

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

October 15, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Andrea Riquier; USA TODAY | Section: News | 786 Words Page: A6 OpenURL Link

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Florida's real estate woes are well documented.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Q&A with candidates for Polk County Board of Commissioners

October 15, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Staff Reports| Section: Community | 2271 Words OpenURL Link

The Tryon Daily Bulletin contacted each of the candidates running for the Polk County Board of Commissioners and posed the following three questions. Republican candidate Jennifer Hargett did not reply.

Below are their responses.

What are your top three priorities if you are elected commissioner? What would you like to see accomplished during your term?

Paul 'Little' Beiler (R)

One of my top priorities when I was first elected as commissioner was to bring a YMCA to Polk County, a vision I've held since the beginning of my term. The idea began during a conversation in the County Manager's office with the CEO of the Spartanburg YMCA, and I'm proud to say that this dream is becoming a reality. We are set to break ground in the fall of 2025. Moving forward, I will prioritize ensuring this facility's successful completion, which will offer essential recreational and community services for our residents. I will also focus on the continued expansion of high-speed fiber internet. I will continue collaborating with state, federal, and local leaders to ensure that at least 90% of Polk County's population has access, supporting local businesses, remote workers, and students by improving connectivity throughout Polk County. Lastly, to address the housing crunch, I will actively work to alleviate the housing shortage in our county, seeking solutions that will allow us to maintain our rural way of life while providing affordable housing options for all residents. These priorities will help strengthen our community, improve our infrastructure, and preserve the values that make Polk County unique.

Ray Gasperson (D)

My most important priority is protecting Polk County's beautiful, rural nature. We must work to prevent high-density subdivisions from being developed in Polk County and strive to prevent rural gentrification. Second, as I did during my 12 prior years on the Board of Commissioners, I will continue to advocate for a sound and fiscally conservative approach to spending taxpayer money. It's also critical that transparency in all county government activities be expanded and the public be given improved opportunities to voice their opinions. My third priority will be to work with local law enforcement, our public schools, our local public health providers, and our county employers to make sure that there is good communication between them and the Board of Commissioners and to make sure that their funding needs are being met in order to adequately serve the public.

Libby Morris (D)

I'll work to maintain our rural lifestyle and family farms. North Carolina is among the five fastest-growing states; we are expected to lose more farmland than any other state by 2040. By then, one-third of our best farmland will change hands as landowners age and sell. Land prices will rise, making it hard for new farmers. Growth must be locally planned. While we need economic growth to remain fiscally healthy, growth should be on our terms and controlled locally. Development risks are subtle. Large land tracts are sought by corporations and subdivided into mini estates, gentrifying farmland. While this is great for owner real estate prices, it eliminates first-time buyers and takes precious farmland out of production. An acre less farmland means an acre less food security. We also need additional housing to meet population growth, but we want housing for our children and folks who make their lives here, not home buyers from outside the region from more urban settings who are seeking less expensive housing options. County Commissioner meetings appear to rubber stamp requests. Decision transparency must be improved, wherein all viewpoints are considered. Fiscal consideration and management must be equally

transparent. No one wants tax increases; we must remain ever financially vigilant. I'd also like to expand economic development activities and increase promotion of Polk County as a tourist destination. Expand protections of our water quality and supplies. Expand broadband and cell coverage to the "blind spots" across the county.

Karen Pack (D)

My top priority will be protecting our rural atmosphere and agricultural lands. We need intentional growth that serves the Polk County citizens in their communities. We need protection from high-impact growth and overdevelopment. I will also prioritize ensuring all citizens are informed and involved in the decision-making process and transparency in government, as well as working with our state legislators to promote Polk County's needs. I would like to see our county come up with some land management strategies that will protect us from growth that does not serve us or will negatively affect the citizens. I'd like to see citizens attending meetings and being interested and participating in the plans being made for our county.

Myron Yoder (R)

My top priority is keeping our tax rate as low as possible, while at the same time enhancing our quality of life. Also, making Polk County an affordable place to live. Second, I will get our broadband initiative and investment across the finish line where about 95% of Polk County households will have internet. Lastly, making sure we are keeping our county rural with common sense planning—looking at our 2020 Vision Plan, keeping our commercial infrastructure along Hwy. 74 corridor and in our municipalities, not offering public sewer in our rural spaces. Common sense development ordinances.

