

Helene hit towns with little flood insurance - FEMA says just 4% of US homeowners covered

October 6, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The (NC) Author: Bailey Schulz; USA TODAY| Section: News| 939 Words Page: A6 OpenURL Link

Kayla Ward was drinking coffee on her porch n the afternoon on Sept. 27 when she noticed water from the nearby Nolichucky River rising fast.

After nearly a year in the house nestled in the Appalachian Mountains, Ward never thought to worry about flooding. But she and her husband had to race to escape after Helene swept through Jonesborough, Tennessee. The couple managed to leave with their pets and the clothes on their back, but their home was severely damaged.

Ward, like many other homeowners affected by the late September storm, did not have flood insurance and said her insurance company denied her husband's claim. It was a surprise to Ward, 61, who used to work as an insurance claims specialist for a full-service insurance agency in the neighboring town of Johnson City.

"We're finding out everybody in our area is the same way. Nobody's being covered," she told USA TODAY. "We lost everything. Everything."

Hurricane Helene's destructive path across the Southeast has spotlighted a lack of flood insurance in the U.S. One estimate from FEMA says just 4% of homeowners in the country have coverage.

"The landscape is bleak, in terms of whether there will be insurance dollars flowing to those impacted households to fund repairs," said Amy Bach, executive director of the consumer advocacy group United Policyholders. "Not enough (affected homes had flood insurance), by a long shot."

Big insurance gap

Officials have yet to release damage estimates, but USA TODAY previously reported that insured residential and commercial property damage is worth at least \$3billion in Florida and Georgia, according to financial services company CoreLogic. The event is one of the deadliest hurricanes to make landfall on the U.S. mainland, causing more than 200 deaths, and has been described as North Carolina's "own Hurricane Katrina," referring to the 2005 storm that devastated the Southeastern U.S. with an estimated \$125billion in damage, not adjusted for inflation.

But Katrina's destruction was different. A number of those affected by the 2005 storm had their homeowners insurance claims approved because the destruction stemmed from wind damage, Bach said. This time, most of the damage is due to storm surge and flooding.

"We don't have the wind argument, the hook, to bring in the home insurers," she said.

Homes tend to go without flood insurance for two reasons: cost and awareness.

Some homeowners, Bach said, aren't aware that flood insurance has to be paid separately.

"There's definitely an information gap," she said. "Insurance regulators and public officials are always trying to find ways to raise consumer awareness about the fact that flood damage is excluded from your home insurance, but people don't want to think about insurance."

Others struggle to pay for additional flood insurance, or don't think the cost is worth the coverage. Flood insurance through the National Flood Insurance Program costs roughly \$1,000 per year on average, USA TODAY's Blueprint

previously reported. And that's on top of traditional homeowners insurance, which saw double-digit growth in 2023, according to S&P Global Market Intelligence.

Insurance prices are expected to keep rising, according to Tim Zawacki, an insurance sector strategist at S&P Global. He expects homeowners' insurers to reevaluate their exposures "in a wide range of locations" after Helene hit regions hundreds of miles off the coast.

"As carriers trim their exposure to limit concentration risk and earnings volatility, this will inevitably lead to higher homeowners insurance premiums," Zawacki said in an email to USA TODAY.

'A false sense of security'

Some homeowners, like Ward, were under the impression that additional flood insurance was unnecessary outside of FEMA-designated flood zones, which require homeowners with a mortgage to purchase flood insurance.

But these flood maps are often outdated or incomplete. A 2020 report from the Association of State Floodplain Managers shows just one-third of the nation's floodplains have been mapped out by FEMA.

"Sometimes these maps give people a false sense of security," said Sharon Cornelissen, director of housing at the Consumer Federation of America. "As climate disasters become more common and with rain and storms becoming more frequent and more heavy, we know that the actual risk of flooding is much more widespread."

With 99% of counties nationwide affected by flooding since 1996, FEMA considers floods the most common and costliest natural disasters in the U.S.

"We see lack of flood insurance as the biggest insurance gap," said Mark Friedlander, director of corporate communications at the Insurance Information Institute. "Some (homeowners) are at a higher risk than others, but you can't say you're not at risk, no matter where you live."

Next steps for homeowners

For homeowners without flood insurance affected by Helene, experts who spoke to USA TODAY shared advice for next steps.

Focus on getting your home dried as quickly as possible, but keep an eye out for scammers. Contractors who can help dry out homes will be in short supply, so vet any business offering to help.

Take photos and videos to document the damage.

Check your home policy. Bach said there may be some coverage for certain expenses under a home policy – especially if the homeowner can point to wind-driven rain as a source of damage. It's worth getting a second opinion before assuming the damage won't be covered.

Apply for FEMA assistance, and check for any state or local emergency funding. FEMA funding can help, but Friedlander warned that it's not a replacement for insurance; the average FEMA disaster assistance grant award between 2016 and 2022 was \$3,000. In comparison, FEMA warns that just one inch of water can cause roughly \$25,000 worth of property damage.

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Hurricane Helene brings out both the best and worst in us

October 6, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The (NC)

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You can learn a lot about people when they are under stress. We see them at their best - or worst. Hurricane Helene is revealing both.

My family has experienced what it is like to be without power, water and refrigeration, with mud and debris in your home. You feel alone, overwhelmed, and sad. We have also rejoiced when strangers we never met come to help muck out the house, haul out furniture and belongings that must be discarded, do carpentry work and saw tree limbs. Their biggest contribution is to provide comfort.

We can't thank these heroes enough. But they aren't looking for thanks. They see this as their responsibility, a calling to help another in times of distress.

These are the people the musical group Alabama sang about in their wonderful song, Angels among us:

I believe there are Angels among us,

sent down to us from somewhere up above.

They come to you and me in our darkest hours

To show us how to live, to teach us how to give.

To guide us with the light of love.

We are blessed by many angels. But times of distress also show the worst side of some.

We all remember when President Trump went to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. His response to the devastation was tossing paper towels into the crowd. It took him weeks to release federal funding for the territory.

His response to Helene wasn't much better. Trump instructed his staff to find a place where the storm had ransacked a business and it was surrounded by rubble. With cameras rolling, he declared his visit wasn't political, then started criticizing Gov. Roy Cooper for doing a terrible job and "going out of their way to not help people in Republican areas."

The claim was totally fabricated. It was disgusting political pandering. This is no time for politics.

As has always been the case, there will be scammers preying on the elderly or those desperate for help, charging them outrageous prices. It is sometimes hard to distinguish between genuine helpers and those trying to make a quick buck. True volunteers won't ask for money. Much as you might need help, be cautious!

Those devastated by Helene are wondering why it is taking so long for help to arrive. Our federal and state government could perhaps have been better prepared to respond. They knew by Wednesday that Helene was going to impact Western Carolina and forecasters predicted it was going to be bad.

But no one could ever have imagined just how devastating this storm was going to be. Not since 1916 has the western section of our state had an event so destructive. By Friday afternoon and evening, when it was obvious

how bad the damage was going to be, it was too late to put resources in place without potentially endangering their lives. Surging waters and sheets of rain destroyed roads, landslides demolished buildings and houses were swept away.... some with people inside.

Media coverage has been uneven. Reporters, photographers and news crews were not allowed into many rural areas because of potential danger. Even so, most of the news coverage has focused on Asheville. It had great damage, but the media has largely neglected a great deal of suffering in smaller communities like Linville, Spruce Pine, Banner Elk, Swannanoa and less populous counties.

Folks are desperate for basic needs. They urgently need water - to drink, to wash themselves, and flush toilets. Wipes, toilet paper, paper towels and even diapers are needed, along with non-perishable food like pop-top tins of chicken, tuna, beans, applesauce fruit and peanut butter. Granola and protein bars and crackers are very welcome. Candles and flashlights with batteries are essential.

Our western neighbors need the right here, right now kind of help. Saying help is on the way when you are thirsty, alone and in darkness being doesn't help with immediate basic needs.

There are many ways you can help. Please don't just hop in the car and head west. DOT says heavy traffic on damaged roads is overwhelming efforts to repair roads. But groups of people can band together, accumulate supplies and transport them to coordinated safe staging areas, where they can be transferred to areas of most need. Have a plan for where you take supplies. Recognized charitable organizations will also welcome help.

