

Groom helps with flood rescue at Wilson Creek wedding venue. Others climbed trees to escape Helene's barrage.

October 9, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Chrissy Murphy cmurphy@morganton.com| Section: News| 1164 Words OpenURL Link

It's not unusual for Wilson Creek to flood, with water rising several feet during periods of heavy rain.

But at Brown Mountain Beach Resort, nestled on the creek's banks between the northern mountains of Burke and Caldwell counties, floodwaters had never reached the yurts and cabins guests use at the resort.

As Hurricane Helene approached Jeremy and Kelsey Wallace, who help run the resort and wedding venue, expected flooding but nothing dangerous.

The Wallaces were wrong.

The couple lost a home and nearly their lives as the creek rose from 2 feet to 28 feet deep. Kelsey, who helps plan weddings at the resort owned by her family, had a couple there that expected to get married that weekend.

Sheer terror

When the water started rising at the resort, Jeremy's mother-in-law, Wendy McDaniel, was trapped inside her house at the end of the property with her dog, Max.

Jeremy Wallace tried to walk to the house to carry her out, but the water was too strong. He and a neighbor, Mike, grabbed a canoe and made their way to the home.

"By the time I got there, the water was already up over the front door," Wallace said.

Wallace pried the door open, fighting against the current, and water started to pour into the home. Once McDaniel and Max were out of the house, they all piled into the canoe and tried to make it across the water to higher ground.

The canoe capsized.

"I'll never forget Wendy's face," Wallace said. "She's 70 years old, maybe 71 now, and sheer terror because it was a rushing, raging river."

They fought against the water for a while, seeking refuge behind a building that ended up getting washed away.

The three adults and one dog needed another plan.

"In the back of that building, we stopped and I called out to Jesus," Wallace said. "I said, 'Please help us."

A tree fell, landing against another tree, and they climbed it. For hours, they prayed the tree would hold, watching as McDaniel's home was washed off its foundation. Mike swam to higher ground.

Moments later, another neighbor, Jessica, floated by them on top of a round bale of hay. Wallace yelled for her to get in a tree.

"I hear her scream and yell and holler, and then just nothing," Wallace said. "I thought for sure Jessica was dead. It was that serious of a scenario."

Eventually, though, the water started to come down. Jeremy strobed a flashlight at a neighbor who was driving down the road, the first contact he made with another person since seeing Mike and Jessica. A little while later, he saw Kelsey walking by.

"I couldn't shake my arms enough to express how happy I was to see her," Jeremy said.

Groom rescues wedding planner

While Jeremy and Wendy held strong in their tree, Kelsey was on higher ground, rounding up their children — Lexi, 13, Ruthie, 4, and Caleb, 2 — to take them to higher ground. When she realized what was happening, she and her friend, Jessica, tried to help.

"There was no plan, it was just to help, because that's what we do. We help people, right?" Kelsey said. "That's what we're supposed to do."

It was a rescue mission that went awry within moments. Kelsey had to shed her sweatshirt and rain boots to keep from getting dragged down into the water. Jessica was about 20 feet in front of Kelsey when she disappeared, only to reappear climbing a hay bale.

Kelsey realized she needed to find higher ground quickly, climbing atop a dump truck on the property.

Kelsey said she heard shrill screams. "I had no clue what's going on because I can't see anything," she said.

Sitting on top of the truck, she heard someone yell for her to come grab on to a gas tank that was tied to a rope. Another neighbor, Eric, and a groom who was set to get married that weekend, Trevor, had thrown the gas can into the water and were going to use the rope to pull her to safety.

The rope came up about 20 feet short, so she jumped to a horse trailer and crawled across it to get closer to the rope. Once she got into the water and grabbed ahold of the gas can and rope, she was getting hit in the stomach with logs as the rapids tumbled trees down the river.

Trevor and Eric helped pull her to shore. The mother of the bride opened her suitcase and gave Kelsey new clothes to wear.

"That was really the beginning of people just loving simply because we're human," Kelsey said.

Family filled with hope despite losses

With the property damage and the loss of revenue, Kelsey estimated the business would lose more than \$1 million. She and Jeremy are without a home after it was flooded, and the McDaniel home was destroyed by the flooding.

Now, they are focusing their efforts on getting their business up and running. "We have a responsibility to these employees," Kelsey said. "That's what we signed up for. We gotta get food on tables, not just ours. There's several people relying on this business to put food on their table, too."

Everyone is safe besides bumps, bruises, scratches and bug bites. Even Max, Wendy's golden doodle, wandered back home a few hours after the ordeal. The family's alpacas, goats and donkeys survived. About 25 chickens did not.

The real story, Kelsey said, is how the community pulled together to help during the storm, and the show of support since the storm. "People are good," Kelsey said. "There's so many good people, and that's how we survive. We don't survive with the government's help, it's just help from our neighbors. That's what makes America, America."

She said she thinks people need to take a step back from the daily vitriol politics can cause and see how good their neighbors can be.

"Look around you," Kelsey said. "How wonderful. People just love to love."

She said a few days after the storm, her friends Amy and John Moore texted that they were coming up with their employees from Brushy Mountain Builders to get started on cleanup.

"I said, 'Amy, I don't know where to start. We don't have a home,'" Kelsey said. "She said, 'Well, let's just start. Let's just start together.'"

The group started small, just picking up insulation.

"We call it moving rocks ... that's what we do with our family, we just move rocks and get over trauma and talk about it and heal together, and now here we are moving rocks again," Kelsey said.

Brushy Mountain Builders paid their staff for two days to come out and help at Brown Mountain Beach Resort. On the third day, many came back to help as volunteers.

"It's who we are," Amy said. "There's a lot of people helping (everywhere). It's overwhelming to see how many people."

Kelsey said it made her speechless to see folks coming together to help after Helene.

"Look around," Kelsey said. "There's so much love and hope."

She added, "Our job is to help, and now, to see people coming out, it's world-moving. ... That's how the change starts."

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CLASSES TO RESUME WEDNESDAY

October 9, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: MICHAEL LAVENDER Director of Communications, MTCC | Section: News | 400 Words OpenURL Link

MCDOWELL TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

McDowell Technical Community College will resume classes on Wednesday following a nearly two-week closure due to the impact of Hurricane Helene on McDowell Tech students, faculty, staff and their families.

On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, Oct. 9-11, students, faculty and staff will report on a two-hour delay, with classes and work beginning at 10 a.m. Students should check their student email for additional instructions on the return to classes.

McDowell County Schools are also scheduled to restart on Wednesday.

McDowell High School students who are enrolled in morning classes in the Career and College Promise program at McDowell Tech should report to their Titan Pride homeroom at the high school on Wednesday morning instead of coming to the college first. Career and College Promise students will not be counted absent in college classes that morning.

On Monday, Oct. 14, students, faculty and staff will start at normal times, with no delay.

The exception to this schedule is for students in the college's EMT, paramedic and basic law enforcement programs, who should wait to hear from instructors regarding class schedules. Students and instructors in these programs have been assisting in disaster response and recovery throughout the county over the last two weeks and will continue to do so for the immediate future.

McDowell Tech President J.W. Kelley told students, faculty and staff it is important to take care of yourself and your families before anything else.

"Self-care is very important during times of crisis like so many of you have experienced," Kelley said. "While returning to a normal schedule can be very helpful in bringing a sense of normalcy back to your lives, we know that some of you have experienced unimaginable loss and may still be without power, running water, a place to live or other basic necessities. Know that we are here to help connect you and your family with valuable resources to get you through these difficult times."

The college has created a new webpage at www.mcdowelltech.edu/student-care, highlighting a number of those resources, including counseling services and others.

"After witnessing incredible strength and resilience these past two weeks," Kelley said, "I am prouder than ever of our mountain heritage. I have no doubt that the toughness we embody — both as individuals and as a community — will carry us toward a bright future. Let's spread this hope by sharing the positive and heroic stories we've seen. Use #TechTough to celebrate our spirit."

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It was scary for a long time - Devastation from Hurricane Helene is unlike anything Mitchell County residents have ever experienced

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Widespread power outages, communication outages, severe flooding and high speed winds devastated many areas of Mitchell County, during Hurricane Helene.

But community members are rallying together to help one another in their time of need.

Many areas of the county, which has a population of about 15, 000, remain without water, sewer, electricity and phone service.

As of Friday, Oct. 4, officials had not released concrete numbers on the amount of those missing or deceased. Grassy Creek community members said that many roads were only accessible with offroad vehicles such as side-by-sides and four-wheel drive.

"I've never seen it this way," Parkway Fire and Rescue Station 2 Rescue Captain Chad Hughes told the Mitchell News-Journal Friday, Oct. 4 about the conditions in the aftermath of the storm. Hughes has been a firefighter for over 20 years and said he had never experienced anything like it before.

Reid Duncan has 42-years-experience as a firefighter and volunteered to help at the distribution hub setup at Parkway Fire & Rescue Station 2 Grassy Creek.

"I've lived here all my life," he added about living in the Grassy Creek community for 76 years.

Duncan said that the blizzard of 1993 is the closest event he can use to compare with Hurricane Helene, but that the damage caused by the hurricane is still much worse.