What do you see as the role of a county commissioner in the aftermath and recovery process of Tropical Storm Helene?

Paul 'Little' Beiler (R)

My focus would be twofold. First, I would work closely with state and federal government agencies to ensure we receive as much support as possible for relief efforts. This partnership would be crucial in speeding up recovery and addressing immediate needs. Second, from the perspective of a private citizen, I would like to ensure that all county residents are cared for in some capacity. In addition to government assistance, I would tap into private funding and resources, particularly from faith-based organizations, to help meet the personal and spiritual needs of our community. These groups are vital in supporting the well-being of our residents during these difficult times.

Ray Gasperson (D)

As we continue to recover from Tropical Storm Helene, one of my first initiatives after being elected will be to start having regular conversations and meetings between the Polk County Board of Commissioners and the governing boards of the three municipalities in our county, Columbus, Saluda and Tryon. I believe that with better cooperation between our towns and county government, we can work to provide better services to our citizens. This will also give us the ability to review what was successful in response to Tropical Storm Helene and how we can improve and be better prepared for future weather-related and other widespread public emergencies. I will also work to initiate a full review of Polk County's maps related to flood plains, and also to identify areas that may be prone to landslides.

Libby Morris (D)

Ensure that everyone is present or accounted for. Assistance is available and provided to those in need. Facilitate state help to maximize recovery and cleanup efforts across the county. Ensure communication channels are available and open for all citizens of the county. Set up satellite communication links in strategic locations in partnership with the townships to provide access in times of communications outages and for those who do not have service. Several local businesses in Tryon opened their Starlink service to the community, providing communications and support as we waited to understand our situation. In times of disaster (no cell, no internet, no phone, no cable), people need general information as well as specifics on how to help.

Encourage preparation for the "next disaster." Provide information and web postings advocating minimum supplies, preparations, and contacts for help. Using lessons learned from the recent Hurricane Helene, while still fresh in everyone's mind, develop a plan to improve our future response to natural disasters. Polk County learned much from Hurricane Helene that should be shared. We had many people who stepped up to clear debris, provide emergency water, food and shelter and perform wellness and safety checks for others. We had Amateur Radio Operators who maintained communications and helped direct help while our power was shut off. Our county government and nearby county governments also provided communications and devoted their time, day and night, to rescue work.

Karen Pack (D)

Our county commissioners' role in the aftermath of Helene's devastation will be to reach out to the citizens. Help with any information they may need to seek help or move forward. Find out what worked and what didn't work. What still needs to be done? What were the main challenges? Can the County and municipalities help with funding for the cleanup and rebuilding? It's a time to learn and research so we can be better prepared in the future. There was no way we could have been prepared for this event. But we can learn from it and be better prepared in the future.

Myron Yoder (R)

As the current Chair of the County Commissioners, making sure that a county Declaration of Emergency was in place, working with the County Manager and Emergency Director, making sure we get out information where people can get food, supplies and emergency shelter is my role. Also, helping and checking on citizens myself, helping clear roads, etc., always keeping the safety of our citizens foremost. Assuring our citizens that their safety is my responsibility.

What state-level issues are you watching for their effect on Polk County? Conversely, are there local issues you want to see elevated at the General Assembly?

Paul 'Little' Beiler (R)

One of the key state-level issues I am closely monitoring is the condition of the Lake Adger Dam. It's crucial that the dam is inspected for any potential damage, and I'm seeking ways the state can assist with necessary repairs or upgrades to bring it up to industry standards. This is a vital concern for the safety and well-being of our county. I'm also vigilant about any legislation that could undermine Polk County's ability to govern with the autonomy we need. Preserving our freedom to make decisions tailored to our rural community is a top priority for me, and I will oppose any measures that restrict that ability. On the local front, one issue I would like to elevate at the General Assembly is the unfair competition between small 1-A public schools and better-funded charter schools in North Carolina. It's not right for small community schools to have to compete against charter schools that have more resources and opportunities. I believe this is an issue that needs to be addressed for the sake of fairness and the well-being of our local students.