Money is also badly needed. Fortunately, our state has several billion dollars in "rainy day funds" and the federal government will also provide large amounts of funding. But it is going to take more than money to help restore life for those affected. Regardless of your beliefs, praying for their safety and wellbeing will help.

We are North Carolina, the "goodliest land," with the goodliest people. Let us all do our best to help our neighbors.

Tom Campbell is a Hall of Fame North Carolina broadcaster and columnist who has covered North Carolina public policy issues since 1965. Contact him at tomcamp@carolinabroadcasting.com.

Tar Heel Voices

Tom Campbell

Guest columnist

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Western NC, we are with you

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It wasn't supposed to happen in the mountains.

They say the deadly floods in western North Carolina caused by Tropical Storm Helene are a 1,000-year flood event. That's why the devastation looks like something we have not seen.

I live hours east of the hardest-hit areas in Buncombe and nearby counties. But like many North Carolinians, I have spent time in the N.C. mountains, our part of the Appalachians. There are few better summer escapes from my part of the state, where we are often the hottest part on the TV news weather map, thanks in part to our Sandhills soil.

How did places I've been to in western NC fare?

As heartbreaking scenes seeped out of Asheville and surrounding areas, I looked for places I had been to.

There is Boone, where I attended my older brother's graduation from Appalachian State University, where one picture showed rows of cars nearly submerged in brown waters. The campus is closed for several days. UNC-Asheville, its fellow campus in the state school system, is closed at least until Oct. 28, officials say.

There is leafy Blowing Rock, like a painting in my mind, where I went to French camp as a high-schooler, of all things. A striking image of a house floating away emerged from there, and news accounts are that mudslides and flooded roads have cut off the town from nearby Boone, with which it shares close ties.

There is Lake Junaluska, where my wife and I have spent comfortable days in a conference at the United Methodist Church. There was significant flooding and power outages, but the dam held, officials reported.

Weaverville, where my family traveled a few years ago – where we rented a country cottage near a farm. I read that the National Guard was busily distributing water to people after the water treatment plant flooded.

Bryson City to the west of Asheville was mostly spared, except for some flooding. I remembered the time I went whitewater rafting in area, located to the west of Asheville, and stayed in my first yurt. I saw a social media post on Monday where an outfitter on the Nantahala River wrote the business had been "barely impacted" and called it "truly a miracle." The outfitters invited people in the local area to come get a hot meal and charge devices.

Meanwhile, a post from Asheville showed people gathered near a public library to use its Wi-Fi, one of the few available hot spots.

The little things become big things in times of disaster. We saw the same when our time came in 2016 with Matthew and 2018 with Florence.

Texts with Allison in Asheville: They are OK

On Tuesday, I talked by text to our friend Allison Sharpe who lives in west Asheville. She was matron of honor at our wedding, and she and her husband, Jon, were safe. That's the most important part.

They were on a generator and hoping power would be restored by this coming Friday.

We texted because talk was not available at that moment. Soon into it, Allison asked me about the status of a particular bridge in her city, if I had heard anything about it.

A little thing like that showed me how her world was still askew – as I was able to Google information about a place just miles from her house. A USA TODAY Network colleague in Asheville confirmed the bridge was fine.

But most roads there are still closed for travel. At one point all roads were closed and Asheville was an island.

"We cannot get any data - websites, etc - only texting and phone calls when out on a main road," Allison texted.

She said Duke Energy and city and county officials have sent texts with links, but they were not able to get the links to work.

And: "Some people get the texts, others don't. Luckily we can get local news on (a) tv antenna."

No water in Asheville, but a

good spirit among her neighbors

There is no water, Allison texted. What a cruel irony of floods.

She said the water system has been weak for decades. She said the water went out in Christmas of 2022 during a cold snap and there had been talk of fixing it but "no action."

"Now this." she texted.

She and Jon have been told it will be three weeks before they have water again. But their gut tells them more like six.

Later, she texted: "I don't want to knock our leadership too hard because this is unprecedented. But, the water issue is going to cause society to fray a bit, I think."

Allison said: "The devastation is heartbreakingly unbelievable."

But she also said the "esprit de corps amongst neighbors and nearby friends has been a great comfort."

She said the camaraderie among her neighbors reminded her of another difficult period they all went through together – when the COVID-19 pandemic kept people at home, and they would socialize around backyard fire pits.

COVID-19 and climate on my mind

Of course, the dramatic and generational impact of COVID-19 is one thing I've thought about. But also climate change and the environment when it comes to my native state, where I have spent most of my life.

Just a week before the remnants of Helene did what it did to our mountains, we saw video of houses on the North Carolina coast slowly collapsing and floating away into the Atlantic – victims of erosion.

These things can impact your psyche.

Tar Heels are proud of many things about our state, and its physical beauty is one. We know that NC offers some of the best beaches on the eastern end and some of the best hiking, camping and rafting in the mountains on the west end. These two natural gifts are among many reasons we are one of the fastest-growing states.

That all seems threatened now. But we are here.

We have esprit de corps. Multiple relief efforts are underway.

The Old North State will recover, and rebuild.

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Opinion Editor

Fayetteville Observer

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National Guard rushes aid to hard-hit towns in NC

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They flew over wastelands of crushed houses, demolished roads and downed power lines.

From the air, they could see once pristine mountain forests destroyed by mudslides and flooded rivers. Cars stranded in streams. Collapsed bridges. Devastated towns.

Members of the North Carolina National Guard on Wednesday continued rushing desperately needed supplies to areas ravaged and cut off by Tropical Storm Helene.

In many communities across western North Carolina, water and food are in short supply, let alone electricity and internet, Wi-Fi and cellphone service – with no word on when they will return for thousands of residents.

The death toll across the Southeast from the storm grew to at least 203 on Thursday, while Buncombe County, which includes Asheville, had reported 61 deaths.

President Joe Biden visited North Carolina on Wednesday and announced that he had dispatched 1,000 troops to reinforce the North Carolina National Guard with relief efforts. The Air National Guard said Wednesday that it had delivered over 100,000 pounds of food, water and other supplies for Helene victims.

For some in the guard, the missions this week are personal.

Chief Warrant Officer Marcus Wilkerson and his crew made a stop in a Black Hawk helicopter at his local church in Fairview, southeast of Asheville. His pastor and and fellow parishioners greeted him with hugs as he and his crew unloaded supplies.

For the past several days, the Trinity Fairview Church has been a hub where the community has been gathering supplies and working on plans to reach others that have been cut off by downed trees and demolished roads.

Dozens of adults and even small children formed an assembly line to unload water, meal kits and more.

Wilkerson said he was glad to be able to personally deliver supplies to his church as a National Guard member, but he had to fight back tears.

"It's hard to see them like this," he said. "But they're making it."

The Black Hawk on Wednesday circled through the mountains of western North Carolina near the Tennessee border looking for small towns and people who needed help. In these mountain communities, monstrous amounts of rain turned rivers and streams into deadly torrents.

"There's our town ahead," the pilot, Chief Warrant Officer Nathaniel Ernst, said as he circled the small mountain community of Buladean in Mitchell County, about 70 miles north of Asheville. As they landed, they were greeted with smiles and relieved faces.

Resident Richard Whitney said most of the town's roads were wiped out, save for one road to Johnson City, Tennessee, which is in danger of failing.

"I've lived on the coasts and been in hurricanes," he said. "But nothing like this."

Even some of the North Carolina National Guard members were concerned for their own family members.

Spc. Cole Woodard, who was on the Black Hawk on Wednesday, said he received word that his parents in Burnsville, a small mountain community in Yancey County, were safe. But he still hadn't seen them.

On Monday, he was able to fly overhead as they waved at him from the ground. "It felt good to see them safe."

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Trump speaks to thousands at rally - Event held Friday night at Crown Arena

October 6, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The (NC) Author: Rachael Riley; Fayetteville Observer | Section: News | 914 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

In his first visit to Fayetteville in his bid to seek another term in the White House, former President Donald Trump told a crowd of more than 5,000 at the Crown Arena on Friday night that he would restore the name of the world's most populated U.S. military installation.