Teenager Eli Hughes was born and raised in the community and said he has never experienced anything like it and wants to help his neighbors.

Volunteers describe helping out as a "heartwarming" experience.

"It gives you a sense of selfsatisfaction," Hughes said about giving back.

Hughes said that because "the good Lord let us see another day" he wants "to give another person hope to fight until tomorrow" and help them persevere despite tremendous obstacles.

The experience was frightening for many folks as they lost communication with loved ones and struggled with finding out if they are okay.

"It was scary for a long time," teenager Kathryn Ringwood told the Mitchell News-Journal while volunteering at Parkway Fire & Rescue Station 2 Grassy Creek distribution. She said that many people in the community went a long time in fear because they did not know the status of their loved ones.

Hughes said the Grassy Creek area has a lot of backroads that were only accessible with four wheelers and offroad vehicles, so neighbors would ride around with chainsaws and other tools to clear travel areas and check on one another.

"We've always been tight-knit but now we are closer," Ringwood said about the community. She added that "everyone has come together" for the betterment of all.

"It's humbling to see our community so tight-knit," she said.

"We really are a community," volunteer Lauren Ringwood said about wanting others to know that its residents are strong and will persevere. "We still have each other," she said, referring to the town as "good neighbors."

Hughes said that the timeline of when schools will open back up is still unknown.

The devastation also forced people to focus on what really matters in life. Some residents spoke of learning that a loved one had washed away with the flooding and passed away, but they had not yet been located.

Fire Station 2 distribution volunteer David Wheeler said that the storm took out the power at his house, but he still found himself flipping on light switches when he walked into the room. He said the storm forced him to appreciate luxuries and what he has and not take anything for granted.

Something that seems so small makes a huge difference when disaster strikes. One firefighter even commented that he had been searching for a chocolate bar for four days. Trash pickup was nonexistent last Friday as well. Dan Noettl, a resident who lives in Swiss Village, told the Mitchell News-Journal at fire Station 2 that he helped collect the trash in his neighborhood but had nowhere to take it.

He was given reassurance that facilities might open in the next few days. Noettl said that he has seen the "community coming together" in the aftermath of the storm and thanked public safety for their efforts.

Luxuries such as the comfort of taking a hot shower in your own home, opening a cold refrigerator, or simply brushing your teeth at your own bathroom sink were ripped away from Mitchell County residents as Hurricane Helene wreaked havoc on the community.

Even though the devastation is unlike anything ever seen before in the area, the community continues coming together and remaining tough in a devastatingly tough situation.

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Rapid recovery loan program open to small businesses

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Mountain BizWorks has launched a rapid recovery loan program to assist Western North Carolina small businesses in recovering from the devastating impacts of Tropical Storm Helene. The WNC Strong: Helene Business Recovery Fund is being established with an initial \$7.5 million in support from the Golden LEAF Foundation. Mountain BizWorks and program partners hope to secure additional funding capacity in the coming days and weeks.

Through the Fund, impacted small businesses will be able to apply for loans up to \$100, 000 to help meet immediate needs and bridge to longer term relief resources from SBA disaster loans, FEMA assistance, insurance, and other sources.

The loans will have a 1 percent interest rate and interest-only payments for 12 months. If not repaid in the first year, the loans will automatically convert to a term loan. For terms and application information, visit mountainbizworks. org/helene/fund. For additional business relief resources, visit mountainbizworks. org/helene.

"Small businesses in Western North Carolina are essential to their communities and this help from Golden LEAF can give them a start to building back," said Governor Roy Cooper.

"The Golden LEAF Foundation's \$7.5 million in bridge loans through Mountain BizWorks will provide critical relief to small businesses impacted by Hurricane Helene. Small businesses are the backbone of North Carolina's economy, and this funding ensures that entrepreneurs can continue their operations during this challenging time. We commend Golden LEAF for their commitment to helping our local businesses recover and rebuild. This support is vital to ensuring the resilience and prosperity of our communities across the state," said North Carolina Speaker of the House Tim Moore.

"Recovering from Hurricane Helene will be a difficult journey, but if there's anyone that can come back stronger than before it's the people of Western North Carolina. The Golden LEAF Foundation's small business loans will be a good step in helping Hurricane victims get their shops up and running. Small businesses are invaluable to the communities they serve and I'm confident this program will be effective in assisting with recovery," said North Carolina State Senate Leader Phil Berger.

"Even in this darkest hour, we believe the path forward lies in unity and our common good. Together, we can rebuild our community. We're honored to contribute our resources to this initial wave of emergency funds, a crucial step towards a more resilient future for our region," said Mountain BizWorks Board Chair Zane Adams.

"The Golden LEAF Board of Directors is making funds available to help meet the immediate needs of businesses in Western North Carolina affected by the devastation of Tropical Storm Helene by building upon a model used following Hurricanes Matthew, Florence, and Dorian," said Golden LEAF Foundation Board Chair Ralph Strayhorn. "This program is designed to assist businesses that will be working to apply for a Small Business Administration (SBA) loan or other commercial loan but that have more immediate needs for capital."

The federal government has additionally made loans available through the SBA. The WNC Strong: Helene Business Recovery Fund will complement the SBA by providing a bridge until businesses can access funding from the SBA or other longer term relief programs.

"The Golden LEAF Foundation recognizes the critical role small-business owners play in our state's economy," said Golden LEAF Foundation President and Chief Executive Officer Scott T. Hamilton. "The 'LEAF' in Golden LEAF stands

for Long-term Economic Advancement Foundation. Golden LEAF cannot let this devastating storm cause irreparable economic damage to our state's small businesses."

Small-business owners in disasterdeclared counties can learn more about the WNC Strong: Helene Business Recovery Fund and apply for a loan at mountainbizworks.org/helene.

Contact wncstrong@mountainbizworks.org or call 828-701-1525 with any questions.

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Firefighter faces battle with cancer among storm devastation

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Hope is the mindset in Mitchell County, as the community comes together in unity following Hurricane Helene's destruction through Western North Carolina.

One firefighter with Parkway Fire & Rescue is bravely fighting his own battle with a rare form of cancer while also giving back to a community who has given so much to him.

Chris Garland is a courageous 22-year-old facing a challenging battle with stage 4 cancer.

Garland is a volunteer firefighter as well as a worker at a mining facility.

His backstory is described on flyers being distributed to the community with information on how to help donate to Chris Garland's Cancer Treatment Fund.

"Chris was dealing with terrible sinus and throat pain for a few months. He went to several doctors thinking it had something to do with his tonsils. After multiple doctors, multiple "possible easy diagnoses," he finally got in with a doctor that would really listen to him," according to information on the handout at fire Station 2 Grassy Creek. "Full body blood panels and scans were done, and after weeks of waiting he was diagnosed with Nasopharyngeal Squamous Cell Carcinoma. This type of very rare cancer is located behind the nasal cavity and inside lymph nodes in his neck. The doctors believe that with several months of chemotherapy and proton radiation therapy he could be cured!" As Garland prepares for treatment, the financial burden of travel expenses looms large.

But Garland now faces another burden because he missed his first chemo treatment due to Hurricane Helene.

Garland told the Mitchell News-Journal last Friday that a plan was in the works to try and get him the treatment he needs as quickly as possible.

"The aftermath of Hurricane Helene has severely affected Chris and his family, with Spruce Pine, their hometown, suffering widespread destruction. This has resulted in the rescheduling of Chris's treatments three times, requiring him to travel extensively for chemotherapy," according to the fundraiser page for his Cancer Treatment Fund. "Nevertheless, Chris's resilience and selflessness have shone through, as he continues to report to the fire department daily, contributing to disaster relief efforts, including supply dissemination, cleanup operations, and search and rescue missions. Chris's unwavering dedication to his community, even during this challenging period, exemplifies his remarkable character and commitment to helping others."

Garland said that although "it's been tough" he can't just sit back and do nothing as the community deals with the devastation from the storm.

"It's hard to not help," Garland said about volunteering with supply distribution and having boots on the ground to help a community that has given so much to him. "I like helping people." He even helped with welfare checks in the area.

"This is a very strong community," Garland said. "There's some tough people up here. It's a lot of the community coming together and helping each other."

Now the community can come together to help Garland in his time of need as well.

"Your support can make a significant difference in Chris' journey to recovery. By donating, you can ensure he has the means to cover essential costs such as food, fuel and accommodations during this difficult time," according to the handout.

Garland is described as someone who "brings joy and laughter to everyone he meets."

"Your contribution, no matter the amount, will go a long way in supporting him and his family during this trying period," according to the Chris Garland Cancer Treatment Fund. "Thank you for being a beacon of light in Chris' journey."

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Neighbors helping neighbors - A sense of community after Hurricane Helene

October 9, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC) Author: Megan Horn; CNI Newspapers | Section: News | 1242 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

"Neighbors helping neighbors" is the focus of the Grassy Creek community as residents came together to support each other in the heartbreaking aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

That message displayed on a banner hanging on the bridge at Parkway Fire & Rescue Station 2 rings true for the entire community and all of Mitchell County.

The station is a hub for people in the community to gather needed resources and check on one another.

