCrary been a religious sign of faith and inspiration to millions of travelers passing by and to tourists visiting Lake Junaluska throughout the years, and a landmark to travelers and Southern Railway Trains on rainy, foggy nights often experienced in the mountains — it can now be said the Junaluska Cross miraculously prevailed an Apocalyptic hurricane.

Connie Lee Lemacks lives in California and is the granddaughter of Mary Isabelle McCrary; relative of John Raymond McCrary. Email her at musicladycl@aol.com.

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