Formerly known as Fort Bragg and named after Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg, the home of the airborne and special operations forces was renamed Fort Liberty last June.

"We did win two world wars from Fort Bragg ... So, this is no time to be changing names ... We're going to do everything we can to get it back. We're going to bring our country back," Trump told the crowd that roared with applause and chanted, "Fight, fight, fight!"

Ahead of Trump's remarks, Sanford resident Chelsea Ruston said she is a military spouse and does not think renaming the installation was worth the money.

Ruston said she came out to support Trump.

"He cares for America, everything to make America great again, closing our borders ... I liked gas prices better (when he was in office). I liked that inflation was down and interest rates," she said.

Trump's visit to Fayetteville was a town hall, which lasted a little more than an hour, and included questions from several North Carolina residents.

Topics included what Trump and others have said was a lack of response to those affected by Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina, and illegal immigration, but the majority of the questions centered on military topics.

Dwight Francisco, a Marine Corps Vietnam veteran, who had presented Trump with a Purple Heart that Francisco had been awarded, said he was moved to see Trump stand up after being grazed in the ear by a bullet during an assassination attempt at a June rally in Butler, Pennsylvania.

Francisco also claimed that the homelessness rate of veterans under Trump's administration was about 7% and has increased to 14%, asking Trump what he would do to help homeless veterans.

Trump said it upset him to see homeless veterans in front of hotels, while "illegal immigrants, many who are killers, drug dealers and terrorists" can walk into the same hotel and sleep there.

He said he would support border policies written during his last term, he would empower local law enforcement to arrest people illegally in the country who have committed crimes and claimed that 350,000 migrant children are missing under the current administration.

He also said the U.S. is sitting on "liquid gold" and said the money from drilling oil and gas would be used "to take care of our veterans properly."

Trump was asked by John, who said he was a former Green Beret kicked out of the military over a COVID-19-vaccine mandate, what he would do to hold military leaders accountable over the former Department of Defense mandate for service members that Congress overturned.

Trump said there should have never been a vaccine mandate and that he would take care of the accountability.

"We lost a lot of great people — a lot of people were forced into doing things they didn't want to do," he said.

Austin, an active-duty service member at Fort Liberty, told the crowd he was at Friday night's forum in a personal capacity and not on behalf of the Army or Department of Defense.

Austin asked Trump about Iran launching missiles toward Israel this week and what Trump's thoughts were on the Iron Dome Missile System used to protect Israel and if America should have a similar system.

"We have to be totally prepared, and we have to be absolutely prepared ... hit the nuclear and worry about the rest later," Trump responded.

Trump said that World War III could start before the election and referenced the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

He said the attacks between Israel and Iran and between Russia and Ukraine wouldn't have happened if he were president.

He said there were no attacks during his four years in the White House.

"We defeated ISIS. I rebuilt the military, and we have great generals," he said.

Asked by a Marine veteran who said he is also a "Latino for Trump" about what he would do for accountability over the 2021 withdrawal in Afghanistan that resulted in the deaths of 13 service members, Trump called the withdrawal an "embarrassing moment in the history of our country."

Trump said that during his last few months in office, troops were getting out of the Middle East, and about 5,000 service members were in Afghanistan.

He said the U.S. should have never given up Bagram Air Base and said that no service members were killed during his last 18 months in office.

"Then we had the election, these guys took over, and it all started up again ...," Trump said. "We lost 13 and left \$85 billion worth of equipment behind. We left Americans behind. Everything was wrong."

Trump said he would fire the generals involved. Former U.S. Central Command commander, Marine Gen. Kenneth "Frank" McKenzie. has since retired.

The last question of the night was asked by former Space Force Lt. Col. Matthew Lohmeier, who sat on stage during the town hall along with Francisco and John, the former Green Beret.

Lohmeier said he was relieved of his command and lost his pension after he criticized DOD training on diversity, equity and inclusion.

"These trainings are still dividing our troops," Lohmeier claimed.

He asked Trump if he would fire the "few woke generals" who are a problem.

Trump said he'd appoint Lohmeier to a task force to look into the matter if elected president.

Staff writer Rachael Riley can be reached at rriley@fayobserver.com.

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Opinion: Democrats are not conceding rural North Carolina. Kamala Harris can win here.

October 6, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Retired Rep. Eva Clayton | Section: Opinion | 351 Words OpenURL Link

Rural voters in North Carolina are speaking up and voting their interest this election. Although the New York Times' current polls indicate former President Trump is winning in our state other polls are very close.

Democrats are no longer conceding rural counties to the Republicans. Democrats are not only listening, but are actively engaging with issues essential to their communities: from access to health care, quality education and sustainable economics through small businesses and farming.

Rural NC communities are great places to live, but need economic opportunities

There is great excitement and expectation for Vice President Kamala Harris, which will translate into votes. I see this firsthand, as I live in rural North Carolina.

OPINONI Helene devastated my NC community. What I saw next helped me survive.

Rural communities are great places to live. They are quiet, surrounded by nature, outdoor recreation, farming and good neighbors regardless of politics.

Our rural communities in the South, however, often lack economic opportunities. Our young people are forced to leave for good-paying jobs. The urban and rural job opportunities are vastly different. However, agriculture and energy projects do offer possibilities.

Opinion Pitts: Cumberland County residents hear about the 'forever chemicals' in their blood

Our schools are starving for resources to adequately prepare the next generation of leaders, employers, employees and business leaders. Several of these states' General Assemblies have failed to adequately fund public schools while providing additional funding for private schools. They have also passed laws to control women's bodies.

We encourage Kamala Harris to visit

This election offers a great opportunity for Vice President Harris to win in North Carolina through her economic plan for small businesses, reduction of prescription drugs and increase in affordable housing. Her plan outlined in response to the Farm Bureau questionnaire to support family farmers, ranchers and other small businesses, and strengthen competition in the agricultural supply chain, is welcomed by the farming communities.

We strongly encourage the team of Kamala Harris and Tim Walz to visit North Carolina's rural as well as urban communities.

Eva Clayton is a former member of the U.S. House, representing the 1st Congressional District in eastern North Carolina from 1992 to 2003.

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Hurricane Helene brings out the best, worst in us

October 6, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC)

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how bad the damage was going to be, it was too late to put resources in place without potentially endangering their lives. Surging waters and sheets of rain destroyed roads, landslides demolished buildings and houses were swept away.... some with people inside.

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We are North Carolina, the "goodliest land," with the goodliest people. Let us all do our best to help our neighbors.

Tom Campbell is a Hall of Fame North Carolina broadcaster and columnist who has covered North Carolina public policy issues since 1965. Contact him at tomcamp@carolinabroadcasting.com.

Your Turn

Tom Campbell

Guest columnist

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Tales of triumph emerge in tragedy - Residents showcase unshakable resolve in recovery efforts

October 6, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Christopher Cann and , Phaedra Trethan; USA TODAY Section: News | 1649 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

A son who journeyed 11 miles into the Blue Ridge Mountains to find his parents. A pastor and a rag-tag group of parishioners navigating collapsed roads to bring aid to stranded residents. Strangers meeting online to coordinate searches for each other's missing loved ones.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, one of the worst storms the U.S. has seen in the modern era, residents across the devastated Southeast and elsewhere have showcased unshakable resolve, heroism and compassion.

Stories abound of harrowing rescues and treacherous hikes to find the many missing. And hundreds have turned out to assist in the recovery, chopping up tree limbs blocking roadways or delivering food to communities in need.

"We've had an amazing response," said the Rev. Paul McGinnis, the pastor at Grace Chapel Foursquare Church in Forest City, North Carolina, which has been transformed into a shelter for many who've lost power, homes and loved ones to Helene.

As soon as the storm passed, neighbors and residents from other counties or even out of state "just began showing up," McGinnis said. Besides providing crucial aid, the response has acted as a resilient source of hope and inspiration in the wake of the storm.

Here are some stories of those who have rushed to aid those in need.