Bringing with it significant flooding and high-speed winds, the storm left a devastating impact on the community with county-wide power and communication outages. Roads were washed away during the storm and as of Monday, Oct. 7, most of Spruce Pine and Bakersville were still without water.

"This is a full-service distribution," Parkway Fire & Rescue Assistant Chief David Hughes told the Mitchell News-Journal Friday about providing resources to the community. "We are set up to serve."

Friday, Oct. 4 made Day 7 of the operation at fire Station 2 after Hurricane Helene began its destruction late Sept. 26.

"We're seven days in but we're seeing progress," Hughes said.

Hughes said that Station 2 had been running on generator power up until the evening of Oct. 3. The community was invited to take showers and Hughes said that on Oct. 3 alone the fire station was able to provide showers to over 100 people as well as feed over 180 people.

The station is also set up with Starlink so people can get in contact with their loved ones to check on them.

Hughes spoke about the reward of helping people in need with something as simple but powerful as being in the position to allow someone who hasn't showered in days take a shower and feel better.

Station 2 is set up with hot meals, showers, bathrooms and cold drinks that feed and accommodate public safety workers as well as community members.

Local businesses were even able to donate food such as meats so that it would not go bad since they lost power.

Parkway Fire & Rescue, the Spruce Pine Fire Department and West of New Bern Volunteer Fire Department worked together to respond to calls and get water from a nearby creek to provide non-potable water that the community can use.

The non-potable water is not for drinking, but anyone whether they are a resident of Mitchell County or not, can fill up buckets with the non-potable water so they can flush their toilets.

Hughes said that Station 2 is open to everyone.

The water also goes to local hospitals and churches that clean it to use for showers.

Melissa Hughes has been volunteering during the distribution at Station 2 and said that it has been an effort of the community together in a time of need.

"[There are] a lot of good Samaritans out there," she said. Melissa Hughes said that she is helping with the cause because "that's what we're called to do as Christians. Be the hands and feet of Jesus."

Even though devastation hit the area, a message of hope is displayed through helpful actions in the Grassy Creek community and a mindset of faith in God.

Parkway Fire & Rescue has the phrase "IN GOD WE TRUST" displayed on their apparatus and that message hasn't waffled as residents stay strong during difficult times.

David Wheeler said that he volunteered to help at Station 2 because it's a time of helping your neighbor and not being selfish. His son, Hagen, is a firefighter as well.

"Pray for God's wisdom, not our wisdom," Wheeler said about how God knows what will happen and only His wisdom can get us through these trials. "We're seeing the good side," he said of everyone checking on one another and doing everything they can to help in good spirits. He said that he is trying to do whatever he can to help.

Donations needed The distribution center at fire Station 2 has received all sorts of donations from areas around North Carolina and even other states, but there's still more that can be done to help.

Resources such as drinking water, food, baby supplies, dog food, cat food, and horse food among many other items could be found at Station 2 last week.

"We never know what people are going to bring us," said volunteer Reid Duncan, about the donations from all around they have received. He has 42 years' experience as a firefighter and is president of the Spruce Pine Rotary Club.

Duncan said that the most needed items are paper products such as toilet paper, paper towels, paper plates, etc. as well as canned food and canned fruit. He added that they have received many donations of snacks but that they are in need of food with sustenance as well.

Supplies have been donated by many companies from all around North Carolina as well as other states. Arcola Logging Co. Inc. from Arcola, N.C. traveled to Parkway Fire & Rescue Station 2 Grassy Creek to help them in their time of need.

The crew saw how Mitchell County was affected and they shut a job down to help out.

"It's given us a new appreciation for volunteer fire departments," the loggers said after seeing the extensive operation.

"We're trying to accommodate everyone we can," Duncan said about asking patrons to be patient and "just bear with us." He added that it was going to be a long recovery process, and everyone needed to continue working together.

Fire Station 2 bustles with activity as helicopters are heard whirring above and residents walk around gathering supplies. Local first responders, public safety from other areas, the National Guard, and State Park Rangers work together to provide basic and important necessities. FEMA was also set up in a nearby location on the hill.

Eric Gleason, with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, said that his crew was activated by the Emergency Operation Command (EOC) to respond to the area.

On day 7, many public safety officials had gone several days without showers and were sleeping in enclosed trailers

in the Station 2 parking lot.

Station 2 was no stranger to people donating their time to help and that was the goal of Wheat's Off-Road, whose members travel around to different areas and help with disaster relief.

"We felt like we needed to come here," Jen Wheat told the Mitchell News-Journal on Friday. "This is what we do," she said about helping.

Officials said that FEMA had established a hub nearby and the goal of the Parkway Fire & Rescue was to go back to normal operations Monday, Oct. 7 and have FEMA coordinate efforts moving forward.

Parkway Fire & Rescue Station 2 Grassy Creek Rescue Captain Chad Hughes said that the community has a unified message of perseverance.

"We have to make sure the groundwork is here today so we can rebuild," Hughes said.

Mitchell County Fire Districts include 1-Estatoe; 2-Grassy Creek; 3-Altapass; 4-Spruce Pine; 5-Ledger; 6-Bakersville; 7-Fork Mountain; 8-Bradshaw; and 9-Buladean.

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Incident response team brings leaders together daily

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As Mitchell County releases daily flood recovery updates on WKYK (940 AM and 104.7 FM) and WTOE (1470 AM and 101.1 FM), much of that information comes from group briefings that bring together local, state, and volunteer relief agencies every morning and evening.

Emergency briefings are being held at 10 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. at the Mitchell County Senior Center. (The first week of meetings was held at the Spruce Pine Fire Department.)

Rusty Schoultz, a representative of the Louisiana Incident Management Team said the emergency response for Hurricane Helene and the flooding Sept. 27 is expected to last for six months, rather than the 30 to 90 days seen after most hurricanes.

"This group that they dispatched from Louisiana - they are excellent," County Manager Allen Cook said. They are moving mountains to get us resources."

Anticipating problems One of the themes constantly addressed at emergency briefings is watching out for future dangers brought on by the floods. These include: More flooding - debris in ditches and drainage areas can make flooding more likely, even with less heavy rain that would not cause flooding normally Traffic accidents, owing to changes in traffic patterns Landslides - any fissures, any visible cracks in the grass, should be reported to emergency personnel Scavenging wildlife - bears can smell uncollected trash and spoiling food and may be aggressive Mental health issues aggravated by the stress of a catastrophe - mental health volunteers are being brought in to serve at community resource distribution centers. Check on neighbors and loved ones who might be experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Getting financial assistance Federal relief is available for flood victims, but the application process can be lengthy, confusing and time-sensitive.

"If your home's been damaged - some of you all may have insurance, some of y'all have a little bit of insurance - regardless of which what you need to do is you need to make sure to register for FEMA," said Rubby Douglas, public information officer for Louisiana IMT. "There are certain timelines. Registration is very very key to [covering] damages."

Douglas said the recovery effort will be challenging.

"People need to understand the magnitude of this storm is very great," she said. Primary concerns for officials are to try to make sure that any kind of community lifelines are up and running. It's a large area; a lot of infrastructure is down."

The number for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's helpline is (800) 621-3362. Douglas said people with damaged homes should begin documenting the damage with pictures as well.

"We definitely want folks to register for FEMA; they can register at the 1-800 number [or] online - you can register at www.disasterassistance.gov."

Housing Transitional sheltering assistance is available for some, and might be able to help some victims stay in a hotel rather than a shelter.

"We're hoping to get the disaster recovery centers up and running soon, that way somebody can go in person and talk to a FEMA representative to help guide their recovery," Douglas said. This recovery is going to be significant - it's going to take a lot of patience." Douglas warns that there may be people out in the community who falsely claim to work for FEMA or some other relief agency.

"People that are in the field that are helping, they're going to be well-credentialed, badged," she said. It's important for folks to document things; keep a journal of who [at the agency] they talked to."

Douglas recommends checking with county officials before agreeing to rebuilding offered by unknown outside contractors.

Road safety Gabriel Johnson, an engineer with the North Carolina Department of Transportation, spoke about road repairs. After the Friday briefing, Johnson said that motorists should be very cautious when navigating damaged roadways.

"You just have to stay away from brokenoff places as much as possible and go slow, and just pay careful attention," Johnson said. I don't know any other way. There's broken-off places everywhere.

Two-& four-legged healthcare Mason Gardner of Toe River Health District said the health department is ready to begin receiving patients with minor illnesses.

"We will accept walk-ins, whether they're insured or uninsured - if they come in we'll see them," Gardner said.We will help people get their medication refills."

Mountain Community Health Partnership clinics are opening in Bakersville, Spruce Pine and South Toe in Yancey County.

"Our clinics will be open from 10 a.m. to noon Monday through Friday for simple acute needs - we're trying to keep people away from the emergency room," Chief Medical Officer Patricia Hall said. Anything you need for chronic medical needs or simple acute needs, [such as] laceration repairs."

The Red Cross shelter at Mitchell High School has a mental health care provider on site but is looking for additional qualified mental health care volunteers.

Health care is a concern for both Mitchell County citizens and their best friends, and Stewart's Animal Hospital - although working with limited power - is treating pets as best they can.

Blue Ridge Regional Hospital According to Nancy Lindell, spokesperson for Mission Health as of Monday, Oct. 7, both emergency and acute care services at Blue Ridge Regional Hospital (BRRH) remain open.

"We have the staff and resources to continue safely treating all those seeking emergency care at Mission Health hospitals. Patients continue to be admitted as needed; and if a patient needs a higher level of care than BRRH can provide, they will be transferred to an appropriate facility as usual. In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, we implemented plans to ensure that water and electricity are available in all Mission Health hospitals. BRRH currently is running on full power and has pumper tanker trucks that are pumping clean water into our hospital until municipal utilities can be restored," said Lindell.

Electricity Avery Dellinger of Duke Energy said that his company is working hard to restore power as quickly as possible. Some neighborhoods close to downtown Spruce Pine and Blue Ridge Regional Hospital already have electricity, at least intermittently. Dellinger said he needs Mitchell County and Spruce Pine personnel to help inspect flood damaged areas to insure power can be safely turned back on without causing fires. Dellinger said the company will focus on re-energizing more densely populated neighborhoods first. We know everybody's in dire need but we're going for big numbers in the least amount of time," he said.

• Citation (aglc Style)

Mariel Williams editor@mitchellnews.com, 'Incident response team brings leaders together daily', *Mitchell News-Journal* (online), 9 Oct 2024 A10 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C19AC56C53B3B8



Boil water advisory Water safety is a concern after flooding

October 9, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC)

Section: News 853 Words

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OpenURL Link

Access to safe and potable water remains a top concern in Western North Carolina in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. Currently, approximately 160 boil water advisories remain in effect and 27 water plants are closed and not producing water.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services is sharing guidance on actions people can take to ensure water is safe and to prevent waterborne disease or illness after the storm.

Identify safe water In disaster-impacted areas, particularly those that have experienced flooding, drinking water may not be available or safe to drink. It is critical that people do not use contaminated water to drink, wash and prepare food, make ice, prepare baby formula, wash dishes, brush teeth or wash hands.

· Do not use contaminated well water. Floods can damage drinking water wells and lead to contamination.

Floodwater can contaminate well water with livestock waste, human sewage, chemicals and other contaminants that can lead to illness when used for drinking, bathing and other hygiene activities. Dug wells, bored wells and wells less than 50 feet deep are more likely to be contaminated, even if damage is not apparent.

· Do not use water from heating systems. Water from radiators or boilers that are part of a home heating system should never be used as potable water.

Use only bottled, boiled or treated water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene. For specific advisories or recommendations regarding boiling or treating water in your area, look for information from your local health department. Currently there is a boil water advisory in Spruce Pine and Bakersville.

Boil water to prevent disease or illness If you do not have safe bottled water, boil your water to make it safe to drink. Boiling is the best way to kill germs in water. If the water is cloudy, first filter it through a clean cloth, paper towel or coffee filter. Another option is to let any particles in the water settle to the bottom, then draw off the clear water for boiling.

Next, bring the clear water to a rolling boil for one minute (at elevations above 6, 500 feet, boil for three minutes).

Let the boiled water cool, and then store the boiled water in clean, sanitized containers with tight covers. As a reminder, do not use gas appliances in an enclosed space to boil water as this increases the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

During a boil water advisory, you should use bottled water or boiled water to do the following: \cdot Drinking and cooking \cdot Brushing teeth \cdot Cleaning (such as washable toys and surfaces)

· Caring for pets Be careful not to swallow any water when bathing and showering and consider giving babies and children a sponge bath to reduce the chances of them swallowing water. If possible, use disposable plates, cups, and utensils during a boil water advisory.

All infant feeding items should be sanitized by using a sanitizing cycle in the dishwasher, boiling them, using steam, or cleaning carefully with a diluted bleach solution. Ensure well water is safe If extensive flooding has occurred, do not drink well water. Listen to your local health authorities for advice on using well water for showering and bathing.

Use water reserves, bottled water or boiled water until your well water has been tested and deemed safe for use.

After a flood, the following steps can help ensure your well is safe for use: · Do not turn on the electricity to your pump until flood waters recede.

· Contact a driller if you think your well will need service immediately after the flood. You can find a list of certified well contractors at the NCDHHS Division of Public Health website.

If you haven't already, find a nearby water testing lab to obtain sample collection bottles and instructions for bacterial contamination. You cannot see, taste or smell bacterial contamination in your well. The NC State Laboratory of Public Health provides free well water sampling kits and testing, and often, your local health department can test your water. If there is not a health department near you, your county extension agent can help you find a lab.

If you live near animal feeding operations, agricultural fields where pesticides are applied or industrial chemical factories, you should contact your local health department for additional testing, especially if you smell fuel or chemicals in your water.

It is strongly recommended to call your local health department or licensed well driller to shock chlorinate the well if it has been flooded. A water well driller will have access to more effective products and will have equipment and experience that a typical well owner will not have. For more information about well water and health, visit the NCDHHS-DPH website. For comprehensive information about ensuring water is safe after an emergency or natural disaster, visit CDC.gov.

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Mitchell: Searching, rescuing, repairing

October 9, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC)

Author: Mariel Williams editor@mitchellnews.com Section: News 696 Words

Page: A1
OpenURL Link

Mitchell County is still in the early stages of recovering from Sept. 27 flooding from Hurricane Helene.

"Helene hit us very hard," County Manager Allen Cook said. "There are still places in our county that have access issues; much of our county still has no power.

Three bodies of flood victims have been recovered, and law enforcement is still checking on those who are unaccounted for.

"We've confirmed that there's potentially four [deceased] victims," Cook said. "Those bodies are in different phases of recovery. We've got three that we have, and then there's a fourth we're trying to get to and locate; it's in a very hardto-get spot."

Human remains dogs are being sent through the flooded areas to see if there are any more victims, and law enforcement is making welfare check visits for those unaccounted for.

Communication With both cell and landline phone service down, county information updates are going out every day on radio stations WKYK (940 AM and 104.7 FM) and WTOE (1470 AM and 101.1 FM).

"Right now, with everything down, that's the only way we can communicate," County Commissioner Jeff Harding said. "We didn't realize how reliant we were on cell phones until this happened, and then all of a sudden you can't communicate.".

Harding said many parts of the county he's been able to visit are in bad shape.

"I've seen complete devastation in this area," Harding said. "I've worked the feeding station and the relief center at First Baptist Church. The folks that are coming in there are pitiful."

Harding said that the north end of the county was hit hardest.

"From what I'm hearing - and I've not been to those sections - most of the northern end, Poplar, Huntdale, Fork Mountain - a lot of those areas it sounds like are pretty much destroyed," Harding said. Harding said he and the other commissioners have been able to communicate occasionally, although not all together.

"The only communication we've had is when we've been in an emergency management meeting together," he said. "I talked to Ms. [Harley] Masters on two occasions, Steve Pitman two times - that's only because of meetings - and Brandon Pittman."

Electricity & residential damage Power has been restored to some parts of Spruce Pine and Ledger. As of Saturday, AT&T and other phone and internet providers were on-line in some areas of Spruce Pine. "Probably county-wide, my understanding is we're probably still 90 percent out of power," Cook said.

Cook said the county is surveying homes to find out how many are total losses.

"Twenty-five percent of the homes in Mitchell County at this time - and we've not completed that canvass - one out of four people have received some type of damage."

Cook said he anticipates the final count of damaged homes will be higher.

Cook recommends that people who have lost their jobs look online to apply for disaster unemployment benefits.

"There's some details that will be coming out on that," he said. "Housing's coming forth; we'll have two shelter and food resource areas coming into the county."

Cook said approximately 40 storm victims have been sheltering at the Red Cross site at Mitchell High School and around 20 at First Baptist Church in Spruce Pine.

Water & supply distribution points A number of locations are offering bottled water, food and other supplies. Distribution points include: · All local fire departments · First Baptist Church in Spruce Pine (also has shower and laundry units available for use) · Mitchell Middle/Elementary schools in Ledger · Gouge Elementary School · Buladean Community Center · Any U.S. National Guard truck driving through your neighborhood · The Grove Church in Spruce Pine Care packages from outside friends and family can be sent care of Big Al's Pack and Ship - if the recipient's phone number is included on the outside of the package they will be contacted when it arrives.

"We're moving in the right direction," Cook said. "Each day we get a little victory, and those are all adding up. We're stabilizing."

Spruce Pine Library The Spruce Pine Library is open this week from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day. They have power and internet but no water or restroom facilities. Facilities are available for internet access, computers, copy/print, and charging stations.

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Buladean Brave - Western NC community at the "end of the line" takes care of its own

October 9, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC)

Author: Brian Brodrick; Special Correspondent to the Mitchell News-Journal | Section: News | 897 Words

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Helene might have met her match in Buladean. At dawn on Sept. 27 the big storm threw a nasty haymaker at Western North Carolina, laying down timber on ridges from the Roan Bald to the Iron Mountain, flooding creeks and rivers across Mitchell County, and destroying roads, bridges and driveways. The number of dead and injured is unknown at this point Buladean Community took the punch and stood right back up, bruised, battered and remarkably brave, like the mascot of its former elementary and middle school.