Churchgoers form relief team, deliver formula to baby in need

The Rev. Cameron Bryson, a pastor in Dallas, North Carolina, received a call last Saturday that Marion, a town about 1,400 feet high in the Appalachian Mountains, had been cut off by floodwaters and cracked roads.

The following morning, he assembled a group of 35 churchgoers, borrowed a parishioner's pickup, filled it with food, water, gas and other aid, and headed for Marion, an hour-and-a-half drive from Dallas.

After some successful maneuvering past downed trees and snapped power lines, the group eventually came upon an impassable road – forcing a few of them to make the rest of the journey on foot.

As the small group approached the first house, they heard a baby crying. To the door came a mother and father. When Bryson and the others started handing them food for their 5-month-old, the mother's eyes welled up with tears. They had run out of baby formula the night before.

"We just happened to have exactly what they needed," Bryson said. "It was incredible."

Since then, Bryson's group has grown and they – along with other church and local aid groups – have made several deliveries across the devastated towns in the southern Appalachians, where many remain stranded. Amid widespread communication blackouts, they have not had contact with the outside world since late last week.

Son hikes 11 miles in the mountains to find his parents

Sam Perkins only had one thing on his mind when he decided to trek through the utter devastation left behind by

Hurricane Helene in North Carolina: making sure his parents were safe.

Perkins was "drowning in worry" because he hadn't heard from his parents in 48 hours following the storm's historic landfall in Florida and other regions across the Southeast. By last Saturday, he couldn't wait any longer.

Perkins hiked 11 miles with 2,200 feet of elevation gain to reach his mom and dad's home in the mountains, he shared in a Facebook post. He said the home is nestled between an unincorporated community and a couple of towns halfway between Asheville and Boone.

"Little did I know that up there, Helene has demolished roads, homes and utility networks," Perkins said. "This area is completely cut off from resources in every direction."

After weaving his way across failing roads, deep mudslides and fallen trees, Perkins found that his parents were "thankfully, OK but surrounded by devastation."

"I have never been so relieved to see anyone OK," Perkins wrote on Sunday.

Church becomes a home for those who are displaced

McGinnis, the pastor in Forest City, planned to feed hot dogs to the guests at his son Knox's fifth birthday party last Saturday. Instead, he has been feeding them to people whose lives have been upended by Helene. Some have lost homes, others have lost family members.

The church in Rutherford County, about 45 minutes from Asheville, has been home for McGinnis, his wife, Katie, and Knox since their home sustained damage from downed trees. Forest City is one of several surrounding small communities that are closely knit and largely rural, with "lots of distant neighbors," said McGinnis, who grew up in Rutherford County.

Most of the damage in the area is from high winds that toppled trees, knocked out power and cut off streets, trapping people in their homes.

McGinnis said he's been worried about one elderly member of his church in particular, 86-year-old Ray Cole, whose whereabouts are unknown. "We're hoping and praying he's been rescued and he's in one of the shelters," McGinnis said.

Asked how he comforts people who've lost so much, McGinnis said, "In those moments, there are no words."

"In the beginning you just let people talk. They just want to be heard. It's about being there with them in the presence of the Lord. ... It's not just a day-to-day thing. It's going to be months."

Couple find out mother is alive through security camera

Vignette Truett and her husband had tried everything they could think of to reach their family in the mountain suburb of Burnsville, North Carolina. Phone calls, emails and public pleas on social media had gotten them nowhere. After four days, they were beginning to lose hope.

But about 8p.m. Monday, they received the first sign of life from an unlikely source: a security camera.

While in their hotel room in Boone, a town about 50 miles northeast of Burnsville, Truett received a notification telling her movement was being recorded on a camera installed in their bedroom.

Through the spotty video, Truett could see her mother-in-law sitting on the bed, playing with her dog, Bou, and two cats, Zelda and Mittens.

"When we finally saw her and heard her voice, we started crying," Truett said. She had worried her mother-in-law, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, had run out of medicine.

The camera has a chat feature and, after a few attempts, Truett was able to speak with her mother-in-law directly through the speaker.

"We spoke to her for about close to what felt like four hours, just hearing her and seeing her smile, seeing my dog whine," Truett said. She and her husband plan to drive home through newly cleared roadways.

Man ascends mountain to find loved ones and a stranger

Carlton Gardner set out Monday morning to locate an aunt, uncle and other family, who he hadn't heard from since last week. His relatives live in Pensacola, North Carolina, a community in the Blue Ridge Mountains, just south of Burnsville, that was devastated by the flooding.

With bottles of water, some food and a gallon of gas, he drove as far as he could before he got out and started hiking. As he ascended the mountain side, Gardner spotted his mother-in-law on the side of the road. She, along with several of her sons and others, had decided to walk down the mountain after four days without rescue.

Gardner continued on and found several relatives at their Pensacola home – the last people in his family who were unaccounted for. Though he was eager to let his mother know everyone was OK, he made one more stop at a stranger's home.

Since the weekend, Gardner's mother, Dona Gardner, had been active on Facebook pages where people shared the latest whereabouts of their missing loved ones. Scouring the various groups for news about her own family, she came across a woman's post that listed an address just a short walk from Dona Gardner's relatives. Dona Gardner promised the woman her son would stop by the home.

Carlton Gardner did just that and discovered the woman's loved ones were safe. He texted his mother, who then notified the woman.

"Everyone who has connections to those mountains knows, you check on your neighbors," Dona Gardner said. "That's just what everyone does."

On Tuesday, Dona and her husband filled 30 gallons of gasoline to give to their relatives and share with residents throughout Pensacola as people chainsaw through trees blocking roadways and power their ATVs, the vehicle of choice for many in the highlands.

FM radio becomes 'a lifeline' amid mass service outages

FM radio stations have provided residents without power or cell service uninterrupted news coverage of the crisis unraveling across the Southeast.

WNCW-FM, an NPR affiliate based in Spindale, North Carolina, is among the stations serving the region. Its signal stretches through parts of Tennessee, Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina.

"Our employees are everywhere," said Joe Kendrick, the station's director of operations and programming.
"Communication is rough, travel is dicey," he said, adding that the conditions have hampered efforts to report on the impact of Helene, especially on western North Carolina.

The station's limited news staff has teamed up with other radio outlets in the region to send reporters out to the affected areas. Along with working to be a conduit of information and resources for people, the station also offers some normalcy to those who are reeling from the storm's damage, continuing to play music in between news and updates.

"We broadcast throughout the storm, amazingly," Kendrick said. "We had a handful of people here over the weekend either live on the air or working on other programming."

As he and the WNCW team know, FM radio is vital to communities that are cut off from other forms of communication, especially when the power is out and internet access, often spotty in rural areas anyway, is completely severed.

"It's a lifeline," he said. "WNCW was created to give better information and service to this really remote region, and we keep that front and center in our minds all the time."

Contributing: Amaris Encinas, USA TODAY

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Where to donate to relief efforts in WNC or get help

October 6, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Chloe Collins; Gaston Gazette | Section: News | 372 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

Members of the Gaston County Republican Party spent time this week loading a truck with toilet paper, water and other supplies for a drive into western North Carolina in hopes of offering aid to communities hit the hardest by Hurricane Helene.

Other groups across Gaston County have made similar efforts since the hurricane devastated the area, and several community organizations and churches are still accepting donations to help those displaced by the storm.

This week, the North Carolina Department of Public safety issued a request that individual residents refrain from self-deploying to heavily affected areas as to keep critical supply lines open, however, they do encourage volunteering or donating with an accredited organization for those looking to help.

Here is everything you need to know about efforts by the United Way of Gaston County, which is working with other accredited organizations in their relief efforts.

In the wake of Hurricane Helene, Gaston County families have gone without power, clean water and other essentials.

Officials from the United Way of Gaston County said in a press release that despite many Gaston residents being personally affected by Helene themselves, they found some still looking to donate or aid in relief efforts for WNC.

The local chapter has worked closely with the United Way of North Carolina and the American Red Cross to plan relief efforts for locally impacted residents and those in WNC, the release said.

In partnership with those organizations, the United Way of Gaston County will serve as a donation collection hub.