"It's been neighbor for neighbor for the past eight days," said Luke Phillips, who has been volunteering and coordinating at Beans Creek Church of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "Never in my life have I seen this happen. To see mountains and hills laid down as far as you can see it is unreal. But the love that has been shown is unbelievable."

Up and down small roads across the community, neighbors in need have been served by friends, churches and a surge of donations from across the southeast. Driveways and roads cleared by neighbors. Food delivered in side by sides by teenage volunteers. Trees taken off of roofs. Retirees delivering to shutins and widows. The stories don't stop.

Misty Coleman is the communications director and food access coordinator for the Buladean Community Foundation. The foundation is housed at the Buladean Community Center, where hot meals are being offered daily and large deliveries of food, supplies and even hay are being distributed directly to those in need and to local churches and other distribution points.

"At the outset, Buladean took care of its own. Our firefighters cut their way in and cut their way back out," said Coleman. "Since then the sheer amount [of donations] is impressive and we are grateful to have the space to store it."

"We are literally the end of the power grid," Coleman added, noting that the greatest need in the months ahead will be a generator and heat for every home as temperatures cool and they wait what might be more than a month for power to be restored. "We know we are the end of the line."

Coleman and her team are also still seeking a consistent team of volunteers to keep the donated goods organized and distributed and are seeking industrial shelving to store the influx of food, supplies, and paper products.

Others in the community are seeking a more modern invention -Starlink systems that allow them to use phones and computers to reach families, pay bills, and communicate with the outside world without traveling to Tennessee or a community center to get access to a signal. Old timers remember cyclones, storms and blizzards of the past, but Mitchell High School history teacher Matthew Hurd says the high winds set this storm apart.

"When I was growing up in Buladean I've heard teachers talk about the flood of 1901, said Hurd, a Marine veteran and Beans Creek Road resident. "This time, we didn't get the flooding, we got the wind."

The wind was devastating. Rare is the home that didn't sustain some damage. Some mountains and ridges have lost more than 80 percent of their standing timber. Others, just across a valley, might be untouched.

Initial projections from the state indicated it might be two weeks before state and local roads reopened due to downed trees. But they weren't counting on the chainsaws, tractors, trackhoes and skid steers of this fiercely

independent community.

One local man -Kenneth Lingerfelt -spent 11 hours traveling from Spruce Pine across the Iron Mountain to Limestone Cove, Tenn. clearing roads as he and his crew traveled. Other volunteers worked similarly, clearing Fork Mountain, Hughes Gap, Pine Root, Battle Branch and other roads, ensuring neighbors could get the help they need. In the end, two weeks became just a few days.

But even as state and federal aid begins to stream in, the financial, emotional and personal damage is likely to linger for years as residents rebuild homes, barns and lives. Coleman knows it will be a long journey and is grateful for the supplies that can sustain the community as it recovers.

"We are in this for the long haul," said Coleman, before she briefly posed for a photo and went back to work. Down the hall 30 people were eating a warm meal, pallets of water and supplies waited outside, helicopters thumped across the sky and trailers of hay were inbound from Tennessee. She is hoping that most precious asset -generators with fuel and extension cords -arrives next.

But taking care of neighbors is nothing this small community can't handle. After all, it has already handled the worst of Helene.

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Spruce Pine rallies together to help - Local churches help with disaster relief

October 9, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC)

Author: Megan Horn; CNI Newspapers | Section: News | 1036 Words

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Downtown Spruce Pine, was completely devastated during Hurricane Helene as businesses and houses experienced destructive flooding and high-powered winds. Roads, bridges and railroad tracks collapsed and remain destroyed.

Streets that were once bustling with shoppers and diners enjoying the amenities downtown has to offer, now are lined with closed businesses that suffered significant water damage. The water damage also destroyed nests for bees so yellow jackets are abundant throughout Mitchell County. Residents describe the amount of bees as "unbelievable" as they dodge getting stung. There is no timeline for when businesses will open or when people will go back to work. Unanswered questions continue piling up and mud several inches high outlines where heavy floodwaters rose throughout the downtown The Mitchell News-Journal was one of many downtown businesses that was significantly damaged during the flooding. On Friday, Oct. 4, people could be seen using equipment to clear the damaged goods from their businesses, which was piled at the storefronts. Some businesses had power, phones and internet restored by the weekend but heavily damaged buildings remained in the dark. Renee Vessels, who manages some properties in the downtown area, told the Mitchell News-Journal Friday that she watched the pedestrian bridge across from the Blue Ridge Boutique collapse during the storm.

Among much that was destroyed and underwater, miles of railroad tracks were damaged as well and crews worked to begin assessing the damage.

Although businesses are closed, people are working hard to help their neighbors and distribute food and supplies.

Local Spruce Pine business L&L Furniture Company owners Walton and Kayla Shepherd decided they would help a community that has done so much for them.

"Our focus is the wellbeing of our community," said Walton Shepherd. He said that the family-owned business made sure that its employees and their families were okay after the hurricane and then shifted gears to help the community by becoming a place where people could gather needed supplies such as food, water, and hygiene products.

"Anything we can do to help," Walton Shepherd said. "We are so blessed," he said. "They can take the business but they can't take the people of Spruce Pine," he added saying they are focused right now on helping others rather than worrying about their business. Damage was reported in many areas and Shirley Singleton said that two trees fell on her home but she was there to distribute items to those in need.

"The community has rallied," she said about the neighborly attitude.

Local churches work together Dr. Rocky Branch is the pastor at Spruce Pine First Baptist Church which is serving as a hub where people in the community can gather needed supplies, shower and eat hot meals.

"We feed the community here," Branch told the Mitchell News-Journal last Friday. "[We] average 1, 000 meals a day if not more," he added. Branch said that Ingles donated its shopping carts to help community members gather their supplies. He said that people who visit the church can grab a grocery cart and travel through the sanctuary where supplies are divided up in the church pews. Once groceries have been gathered, shoppers can travel down a ramp where equipment and people are available to help load supplies.

"It's very humbling," Branch said about being able to help the community as Jesus calls us to help those in need.

"We're making it." He added that Ingles was able to donate the carts because the business is closed due to significant water damage. The timeline for opening back up is still unknown.

Branch said that the plan is for the church to operate in that capacity for about one month.

But church services won't be missed and Sunday morning services will be conducted outside on the front lawn at 11 a.m. and a meal will be served.

The church's website has more information on resources offered during the relief efforts. Visit https://www.sprucepinefbc. com/to support the Spruce Pine First Baptist Church Relief. "Prayer should be the first resource not the last resort and everything in between," according to a message posted on their website. T

he Baptist State Convention of North Carolina Disaster Relief was stationed at Spruce Pine First Baptist Church on Friday to help provide showers as well as usage of washer and dryer facilities, among many other helpful resources.

Joe Moore with Disaster Relief said that the organization travels to different areas to help with disasters.

"It's a mess," Moore said of the devastating aftermath Hurricane Helene caused. "These communities have come together during all this trouble," he said of Mitchell County. "I've never seen anything like it."

Branch said that Disaster Relief ranks disasters up to 7 and that Mitchell County was rated with a 7-plus status.

"God works miracles," Moore said. "This has brought a lot of people together, especially families. Sometimes it takes something like this to bring people together again."

Central Baptist Church with Pastor Jody Griffin is located in downtown Spruce Pine and opened its doors to work with Spruce Pine First Baptist Church to distribute supplies to the community.

Church member Deborah Owings works at an elementary school and said the timeline of when schools will open back up is unknown also.

Community member Crista is all too familiar with the unknown after her daughter was in a crash on Highway 19 E. Crista said that her daughter was taken to a local hospital but then airlifted to another facility.

Because communication is not available, she had to wait several hours before finding out where her daughter was located. They finally were reunited.

"That's been the biggest impact, I think. It's the unknown," Owings said. She said she has seen devastation before, but never thought something like this could happen here.

"I was not expecting the wind," 50-year Spruce Pine resident Roger Burleson told the newspaper. He said that he had never seen anything like the devastation in Spruce Pine.

Roads, bridges and businesses might have gotten destroyed, but the Spruce Pine community has not let the storm damage their spirits as they assess the damage and work to rebuild while helping one another and helping others by the grace of God.

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"What do you need?" - Our Opinion

October 9, 2024 \mid Mitchell News-Journal (NC)

Section: Opinions | 569 Words

Page: A5
OpenURL Link

Well, electricity, mostly. As dreadful as Hurricane Helene has been, the outpouring of generosity from both home and abroad has been heartwarming. Food, water and supplies have flooded into the tri-county area. We've had the opportunity to meet and learn from both professionals and volunteers who dedicate a large portion of their lives to just this kind of disaster, and everywhere we hear the question: "What do you need?" We need time - every little essential daily activity that we used to take for granted takes so much time now - time to figure out a safe route to travel; time to carry and heat water; time to charge batteries and travel to somewhere with an internet connection; time to get everything done before dark.