Essential items like water, paper towels, toilet paper and cleaning supplies can be dropped off at the United Way office, 200 E. Franklin Blvd. in Gastonia from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday.

Monetary donations can be made to the UWHelpsNC Helene Recovery Fund or the United Way of Gaston County, with the option to designate Gaston County as the focus of support for local community members in need.

Those looking to volunteer in person can find opportunities at www.nvoad.org.

Additionally, the United Way is supporting loved ones looking to reconnect with a family member impacted by the hurricane in WNC.

"Those trying to contact loved ones in the affected areas of North Carolina can access NC 2-1-1 by texting "PERSON" to 40403 to aid in search and rescue efforts," the release said.

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Helene hit towns with little flood insurance - FEMA says just 4% of US homeowners covered

October 6, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Bailey Schulz; USA TODAY | Section: News | 903 Words Page: A4 OpenURL Link

Kayla Ward was drinking coffee on her porch n the afternoon on Sept. 27 when she noticed water from the nearby Nolichucky River rising fast.

After nearly a year in the house nestled in the Appalachian Mountains, Ward never thought to worry about flooding. But she and her husband had to race to escape after Helene swept through Jonesborough, Tennessee. The couple managed to leave with their pets and the clothes on their back, but their home was severely damaged.

Ward, like many other homeowners affected by the late September storm, did not have flood insurance and said her insurance company denied her husband's claim. It was a surprise to Ward, 61, who used to work as an insurance claims specialist for a full-service insurance agency in the neighboring town of Johnson City.

"We're finding out everybody in our area is the same way. Nobody's being covered," she told USA TODAY. "We lost everything. Everything."

Hurricane Helene's destructive path across the Southeast has spotlighted a lack of flood insurance in the U.S. One estimate from FEMA says just 4% of homeowners in the country have coverage.

"The landscape is bleak, in terms of whether there will be insurance dollars flowing to those impacted households to fund repairs," said Amy Bach, executive director of the consumer advocacy group United Policyholders. "Not enough (affected homes had flood insurance), by a long shot."

Big insurance gap

Officials have yet to release damage estimates, but USA TODAY previously reported that insured residential and commercial property damage is worth at least \$3billion in Florida and Georgia, according to financial services company CoreLogic. The event is one of the deadliest hurricanes to make landfall on the U.S. mainland, causing more than 200 deaths, and has been described as North Carolina's "own Hurricane Katrina," referring to the 2005 storm that devastated the Southeastern U.S. with an estimated \$125billion in damage, not adjusted for inflation.

But Katrina's destruction was different. A number of those affected by the 2005 storm had their homeowners insurance claims approved because the destruction stemmed from wind damage, Bach said. This time, most of the damage is due to storm surge and flooding.

"We don't have the wind argument, the hook, to bring in the home insurers," she said.

Homes tend to go without flood insurance for two reasons: cost and awareness.

Some homeowners, Bach said, aren't aware that flood insurance has to be paid separately.

"There's definitely an information gap," she said. "Insurance regulators and public officials are always trying to find ways to raise consumer awareness about the fact that flood damage is excluded from your home insurance, but people don't want to think about insurance."

Others struggle to pay for additional flood insurance, or don't think the cost is worth the coverage. Flood insurance through the National Flood Insurance Program costs roughly \$1,000 per year on average, USA TODAY's Blueprint

previously reported. And that's on top of traditional homeowners insurance, which saw double-digit growth in 2023, according to S&P Global Market Intelligence.

Insurance prices are expected to keep rising, according to Tim Zawacki, an insurance sector strategist at S&P Global. He expects homeowners' insurers to reevaluate their exposures "in a wide range of locations" after Helene hit regions hundreds of miles off the coast.

"As carriers trim their exposure to limit concentration risk and earnings volatility, this will inevitably lead to higher homeowners insurance premiums," Zawacki said in an email to USA TODAY.

'A false sense of security'

Some homeowners, like Ward, were under the impression that additional flood insurance was unnecessary outside of FEMA-designated flood zones, which require homeowners with a mortgage to purchase flood insurance.

But these flood maps are often outdated or incomplete. A 2020 report from the Association of State Floodplain Managers shows just one-third of the nation's floodplains have been mapped out by FEMA.

"Sometimes these maps give people a false sense of security," said Sharon Cornelissen, director of housing at the Consumer Federation of America. "As climate disasters become more common and with rain and storms becoming more frequent and more heavy, we know that the actual risk of flooding is much more widespread."

With 99% of counties nationwide affected by flooding since 1996, FEMA considers floods the most common and costliest natural disasters in the U.S.

"We see lack of flood insurance as the biggest insurance gap," said Mark Friedlander, director of corporate communications at the Insurance Information Institute. "Some (homeowners) are at a higher risk than others, but you can't say you're not at risk, no matter where you live."

Next steps for homeowners

For homeowners without flood insurance affected by Helene, experts who spoke to USA TODAY shared advice for next steps.

Focus on getting your home dried as quickly as possible, but keep an eye out for scammers. Contractors who can help dry out homes will be in short supply, so vet any business offering to help.

Take photos and videos to document the damage.

Check your home policy. Bach said there may be some coverage for certain expenses under a home policy – especially if the homeowner can point to wind-driven rain as a source of damage. It's worth getting a second opinion before assuming the damage won't be covered.

Apply for FEMA assistance, and check for any state or local emergency funding. FEMA funding can help, but Friedlander warned that it's not a replacement for insurance; the average FEMA disaster assistance grant award between 2016 and 2022 was \$3,000. In comparison, FEMA warns that just one inch of water can cause roughly \$25,000 worth of property damage.

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Parks closed through Oct. during recovery

October 6, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: The Star | Section: News | 411 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

All North Carolina state parks west of Interstate 77 are closed through at least Oct. 31, the Division of Parks and Recreation announced. These parks include Chimney Rock, Crowders Mountain, Elk Knob, Gorges, Grandfather Mountain, Lake James, Lake Norman, Mount Mitchell, New River, South Mountains, and Stone Mountains state parks, as well as Mount Jefferson State Natural Area and Rendezvous Mountain.

In addition, all events and programs at all state parks have been canceled through Oct. 31, with the exception of Dismal Day, Oct. 12, at Dismal Swamp State Park; Fear at the Fort, Oct. 18-19 and 25-26, at Fort Macon State Park; and a Schools in Parks training, Oct. 26, at Carolina Beach State Park.

The division is assisting with the statewide emergency and rescue efforts in western North Carolina, in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. About 30 staff have been deployed on law enforcement assignments requested through the North Carolina Emergency Operations Center. Scaling back operations across the state will allow staff to continue to assist with critical deployments. In addition, the closure of western parks can help limit travel in the area while roads and other infrastructure are repaired and replaced.

"The devastation brought by Helene in many communities across western North Carolina has been profound," said State Parks Director Brian Strong. "The entire division wants to provide whatever assistance we can to our neighbors and to these areas that were hit hardest. We want to prioritize our resources, both staff and equipment, towards immediate and lifesaving needs."

State park rangers are sworn law enforcement officers, and many park field staff — rangers and maintenance technicians — are certified as emergency medical responders, are trained to operate chainsaws and large equipment, and possess a commercial driver's license. Once the vital needs of post-storm recovery efforts have been met, staff will focus on recreational facilities at parks, including trails, visitor centers, and campsites. Staff will assess conditions, clear downed trees, and address any remaining safety hazards before reopening to the public.

"In the last few days alone, we have seen the entire state come together to support each other during this difficult time," Strong said. "We know our parks are beloved by North Carolinians, but we also know our visitors are eager to help those who are grieving and those who have lost so much because of this storm."

All reservations for campsites and other facilities such as picnic shelters at western state parks through Oct. 31 have been canceled and refunded in full.

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How Helene became 'perfect storm' for flooding

October 6, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Author: CHAEWON CHUNG Staff Reporter | Section: Main | 654 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

Western North Carolina, particularly Asheville, has long been regarded as a climate haven, relatively insulated from the impacts of climate change. However, this perception is being challenged as the city faces devastating flooding caused by Hurricane Helene.

A key question that arose after the storm was how such extensive flooding could occur in a city located over 2,000 feet above sea level and roughly 300 miles from the nearest coastline.

"Even though Asheville is about 300 miles away from the Atlantic coast, it's also less than 400 miles away from the Gulf Coast where Helene made landfall," Corey Davis, assistant state climatologist at the North Carolina State Climate Office, told the Journal.

"When a storm like that is so strong at landfall, it's bound to keep some of those higher winds intact across that relatively short distance, especially when it was moving as quickly as it did after making landfall."

The city, according to the National Weather Service, experienced over 15 inches of rainfall from Helene, as water poured off the already saturated mountainous terrain following recent storms. The surging French Broad River wreaked havoc over the weekend, damaging interstate highways, flooding homes with mud and leaving communities without access to clean drinking water.

Davis also highlighted the immense size of Helene, noting that it was generating tropical storm-force winds more than 300 miles from its center. This allowed people to feel "gusty winds" on the northern side of the storm well before it actually reached the mountains and began to weaken over the higher terrain.

"Last Friday morning, the storm was moving at 30 miles per hour across Georgia, and while that's slow in terms of highway speeds, that's fast for a storm, so that gave even less time for it to weaken before it actually moved into the Appalachians," Davis added.

Charles Konrad, a geography professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, agreed, adding that large tropical systems like Helene tend to maintain their circulation above the surface for a longer period, which results in stronger winds.

"In terms of the rainfall, those winds brought in tremendous quantities of Gulf moisture," Konrad said.

"Then later on, the system was also pulling in a lot of Atlantic moisture, slamming that moisture up against the mountains ... unleashed tremendous quantities of water."

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says that warm water and moist air are key ingredients for strong hurricanes, known consequences of climate change. With Gulf of Mexico temperatures reaching record highs over the past two years, the increased warmth led to more moisture in the air, creating optimal conditions for Hurricane Helene to form and intensify.

It was the "perfect storm for creating catastrophic flooding," Konrad continued.

Since Hurricane Helene's landfall last week, the death toll in Buncombe County, Asheville, has risen from 61 to 72 as of Thursday, according to local officials. This brings North Carolina's total fatalities to at least 108.

With a nationwide death toll reaching 200 as of Thursday, Helene is now the deadliest U.S. hurricane since Katrina in 2005 and the fourth deadliest to make landfall on the mainland since 1950.

Chaewon Chung covers climate change and the environment in the Triad and Northwest North Carolina. Her work is funded by a grant from the Green South Foundation and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation.

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HEARTS ON DISPLAY

October 6, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Author: JIM SANDS Staff Reporter | Section: Main | 1051 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

As details continue to unfold regarding the true extent of the devastation left in the wake of Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina, the citizens of Rockingham County are lending a helping hand to those in need.

The category four hurricane made landfall on the west coast of Florida on Thursday, Sept. 26 and rolled through Georgia, The Carolinas and Tennessee, cutting a 500-mile swath of destruction before eventually moving out to the Atlantic Ocean. Hurricane Helene, with winds reaching 140 miles per hour when it first hit land, was downgraded to a tropical storm by the time the eye passed through the Carolinas. Nevertheless, results were catastrophic and state and federal officials say recovery and construction could cost untold billions of dollars when all is said and done.

National casualties had risen to over 200 as of Friday and could continue to climb as search and rescue crews work to reach victims isolated due to the destruction of roads, and in some cases, entire communities.

"To say this caught us off-guard would be an understatement," Asheville Sheriff Quentin Miller declared.

Locals lending a helping hand

Several Rockingham County fire, police and EMS crews volunteered to make the trip out to Western North Carolina to help with rescue, treatment and the recovery of victims.

Meanwhile, the citizens of Rockingham County held multiple projects over the last week with supply drop sites just trying to provide some form of relief for their fellow North Carolinians in need.

Rockingham, Reidsville and McMichael High Schools all held supply drives and packed several vehicles with vital necessities bound for State Emergency Operations Centers impacted by the natural disaster.

Rockingham County High School officials and students held a Stuff the Bus event Tuesday afternoon.

Rockingham County head soccer coach Timothy Buck approached RCHS Athletics Director Adrian Doss last weekend about putting together a supply drive for the victims of the storm. Several dozen student-athletes lent a helping hand to meet donors and load the bus.

"It was an overwhelming success. We ended up with three pallets of water, two pallets of food, cleaning supplies, diapers, formula, feminine products - we covered just about everything. People thought of things that I never thought of. It was just amazing. The bus was literally stuffed and when we got to Southern States, those guys helped us unload it and put it on pallets, wrapped it up, put it in a trailer then off to Canton, North Carolina," Doss said.

Canton is located southwest of Asheville, just off I-40 near the Tennessee border.

Representatives of Southern States Cooperative of Reidsville met Doss and the bus and transported the supplies to emergency sites free of charge.

New Reidsville head baseball coach Mike Elrod approached RHS Principal Ericka Blackwell and Athletics Director Joe Walker to help organize an event earlier this week as well. Elrod and the Rams JV and varsity players set up two

locations for citizens to make donations earlier this week.

Elrod, who is also a sergeant with the North Carolina State Highway Patrol, learned first-hand of the devastation from some of his local troopers that made the trip to the western part of the state to help with recovery, rescue and cleanup.

"Anytime something like that happens, you know people in that area are going to need stuff we sometimes take for granted. Last Friday, we sent our first squad of troopers up, and they told me the types of stuff the victims needed. I started brainstorming and thinking - what can we do to where our guys can see what it is like to help others immediately, and we came up with the supply drive. Our guys, our parents, fans and supporters got together, and the reaction was overwhelming with people that wanted to help," said Elrod.

Thursday afternoon, Elrod assisted by North Carolina State Highway Patrol 1st Sgt. James Chinnici, Trooper Keith Benfield and Trooper Ben Kirby, worked shoulder-to-shoulder with the Reidsville players and assistant coaches loading the truck.

Another regional company, Nickelston Industries out of Stokes County, loaded up a 26-foot box truck for the Reidsville supply event. Driver Tim Nickelston said it's a difficult feeling because people want to help their fellow citizens. He decided one of the ways he could contribute to the recovery effort was to donate and volunteer his time to get much-needed supplies to emergency workers and thousands of misplaced victims.

McMichael Senior High School also held a similar event Thursday afternoon and filled up the back of Phoenix Athletics Director Robert Lamberth's pickup with vital supplies bound for western North Carolina.

Doss remembers how devastating a natural disaster can be. His hometown of Stoneville suffered tremendous damage from an F3 tornado in 1998, but he said Hurricane Helene levied a different kind of devastation on a whole other scale.

"It's one thing when a natural disaster hits a real small area and a small population. You've still got neighbors to help you out, but these people don't have any neighbors left in some cases. Everybody got wiped out up there, and the mode of transportation in and out was wiped out. A lot of stuff is having to be taken in by helicopters. It's just a tragedy. I'm glad that we could help out a little bit, and I hope it gets to the people that need it the most," Doss said.

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Canton is located southwest of Asheville, just off I-40 near the Tennessee border.

Representatives of Southern States Cooperative of Reidsville met Doss and the bus and transported the supplies to emergency sites free of charge.

New Reidsville head baseball coach Mike Elrod approached RHS Principal Ericka Blackwell and Athletics Director Joe Walker to help organize an event earlier this week as well. Elrod and the Rams JV and varsity players set up two

locations for citizens to make donations earlier this week.

Elrod, who is also a sergeant with the North Carolina State Highway Patrol, learned first-hand of the devastation from some of his local troopers that made the trip to the western part of the state to help with recovery, rescue and cleanup.

"Anytime something like that happens, you know people in that area are going to need stuff we sometimes take for granted. Last Friday, we sent our first squad of troopers up, and they told me the types of stuff the victims needed. I started brainstorming and thinking - what can we do to where our guys can see what it is like to help others immediately, and we came up with the supply drive. Our guys, our parents, fans and supporters got together, and the reaction was overwhelming with people that wanted to help," said Elrod.