Locally, we've been impressed by the hidden talents and ingenuity of neighbors who have worked to clear and repair roads, grade washed-out driveways, and check on shut-ins and those stranded in the back hollers - "What do you need?" We need breathing space from chaos; a break from having to stop and think and figure out a new way to do every single thing that has to be done in an ordinary day. We need predictability. We need routine - even if it's a new routine, if we could just get used to something happening in regular, easilyanticipated way.

Further afield, friends and family check in constantly, wanting to know what they can send, where they can send it, and if they should drive up here and get you - "What do you need?" We need to go back in time, and try a new approach to persuading stubborn residents to evacuate vulnerable homes. We've thought of new arguments; we just need a chance to share them.

"What do you need?" We need patience with spouses and family members and neighbors and "helpers" who maybe haven't given much thought to the unintended cost of un-asked for interference with damaged property. We need to take a breath and remember that everyone is rattled and tense and overwhelmed and not thinking clearly.

"What do you need?" We need wisdom, sometimes in a really big hurry, as we try to decide which damaged and maybe repaired-a-little roads are safe to drive over.

We also need to go back to following the actual laws of the public highways - they're not like what fork to use at a banquet, guys, they actually serve a purpose, even in a state of emergency.

A non-functioning traffic light is to be treated like an all-way stop. Abruptly pulling out in front of people was not safe before and it's not safe now. You can't block traffic to randomly shout at people you know because you're glad to see they're safe, or at people you don't know who might need a case of water that they're not currently asking for, on account of how they're otherwise engaged in operating a motor vehicle. Unnecessary accidents have already happened, with injuries straining an overburdened hospital system. If that is not sufficient deterrence, know that the North Carolina Highway Patrol has brought in reinforcements from the coast and they are handing out tickets.

"What do you need?" Of course we also need patience with drivers who are anxious, distracted, and driving slow in order to be prepared for obstacles they might not had the opportunity to identify yet.

"What do you need?" Sometimes we're not entirely sure. We've never done this before.

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After the storm

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Photos clockwise: A water truck from baptistonmission.org sets in front of the First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine. The church is providing more than 1, 000 meals a day to victims of Hurricane Helene. Members from Plain Compassion Crisis Response team helps local businesses remove damaged carpets and drywall. A member of The Ark Church carries out damaged wood. Residents are given a shopping cart at First Baptist Church to fill with needed items from the sanctuary that has been converted to a relief center. Debris from downtown stores in Spruce Pine are loaded into a dump truck. Locust Street in Spruce Pine is scattered with debris from stores that were flooded during the storm. (MNJ photos)

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Tips for home repairs and protecting yourself - Megan Carroll Executive Director of the Builders Association of Blue Ridge Mountains

October 9, 2024 | Mitchell News-Journal (NC)

Section: News 644 Words

Page: A5 OpenURL Link

As Western North Carolina residents start to think about recovering from the devastating effects of Hurricane Helene, it's important to make sure that work on our homes is done safely and by reputable professionals.

Building professionals around Western North Carolina are fielding scores of calls, whether it's to remediate water damage, to repair structures, or to clear away debris. And residents are doing a lot of work themselves, cutting drywall, pulling out flooring and doing other things to mitigate long-term issues like mold.

As an impacted homeowner, it could be tempting to say "yes" quickly if you find a professional who can help. But there are a number of things you should do to protect yourself as you consider where and how to get help.

First, if you are doing remediation work yourself, the Builders Association of the Blue Ridge Mountains recommends:

Be sure that there is no further danger of flooding. Do not wade through or enter standing flood waters or unstable structures.

Wear the correct personal protective equipment. Protective equipment includes rubber or work gloves, longsleeved shirts and long pants, and proper respiratory protection.

- \cdot Assume that the electrical system may be unsafe until it has been thoroughly tested. Make sure all electric and gas service is shut off before entering a structure for the first time. Consult professional specialists to inspect these systems before having them turned back on. \cdot Unless you've received official word that the water supply is safe, purify all water. Sterilize utensils before using them.
- · Contact your insurance company. Homeowners are encouraged to review their insurance policies and contact their insurance company as soon as possible to report damages. Make sure to record any damages or losses to the home.
- · If water has seeped beneath sheet flooring, the entire sheet should be removed and replaced. For tile floors, loose tiles may be re-cemented if the floor is otherwise acceptable after it dries. Check that the subfloor is thoroughly dry before applying any new floor coverings. The drying process may take weeks or months.
- · Take flood-affected wood furniture outdoors to hose off. All drawers and other detachable parts should be removed for cleaning. Dry the furniture slowly to prevent warping, and be sure not to dry it in direct sunlight. Discard mattresses that have been soaked in flood waters.
- · Most motorized appliances can be saved. Turn off the electricity or other power source, unplug the appliance and open it as much as possible to wipe it clean. If possible, tilt the appliance to drain any standing water. Let the appliance dry and have it checked by an appliance repair professional before you plug it in.

And if you are looking to hire a contractor, consider the following tips: · Work with a professional, local contractor. There are many intricacies related to building and repairing homes in Western North Carolina. Licensed General Contractors have a firm grasp of requirements to meet city ordinances, regulations, and permits.

· If you need to hire a contractor to perform repairs on any part of your home, find out if the contractor has a

permanent business address and can provide references.

- \cdot Find out how long the contractor has been in business and whether the Better Business Bureau has any record of unresolved complaints.
- · Make sure you get a complete, clearly written contract for the work to be done. This contract needs to include the fee you are paying, and what the fee includes.
- · Do not pay any cash up front unless you have signed a valid contract that stipulates the terms for the work to be performed.
- · Start the process by asking friends, family and business colleagues for referrals. This is one way to have confidence you are working with a proven professional who does quality work. It's important to do your homework, even as you address the urgent need to get assistance for issues at your home or business.

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Grandfather Mountain Executive Director shares stories about Hurricane Helene rescue and relief

October 9, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: DEREK HALSEY| Section: Mountaintimes | 1924 Words OpenURL Link

When the raindrops began to fall on Wednesday night, September 25, the first storm was beginning to saturate the ground in these 300-million year old hills. Hurricane Helene, the second and much bigger storm, had yet to reach Florida soil at that point, yet this initial low pressure rainstorm up ahead was laying the groundwork for the disaster that was to come. With the weather system flowing from south to north, this two-storm monster was ready to take on the Appalachian Mountains —500 miles from the northern Gulf of Mexico shoreline of West Florida.

The reason why I bring all of that up is that, as Jesse Pope President and Executive Director of the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, points out our local police, firefighters and EMTs were doing rescues long before Storm Helene hit the High Country two days later. It was the beginning of what has been a tragic and historic two weeks of devastation.

Pope grew up in nearby Mouth of Wilson, Va., and went to Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk; he soon realized that he did not want to move away from these beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains. He found a home with the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, first as a naturalist, a back country ranger and an animal keeper at the facility's zoo. Eventually, he worked his way up to the Executive Director position while raising a family in Newland.

Over the last two weeks, Pope has been heavily involved with the storm relief effort that has ensued here because, luckily, he has had some experience with natural disasters in the past.

"I did some missionary work back in the day and I have done quite a bit of relief work as well," Pope said. "I was down in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina and worked two different two-week shifts there. We also did some Hurricane Matthew relief work in 2016. I also have a First Responder background and a wilderness medicine background as well. So, I always feel like I have skills that are beneficial to relief situations like we are experiencing now, plus I just don't mind working, in general. After disasters like this happen, a lot of the hard work happens in the first week, the second week, and three weeks and more after the event because that is when everybody else leaves, and that is truly when the work is needed."

Pope's experiences have naturally made him an asset to the team, which consists of many impressive individuals that came together right after Hurricane Helene smashed into the High Country. Pope and his team began working with the Avery County YMCA, the Feeding Avery Families organization, the local police, firefighters and EMTs, and eventually, folks from neighboring counties and all around the country.

Pope knew the community was about to endure a deadly, devastating storm for the ages.

All of us that were here during that fateful last week of September have their own story to tell about the storm's direct hit on our mountains. For Pope, his eyes were opened while looking out of the windows on the second story of his home. One of his three kids was uneasy with the ferocity of the storm when it hit full force, so Pope went upstairs to reassure and calm nerves. Instead, he, too, started freaking out about what was happening in front of them.

Grandfather Mountain park has a weather station on top of it, and according to Pope, the previous two-day rainfall measurement record was 12.3-inches of water falling during a 48-hour period. This time around, over 20 inches of rain was measured, and the initial focus at the Grandfather Mountain facility was to begin making sure the animals in the zoo were safe and the pavement was still roadworthy. As all of that was playing out, the winds of Hurricane Helene finally made their way up from the Florida coast, hammering the High Country on Friday morning.

"My son was in his room and he gets a little bit anxious about big storms, as we all do, and he said, 'Yeah Dad, I'm good,' and then we started to look out of his window," Pope said. "I have a bunch of big oaks surrounding my house, which was built in 1968, and one of the big oak branches had broken and was swinging back and forth in the wind over my driveway. I told my son, 'I kind of wish the wind would just blow that one down because it is so high, I can't reach it and it s going to hit our car underneath.' No more than a few seconds after I said that, we watched that whole oak tree fall down. ... 'Dad, did you see that?' Seconds later, another big oak tree falls onto the top of the first tree, and then a third tree fell on top of the other two. And, during that same main-line gust, the wind shear blew another tree down that smashed into my neighbor's house. All four big trees fell within 30 seconds of each other, and we watched all of it happen right in front of us."