Thursday afternoon, Elrod assisted by North Carolina State Highway Patrol 1st Sgt. James Chinnici, Trooper Keith Benfield and Trooper Ben Kirby, worked shoulder-to-shoulder with the Reidsville players and assistant coaches loading the truck.

Another regional company, Nickelston Industries out of Stokes County, loaded up a 26-foot box truck for the Reidsville supply event. Driver Tim Nickelston said it's a difficult feeling because people want to help their fellow citizens. He decided one of the ways he could contribute to the recovery effort was to donate and volunteer his time to get much-needed supplies to emergency workers and thousands of misplaced victims.

McMichael Senior High School also held a similar event Thursday afternoon and filled up the back of Phoenix Athletics Director Robert Lamberth's pickup with vital supplies bound for western North Carolina.

Doss remembers how devastating a natural disaster can be. His hometown of Stoneville suffered tremendous damage from an F3 tornado in 1998, but he said Hurricane Helene levied a different kind of devastation on a whole other scale.

"It's one thing when a natural disaster hits a real small area and a small population. You've still got neighbors to help you out, but these people don't have any neighbors left in some cases. Everybody got wiped out up there, and the mode of transportation in and out was wiped out. A lot of stuff is having to be taken in by helicopters. It's just a tragedy. I'm glad that we could help out a little bit, and I hope it gets to the people that need it the most," Doss said.

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AFTER THE STORM

October 6, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Section: Sports | 905 Words

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Tom Campbell is a Hall of Fame North Carolina broadcaster and columnist who has covered North Carolina public policy issues since 1965. Contact him at tomcamp@carolinabroadcasting.com.

You can learn a lot about people when they are under stress. We see them at their best - or worst. Hurricane Helene is revealing both.

My family has experienced what it is like to be without power, water and refrigeration, with mud and debris in your home. You feel alone, overwhelmed and sad. We have also rejoiced when strangers we never met come to help muck out the house, haul out furniture and belongings that must be discarded, do carpentry work and saw tree limbs. Their biggest contribution is to provide comfort.

We can't thank these heroes enough. But they aren't looking for thanks. They see this as their responsibility, a calling to help another in times of distress.

These are the people the musical group Alabama sang about in their wonderful song, Angels among us:

I believe there are Angels among us,

sent down to us from somewhere up above.

They come to you and me in our darkest hours

To show us how to live, to teach us how to give.

To guide us with the light of love.

We are blessed by many angels. But times of distress also show the worst side of some.

We all remember when President Trump went to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. His response to the devastation was tossing paper towels into the crowd. It took him weeks to release federal funding for the territory.

His response to Helene wasn't much better. Trump instructed his staff to find a place where the storm had ransacked a business, and it was surrounded by rubble. With cameras rolling he declared his visit wasn't political, then started criticizing Gov. Roy Cooper for doing a terrible job and "going out of their way to not help people in Republican areas."

The claim was totally fabricated. It was disgusting political pandering. This is no time for politics.

As has always been the case, there will be scammers preying on the elderly or those desperate for help, charging them outrageous prices. It is sometimes hard to distinguish between genuine helpers and those trying to make a quick buck. True volunteers won't ask for money. As much as you might need help, be cautious.

Those devastated by Helene are wondering why it is taking so long for help to arrive. Our federal and state government could perhaps have been better prepared to respond. They knew by that Wednesday, Sept. 25, that Helene was going to impact western Carolina and forecasters predicted it was going to be bad.

But no one could ever have imagined just how devastating this storm was going to be. Not since 1916 has the western part of our state had an event so destructive.

By that Friday afternoon and evening on Sept. 27, when it was obvious how bad the damage was going to be, it was too late to put resources in place without potentially endangering their lives. Surging waters and sheets of rain destroyed roads, landslides demolished buildings and houses were swept away ... some with people inside. The death count is far greater than is being reported.

Media coverage has been uneven. Reporters, photographers and news crews were not allowed into many rural areas because of potential danger. Even so, most of the news coverage has focused on Asheville. It had great damage, but the media has largely neglected a great deal of suffering in smaller communities like Linville, Spruce Pine, Banner Elk, Swannanoa and less populous counties.

Folks are desperate for basic needs. They urgently need water - to drink, to wash themselves and flush toilets. Wipes, toilet paper, paper towels and even diapers are needed, along with nonperishable food like pop-top tins of chicken, tuna, beans, apple sauce, fruit and peanut butter. Granola and protein bars and crackers are very welcome. Candles and flashlights with batteries are essential.

Our western neighbors need the right-here, right-now kind of help. Saying help is on the way when you are thirsty, alone and in darkness doesn't help with immediate basic needs.

There are many ways you can help. But please don't just hop in the car and head west. The state Department of Transportation says heavy traffic on damaged roads is overwhelming efforts to repair roads. But groups of people can band together, accumulate supplies and transport them to coordinated safe staging areas, where they can be transferred to areas of most need. Have a plan for where you take supplies. Recognized charitable organizations will also welcome help.

Money is also badly needed. Fortunately, our state has several billion dollars in "rainy day funds," and the federal government will also provide large amounts of funding. But it is going to take more than money to help restore life for those affected. Regardless of your beliefs, praying for their safety and well-being will help.

We are North Carolina, the "goodliest land," with the goodliest people. Let us all do our best to help our neighbors.

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Ask SAM: How small businesses affected by the disaster can get help from the SBA

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Section: Main | 508 Words

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Q: A friend's family was severely impacted by Hurricane Helene. Thankfully, they are safe, and their home was spared. However, their family business lost equipment, supplies and buildings due to the flooding. They didn't have flood insurance, living in the mountains, sounds like you wouldn't need it. What kind of help is available to folks in this situation? Are there federal funds to help pay for the things ruined by the flooding? If federal funds are available, how is the money distributed? Does any money going to victims go to state and local agencies? What do they need to do to recoup some of their losses? D.P.

Answer: Much of Western North Carolina is included in the Tropical Storm Helene disaster declaration that President Joe Biden issued on Sept. 28.

Because of that declaration, the U.S. Small Business Administration has disaster loans that are available for businesses that have been affected by Tropical Storm Helene.

The three types of disaster loans that are available are:

"Business Physical Disaster Loans - Loans to businesses to repair or replace disaster-damaged property owned by the business, including real estate, inventories, supplies, machinery and equipment. Businesses of any size are eligible. Private, non-profit organizations such as charities, churches, private universities, etc., are also eligible.

"Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) - Working capital loans to help small businesses, small agricultural cooperatives, small businesses engaged in aquaculture, and most private, non-profit organizations of all sizes meet their ordinary and necessary financial obligations that cannot be met as a direct result of the disaster. These loans are intended to assist through the disaster recovery period.

"Home Disaster Loans - Loans to homeowners or renters to repair or replace disaster-damaged real estate and personal property, including automobiles."

The residents of Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, Yancey and the Eastern Cherokee Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land may be eligible for the loans.

Other North Carolina counties that may have been affected: Cherokee, Graham, Iredell, Mecklenburg, Surry, Swain, and Yadkin residents may apply for Economic Injury Disaster Loans only.

The loans cover uninsured or uncompensated losses caused by the disaster.

Unless used for business, secondary homes, pleasure boats, airplanes, RVs and other similar property are not eligible.

Applicants must have an acceptable credit history and show the ability to repay the loans.

On Friday, the SBA opened Business Recovery Centers in Asheville and Boone.

The Buncombe County office is at the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, 36 Montford Ave.

The hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, and closed Sunday.

The Watauga County office is at the Appalachian Enterprise Center, 130 Poplar Grove Connector, Boone.

The hours are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, and closed Sunday.

Loan applications and more information are available online at SBA.gov or call 800-827-5722.

The deadline for physical damage loans is Nov. 27. The deadline for economic injury is June 30, 2025.

Email: AskSAM@wsjournal.com Write: Ask SAM, 418 N. Marshall St., #100, Winston-Salem, NC 27101

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Main

October 6, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

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Both Democrats and Republicans using abortion as political weapon. News, A3

Tom Campbell: Hurricane Helene brings out the best ... and worst in us. Ideas, C1

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A flood of lies

October 6, 2024 \mid News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Section: Sports \mid 652 Words

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OUR OPINION

As if there weren't already enough muck to be cleared in the aftermath of Helene, Donald Trump alleged last week, with no evidence, that Gov. Roy Cooper and the Biden administration have conspired to withhold assistance from Republican areas.