The high winds were adding to the flood damage. Initially, high waters were taking out the houses and businesses and roads, but suddenly, trees of all sizes were doing more damage.

By the time the storm had passed through on Friday afternoon, Sept. 27, the destruction kept grinding. Soon, all phone towers were out, all electricity was out, and the roads were blocked in every direction.

That's when Pope became an important cog in the relief efforts, partly because he explored and found a spot on the back side of Grandfather Mountain where he could get a phone signal. At times, it was only enough of a signal to get a text or a Facebook post or two out, and that unexpected hotspot proved to be crucial.

"Saturday, there was little to no communication, so by Sunday, that is when we really realized that there was a ton of people in the shelters and that the shelters needed supplies, food, water and tarps. So we immediately put out a call for help to friends, family and the donors of Grandfather Mountain through social media," Pope said. "Right away, people began to bring in supplies, and that is when we realized that the Starlink satellite connections were a great tool and resource when you have no cell towers working.

"By Monday morning, we had loads of supplies coming into Avery County from literally all over. I have a friend in Florida named Mark Coffman, for instance, who is a regular at the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games every July, and I told him, 'Look, if you can find any Starlink systems at Home Depot or anywhere else, buy as many as you can while you travel up here.' I was thinking he would find about two or three of them on his way from Florida to North Carolina, but he criss-crossed from store to store as he drove up and he showed up with seven. I talked to Mark on Sunday about 4 p.m. and he showed up the next morning with supplies, and he is still here working with us. In fact, one day, Mark and us, along with the Teen Valley Ranch youth camp, we served 1,000 meals at the Spear Country Store."

Folks on the local level organized a plan as well.

"The partnerships began to blossom," Pope said. "We work a lot with the Williams YMCA of Avery County on a regular basis, so Trey Oakley and I, Trey is the CEO of the Williams YMCA, we drove around and went to the hospital to talk to the leadership there. We checked in with Sally Loftus of Feeding Avery Families, we checked in with the local school system, and we went to Incident Command and met with the command leaders who were running the Emergency Response. Another food bank organization that we worked with during this event was called A Simple Gesture out of Greensboro, N.C. When I made the call out to them that we were in trouble and we needed help, they responded instantly. And, we also wonderfully partnered with Wine To Water organization in Boone as well and with everyone working together, good things began to happen."

As the need to feed people grew in the High Country, Pope and his team realized that it would take a couple of days to get the Grandfather Mountain park restaurant up and running, and that is when a worldwide relief organization stepped in to bridge the gap.

"The World Central Kitchen organization was set up and mobilized in Boone, doing their amazing work, but we couldn't get to Boone at that time," Pope said. "So, the main World Central Kitchen set up in Asheville flew in 300 prepared meals and landed with them here at Grandfather Mountain for two days in a row, and we distributed them

to rescue workers across the county. Then, on the third day, we finally got our food service hub up and operational."

There have been many hotdogs and hamburgers served at many locations throughout all of our counties over the last two weeks, yet one day, an idea was hatched to bring along a treat for those in need that might lift their spirits — ice cream.

"We took eight tubs of ice cream to the Spear Country Store and used coolers and ice to get it there," Pope said. "One of the people who was cooking on the grill for others down there had been doing it for hours and everyone kept asking him: 'Hey, do you want something to eat? You need to eat.' But, he'd say, 'No, I don't want to take food from other people. I'm good.' When the ice cream showed up, however, he was like, 'Yeah, I'll take a little ice cream.'"

Not long afterwards, a family walked up to the store from a long ways off, as folks could see them by the side of the road in the distance. It was a young family with five kids in tow, hoping for a good meal.

"The second-oldest daughter was shellshocked," Pope said. "I've never been through a war, but that is the only thing I could imagine when I saw her. That little girl looked so sad and so confused and so scared, stunned at what had just happened to them, and I think she was just old enough to know that this situation was bad, yet not old enough to understand that everything will be OK again someday. There were some police officers there from Concord, N.C., who were volunteering to help, and one of the officers was talking to her family and to her, trying to cheer them up.

"The officer then picked her up and put her into his UTV side-by-side and he is trying to show her all of the bells and whistles and flashing lights of his police vehicle, yet it is all lost on her. She was just sitting there, with no to little expression. Then, one of my team members notices her and decides to scoop some ice cream for her and brings it over. As soon as the ice cream was handed to her, her reaction was like, 'Ice cream!' She immediately came alive. All of a sudden, she was a little kid again. For a few minutes, she had happiness and something good happening in the world around her, as she sat there with her bowl of ice cream."

To find updates on this crisis and to find ways to help, go online to grandfather.com/helene-updates/ (c) 2024 The Mountain Times. All rights reserved.

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Many events in High Country hoping to reschedule in aftermath of deadly storm

October 9, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: JERRY SNOW| Section: Mountaintimes | 371 Words OpenURL Link

A lot of festivals, live music, screenings and other scheduled events in the High County have either been cancelled or postponed in the first few weeks of October, as the region recovers from the devastation left behind by Hurricane Helene in late September.

Popular traditions like the Woolly Worm Festival and the Valle Country Fair, both planned for the weekend of Oct. 18 and 19, have been canceled by organizers.

The 2024 Appalachian Autumn Market & Fall Festival, which was scheduled for Oct. 5 at Horn in the West, was postponed and will be rescheduled, according to horninthewest.com.

Halloween is a festive time that children can look forward to later this month.

The Boone KOA Holiday campground was closed from Sept. 30 until Oct. 6 to clean up after the historic storm, but the Halloween Weekend 1 remains on the schedule for Oct. 18-20, according to koa.com. It includes children activities, a costume contest and trick-or-treating. Boone KOA Holiday (123 Harmony Mountain Ln.) is open from May 1 through the end of October. For more information, call (828) 264-7250.

The Blowing Rock Halloween Festival & Monster March is scheduled for Oct. 26 from 3-8 p.m. at 1094 Main St. The downtown trick-or-treat event is free.

Boone Boo is scheduled for Oct. 31 from 5-7:30 p.m. at the Jones House in downtown Boone. Anyone with questions can call 828-268.6280.

A Trick-or-Treat Event at Lantern Farm, located on Doe Meadows Drive in West Jefferson, is scheduled for Oct. 31 from 6:30 until 9 p.m. The cost is \$10.

October typically brings a lot of tourists and sightseers to the High Country, but 2024 will be much different than most years.

The Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina is closed due to damage from Hurricane Helene; Elk Knob and Grandfather Mountain State Parks are closed until at least Oct. 31, according to the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation.

A travel advisory has been issued for Western North Carolina, according Visit North Carolina; state and local officials "strongly advises all motorists avoid travel in Western North Carolina due to the continued risks from the flooding.

The confirmed death total from Hurricane Helene has exceeded 200, including at least 35 in Buncombe, which also has 600 people reported as missing, according to the Associated Press.

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The heart of hurricane relief: well-oiled machine rolled out well ahead of Helene

October 9, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Vicki Hyatt vhyatt@themountaineer.com| Section: Hurricane Helene | 1009 Words OpenURL Link

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Helene, pallets of water, mountains of food, an army of volunteers, mass feeding operations and a litany of supplies — from batteries to baby wipes — were available almost immediately nearly in every corner of Haywood County.

Some locations even had mobile medical help, shower trailers, laundry stations and food delivery services that delivered to those unable to make it to a central location.

Part of the hurricane response happened organically, as it generally does across the nation when disaster strikes. But the largest operation was part of a deliberate plan devised in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Fred.

The initial push was to get the federal supplies set up in a central location where they could be shuttled to communities across the county, said Allison Richmond, the public information officer for Haywood County Emergency Management. That happened the day after Hurricane Helene hit.

Because very few people in the county had phone or internet service, and washed-out roads and bridges meant some couldn't even leave their homes, the rural fire departments played a key role in the response.

Each department had done a door-to-door assessment in their community, so were perfectly positioned to get the supplies where they were needed.

Once federal supplies were trucked into the Smoky Mountain Events Center (former fairgrounds), they were shuttled initially to the fire departments, and later to three main distribution centers across the county.

The official donation/distribution sites included Woodland Baptist Church near Clyde; Jonathan Valley Elementary School and Bethel Elementary School, Maggie Valley Pavillion, town of Canton's IP Sports Complex and Canton First Baptist Church.

Other organizations operating distribution efforts were able to coordinate with the county to have needed supplies shuttled to their sites, as well, including Waynesville First United Methodist Church, the Pigeon Multicultural Community Center and Fines Creek Community Center.

Efforts at the center are part of the overarching effort being coordinated by Orchard Church — one that includes 100 other churches and organizations.

Haywood County Sheriff Bill Wilke had nothing but praise for the disaster response component being coordinated by the faith-based community.

"I've spent 31 years in the Army, and I don't know I have ever seen a logistics operation run so efficiently and smoothly as the staff the Orchard Church has organized," Wilke said. "It's not just the Orchard Church. They've integrated the larger faith community and set up an organization that has efficient distribution. It takes a large burden off emergency management."

County Commission Chairman Kevin Ensley said the churches sought out the county — not the other way around.

"They came to us, and we helped them get organized," said Ensley. "I was over there today watching, and there is car after car coming in with donations, and they would unload it, organize it, and send it back out."

Haywood leaders got a bit of good news Monday. The county has all the supplies it needs — for now.

The Smoky Mountain Events Center — the main spot where the federally provided supplies and donations are offloaded to be shuttled to other distribution points — is "busting at the seams," said Travis Donaldson, the county's director of emergency management.

He's hoping donations can be diverted for a week or so as those at the center get pushed out in the community.

"We're asking to spread that out to sustain this effort going forward. We don't want folks to forget about us two months from now, six months from now," he said.

There is one immediate need though. Propane tanks and propane cooking stoves are desperately needed, especially as cold weather approaches.

The supply distribution center was yet another piece of Haywood's disaster response the county was able to pass off to a highly trained team — one from Kentucky emergency management.

Incident Manager Dustin Heiser's Kentucky team responded to a call from the N.C. Department of Public Safety. He said coordinating the distribution center details is something the team does all the time.

"It's a small part in the overall process, but it's a key first piece in getting people back to where they were," Heiser said. "Food, water, diapers, hygiene products, cleaning supplies, pet and livestock feed, those are all necessary."

Heiser's team of four is coordinating the logistics of getting supplies in and then shuttling them to central hubs across the county. It's something that couldn't happen without volunteers. That's where Dave Nicholson comes in. He was tapped by Pastor Stephen Buys at Orchard Church to oversee the overall volunteer effort, which is no small task.

At any given time, between 20 and 50 people are working at the center, unloading the semi trucks that arrive with the federal shipments and reloading them into vehicles so they can be transferred to sites around the county. The site operates from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

Nicholson said volunteers have come from all over — local churches, Western Carolina University, county employees, sports teams from Pisgah and Tuscola, and SOAR students, to name a few. Since there is no end date for the distribution operation, ongoing volunteers will be key.

He said Weber Grill Company donated 750 grills and charcoal which have been "incredibly well received."

He relayed one story of a woman who was cooking outside over a fire when a grill was delivered. At another site, supplies had to be tossed across a ravine because the access road was impassable.

One homebuilder, Mike Webster, with his truck and trailer, has been invaluable, Nicholson said.

"I've lived here 41 years," Webster said. "I just wanted to help."

Commissioner Terry Ramey has adopted the central supply distribution site at the Smoky Mountain Events Center as a place he checks on regularly.

"It's unreal how smooth the volunteers we've had are working and how people stepped up from different county agencies to help," he said. "Not one person complained. I want to make sure these people know how much we appreciate them. It's amazing to watch how people pull together."

At Monday's commissioner meeting, leaders were full of praise for those working at the center, including county

employees who volunteer on weekends and even shift efforts from their regular job to help the center run smoothly.

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Supply train for storm victims running full throttle at Canton distribution site

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CANTON — For the past week, Canton's IP Sports Complex has been the community's central site for immediate disaster needs.

The town has converted a large building housing batting cages into a massive area where food, cleaning supplies and more are dropped off and distributed. In just two days, the empty building transformed into a warehouse where disaster victims could find everything they need from shovels to diapers to water and more.

"People can come her and say 'Hey I need diapers, I need baby food, I need dog food. They get it pack it and move on out of here," Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers said, giving Gov. Roy Cooper a tour of the site Friday.

Canton Town Planner Byron Hickox was tasked with organizing the operation — an idea conceived by town employees. The initial setup was advanced rapidly through the help of volunteers through Pinnacle Church. Once word got out, both donations and volunteers flooded the center.

"What you see is an army of volunteers doing an absolute stellar job," Hickox said. "They are working 90 miles an hour."

The operation is a carousel of supplies coming in and going out.

"These volunteers are on hand to unload it. Then they organize it and make sense of it, so when someone comes in and says 'we need this, this and this,' we can find it," Hickox said.

Canton Alderwoman Kristina Proctor, along with her son, were in the thick of things, working, greeting volunteers and helping out where needed at the bustling center.

Two of the volunteers on Friday, Megan Edwards of Cruso and Jarilyn Tuttle of Clyde, were able to help out after learning the Waynesville office where they work was closed for the day.

Hickox praised the volunteers, town recreation director Sam Dunbar and street department director Josh Pirowski, who helped organize the effort, as well as other employees and volunteers who are working tirelessly in a time of such need.

"Except for two pallets of water, every single item has been unloaded by a pair of human hands and put where it is," Hickox said. "These volunteers are self-starters. They're motivated. I don't have to tell them what to do, I don't have to micromanage them. They jump right in. They just have a sense of what to do.

"This distribution center is a good addition," Hickox said, noting there was nothing like it near town in 2021 when Tropical Storm Fred ravaged the county. "This is more centrally located for east Haywood."

It is open seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Located at 305 Silkwood Dr. off I-40 exit 33 near the regional livestock center.

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Thank you FEMA, thank you NC, thank you Haywood

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The government response to Hurricane Helene has become a political football as the 2024 presidential election approaches. Allegations from some are that the federal government didn't show up when it was most needed.

That couldn't be farther from the truth in Haywood where FEMA teams were on the ground pre-flood.

The federal and state response in Haywood County carries a valuable lesson that should underscore a key truth. That truth is, being ready for an emergency starts at the lowest levels of government shows the process can work beautifully.

Pointing fingers after the fact is blaming the very people in the trenches now working tirelessly on recovery, and that's the local emergency leaders.

In a Saturday interview, U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards said it took up to 30 hours before FEMA was on the ground in his district, something he called unacceptable. That was what he was finding in parts of his 15-county congressional district after suspending his political campaign to focus on disaster response.

When Edwards visits Haywood this week, he'll find an example he can share across the region in how the federal government can work like a well-oiled machine if counties are prepared.

Federal and state agencies don't swoop into a natural disaster area to take over. They are invited in by officials at the local level once they realize help is needed. That's what happened in Haywood even before the storm hit.

The Haywood emergency response team was carefully monitoring Hurricane Helene five days before it actually hit.

Weather predictions provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) included reports that used warnings local team members had never heard before — ones with phrases like "catastrophic flooding on par with levels in 1916." As the warnings became more dire, local leaders put in requests for federal and state help.

Those requests led to FEMA having multiple crews in Haywood pre-flood. For example, many of the swift-water rescue teams that helped during the flood were provided by FEMA, which managed that aspect of the disaster response.

An early request for state assistance led to a specialized team from Kentucky being onsite by late Saturday, a day after the storm, to take charge of the massive food, water and supplies operation at the Smoky Mountain Events Center on N.C. 209.

While it is undoubtedly true that federal and state resources didn't arrive in some areas of the hurricane-ravaged region for several days, it is also true there were procedures in place where federal and state teams could be standing ready on site before the storm.

Haywood was likely the most prepared county in the entire region hit by Helene, largely due to our misfortune of being struck by equally tragic flooding three years ago. We all learn from our troubles, and Haywood took those lessons to heart, which allowed us to be ready for the next time, never dreaming it would come so soon.

Other counties can learn from Haywood's response model — one that is sure to be the focus of many training exercises across the nation.

Another aspect of disaster readiness is one that can't be shifted to government, but is that of personal responsibility. When local experts issue warnings to move to high ground and get anything that can float out of the way, those warnings need to be taken seriously.

When rescue teams show up at your door saying you need to leave now, you should do it. Lives were endangered or lost by some refusing to leave their home when first asked.

Warnings about getting items out of the flood zone need to be heeded. That includes even moving things as heavy as tractors, pickups and campers because we have learned the hard way, they will float.

The more that floats down the river, the greater the personal tragedies and the greater the cumulative losses when rivers are filled with trash. It was obvious many in Haywood, with days of early warnings that allowed for time to prepare, took evasive action and that made a huge difference.

The stream debris after Hurricane Helene was mostly large trees and limbs. During Tropical Storm Fred, which we knew about just hours beforehand, the personal losses were on full display with the homes, vehicles, children's toys, farm equipment, clothing and more left behind when cleanup started.

A much broader take-away concerning the politicization of natural disasters could be "please don't." The Haywood case proves government can work just as it should. FEMA and state emergency help is available quickly if counties have to have the foresight to put in a call early on. It takes time to mobilize highly specialized teams that drive here from several states away.

We were ready because of the disaster we endured three years ago. Blaming those who weren't ready because they had no recent misfortune is just plain wrong.

While the FEMA rumors have been repeated and used as a way to undermine the governmental role in helping during disasters, one look at all that's happening in Haywood shows what a godsend it can be when government shows up to help.

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The heart of hurricane relief: well-oiled machine rolled out well ahead of Helene

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In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Helene, pallets of water, mountains of food, an army of volunteers, mass feeding operations and a litany of supplies — from batteries to baby wipes — were available almost immediately nearly in every corner of Haywood County.

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