Among those who have endorsed Trump's allegation: disgraced Sandy Hook shooting conspiracy promoter Alex Jones, which should tell you all you need to know.

Trump also claimed falsely that "a billion dollars was stolen from FEMA to use it for illegal migrants," instead of areas ravaged by the storm's remnants.

And Trump said on Monday that Georgia Republican Gov. Brian Kemp was having trouble reaching President Biden, despite Kemp having said the exact opposite the day before.

"He just said, 'Hey, what do you need?'" Kemp told reporters of a phone conversation with Biden. "And I told him, you know, we got what we need."

Closer to home, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, the Republican nominee for governor in North Carolina, attacked the state's relief efforts, including a post that only private aircraft were flying relief missions to the heavily affected areas in western North Carolina. Last week, the state's National Guard reported flying 57 missions and rescuing more than 400 people.

Robinson also posted that the state of Florida was repairing roads damaged in North Carolina by floods and landslides.

"No sir," wrote Ardis Watkins, the State Employees Association of North Carolina's legislative affairs director, on X. Watkins added that the state Department of Transportation "is going to rebuild the roads in N.C. like they do every time we have a disaster. They have been busting butt for days. Our folks at DOT will appreciate the help from neighbors but how dare you want to lead them as a cabinet agency and say something like this!"

Among other myths that were swirling in a torrent of falsehoods:

FEMA was confiscating donations.FEMA was withholding body bags, forcing hospitals to stack bodies.The government was planning to condemn the town of Chimney Rock so it could take control of a nearby lithium mine.

And, of course, there was Georgia U.S. House Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who suggested in an ominous post: "Yes, they can control the weather. It's ridiculous for anyone to lie and say it can't be done."

It was not clear who "they" in the post were. A cartel of Bond villains? A legion of Marvel Cinematic Universe alien invaders? Greene, who has previously suggested that space lasers caused a California wildfire, did not say. Nor was it clear whether she was wearing a tinfoil hat at the time.

With an air of exasperation, a Republican lawmaker from western North Carolina pleaded for honesty and reason.

"Friends can I ask a small favor?" state Sen. Kevin Corbin of Macon County posted Thursday on Facebook. "Will you all help STOP this conspiracy theory junk that is floating all over Facebook and the internet... Please don't let these crazy stories consume you."

To address the surging misinformation, FEMA has created a "rumor response" page to share verifiable information and to help dispel rumors. Gov. Cooper also released a statement responding to false reports.

And, while the state and federal governments' handling of this disaster are fair game for critical evaluations, those assessments should be based on facts, not fabrications or reckless speculation.

So, can we please take a timeout for sanity and compassion?

People are hurting. It does not help anyone to poison the air with malicious falsehoods and wild-eyed theories.

In the hours after Helene rampaged through the Southeast with wind and rain, people didn't care about politics and parties. They cared about each other. There's no appealing to reason from some fringe elements. And maybe not from Marjorie Taylor Greene. Or Mark Robinson.

But is it too much to ask if the man who would be president - for a second time -would be honest and decent for at least a short, precious while?

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GNR weather and index October 6, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Section: Main | 42 Words Page: 1A OpenURL Link Vol. 134, No. 280 **WEATHER** The page isn't done yet. Please fill in information when page is done. **INDEX** Advice C9 Classifieds C12-13 Comics Insert Crossword C11 Editorial C2 Features C16 Nation & World B1 **Obituaries B4** Sports D1 **TV C10 BOTTOM BILLBOARD:** Hurricane Helene puts climate change at the campaign forefront for candidates. News, A12 Copyright (c) 2024 Greensboro News & Record

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McMichael and Rockingham remain undefeated in Mid-State league play

October 6, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Author: JIM SANDS Staff Reporter | Section: Local | 1085 Words Page: 1B

Page: 1B OpenURL Link
2A Conference Overall
McMichael 10-0 20-2
West Stokes 7-1 14-3
Walkertown 7-4 13-7
Morehead 6-4 9-8
Reidsville 2-7 4-9
TW Andrews 2-8 5-14
N. Forsyth 0-10 1-18
Mid-State 3A
Conference Overall
Rockingham 11-0 16-3
E. Guilford 9-2 11-4
Dudley 8-3 12-3
NE Guilford 6-5 6-13
S. Guilford 5-6 5-12
Atkins 4-7 6-10
HP Central 1-10 2-17
Smith 0-11 1-18
Volleyball Dates to Remember
Conference Reporting Deadline at 11:59 p.m.: Oct. 16, 2024
Seeding: Oct. 17, 2024

2nd Round Playoffs: Oct. 22, 2024

1st Round Playoffs: Oct. 19, 2024

3rd Round Playoffs: Oct. 24, 2024

4th Round Playoffs: Oct. 26, 2024

Regionals: Oct. 29, 2024

State Championships: Nov. 2, 2024

Only two weeks remain in regular season play, and the McMichael and Rockingham volleyball teams are sitting in the driver's seat with Mid-State titles in their sites.

Thursday night, the Cougars defeated Dudley 3-0 (26-24, 25-16, 25-17). Rockingham (13-0, 17-3) has won 13 games in a row and was undefeated in the month of September. The victory marked a sweep of the Panthers (8-4, 12-4) in regular season play. The Cougars look forward to making it official and wrapping up their second Mid-State Conference 3A regular season title next week.

Rockingham head coach Deanna Revis said the primary focus is not on the postseason but the final two games of the season. The Cougars are looking for a second-consecutive undefeated regular season.

"There's still work to be done, and there's always room for improvement. Just talking, gelling together - passing and just working together as a team. I believe in these girls."

Rockingham travels to Northeast Guilford (6-5, 6-13) on Oct. 8, then hosts Atkins (4-7, 6-10) to close out the regular season on Oct. 10. The Mid-State 3A Conference tournament begins Oct. 14 with the higher seeds serving as host.

McMichael (10-0, 20-2) had a strong week as well as they reached the 20-win plateau on Wednesday with a 3-1 (25-23, 25-27, 26-28, 23-25) victory over a very good 18-win Grimsley team.

Unfortunately, the game had to be McMichael's final out-of-conference test of the season. The Phoenix had originally planned to compete in the Forsyth Central High School Tournament in Cummings, Georgia, against several elite east coast teams last week, but the dangers to travel during Hurricane Helene changed all of that.

"Obviously, there is nothing you can do about it. The safety of our student-athletes is the most important thing, and my heart breaks for all of the people in Georgia and North Carolina. I mean they are devastated. Some of them don't know if they will be able to get back to school in the next month or so. We are disappointed as a team, obviously, because we invested a lot of time finding a place where the competition would be and pushing ourselves to the limit and that's what we wanted," McMichael Hall of Fame head coach Marty Woods said.

"Right now, we are really inconsistent. We can go on really good runs, and then we go on really negative - mistake after another mistake and that's not characteristic of us. We are not getting pushed every single time we step on that court. And it's nothing against anybody else. We like to play fast, and we like to play hard and the harder they push us, it seems the better that we respond," said Woods.

Wednesday's win, where the Whirlees gave the Phoenix all they could handle in four sets decided by two points or less, was a great sign McMichael is ready for postseason play.

It was McMichael's sixth win in a row as they get ready for their final two regular season games games versus T.W. Andrews (1-8, 4-14) Oct. 8 and a road showdown with second place West Stokes (7-1, 14-3) Oct. 10.

Morehead's postseason aspirations are all within their hands. They are currently sitting a game above .500 is in a bubble position regarding earning a postseason bid. The Panthers (6-4, 9-8) have an out-of-conference home game versus Martinsville (3-8) for Senior Night Monday, followed by the final regular-season contest of 2024 versus North Forsyth (0-10, 1-18) Oct. 10. Two wins next week would likely be enough to earn the Panthers a playoff spot.

Both the Mid-State 2A and 3A Conference tournaments begin Oct. 14 and will be hosted by the higher seeded team.

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