Ray Gasperson (D)

A primary concern that I have with the state legislature is related to any action that could be taken that could weaken or remove Polk County's ability to set local land use policy. Currently, we have a Subdivision Ordinance (that applies to the whole county except for the areas in the municipalities), which makes it impossible for a high-density major subdivision to locate in our county. When I was Chair of the Polk County Board of Commissioners in 2011, I spearheaded the passage of the current subdivision ordinance. I believe that this ordinance is essential to helping protect the beautiful, rural nature of our county. I also want the State General Assembly to move forward and help fund a portion of the cost of building a YMCA in Polk County.

Libby Morris (D)

Polk County has worked hard to provide a safe, quality education for all our students. We are proud to have one of the best school systems in North Carolina. This distinction has been obtained by "Doing What's Right For Students," and it works. We want to preserve our top-notch schools. Farmland preservation is an issue that will require attention from state leaders, farm groups, and farmland preservation trusts to address. Workforce housing (quality housing within reach of our teachers, EMS, nurses, and law enforcement) is a regional and state-wide issue. Housing solutions may be more readily available with assistance outside the county.

Karen Pack (D)

I'm watching and concerned about how funds are being taken from our public schools and used as a voucher system for certain privatized schools. I'm so proud of our public school system here in Polk County. If you attend a school board meeting, you hear all the challenges our public schools are facing, and I'm so impressed with how well we are doing here in Polk. We have wonderful people who care so much about our children here and want them to have the very best. Lack of funding from the state level is extremely challenging, yet we continue to rank high. Locally, I'd like to see funding (our tax dollars) given to NCDOT for maintenance and repairs for our roads and bridges here in Polk County. Our roadways used to be maintained; for example, road shoulders were cut down so the heavy rain waters could flow off and not stand in the road as they do now. This is a safety issue here in Polk.

Myron Yoder (R)

State and federal issues currently include ensuring our citizens get the financial help they need to recover from Helene from state and federal funds. Also, more funds being released from the state for broadband infrastructure. As county commissioners and county management, we are communicating with state legislators to ensure we can get as much financial help for infrastructure as possible and elevate to the legislators that we need help financially for our YMCA build-out. Also, I sat down with the DOT director, just to make them aware of our road repair needs and the heavy traffic areas that need attention. I would count it a privilege to serve Polk County citizens for four more years.

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Spooky season entertainment

October 15, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Jen Pace Dickenson | Section: Opinion | 482 Words OpenURL Link

I know all of our minds are on the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, but our mental health is important as well! Sometimes at the end of the day, we just need to unwind with a good book or movie. If you celebrate Halloween, or just enjoy horror novels or films, distract your mind with one of these suggestions. Also remember that Columbus Library is open regular hours with wifi, computers, printing, private study rooms, books, DVDs, and more! The Libby and Hoopla apps also have a plethora of ebooks, audiobooks, movies, music, and other downloadable content available for checkout.

All the Lovely Bad Ones by Mary Downing Hahn

In this eerie graphic novel adaptation of one of award-winning author Mary Downing Hahn's most popular ghost stories, mischievous siblings pretend their grandmother's Vermont inn is haunted and awaken the real spirits who dwell there. Recommended for kids ages 8-12.

The Taking of Jake Livingston by Ryan Douglass

Jake is one of the only Black kids at St. Clair Prep, one of the others being his infinitely more popular older brother. It's hard enough fitting in but to make matters worse and definitely more complicated, Jake can see the dead. Most are harmless. Stuck in their death loops as they relive their deaths over and over again, they don't interact often with people. But then Jake meets Sawyer. A troubled teen who shot and killed six kids at a local high school last year before taking his own life. Now a powerful, vengeful ghost, he has plans for his afterlife-plans that include Jake. Suddenly, everything Jake knows about ghosts and the rules to life itself go out the window. Recommended for teens ages 13-17.

True Detective: Night Country

The fourth season of this anthology series is about the disappearance of eight men from a research station in the fictional Alaskan town of Ennis. The season stars Jodie Foster as Detective Liz Danvers and Kali Reis as Detective Evangeline Navarro.

The Return by Rachel Harrison

An edgy and haunting debut novel about a group of friends who reunite after one of them has returned from a mysterious two-year disappearance.

The Only Good Indians by Stephen Graham Jones

Seamlessly blending classic horror and a dramatic narrative with sharp social commentary, this novel follows four American Indian men after a disturbing event from their youth puts them in a desperate struggle for their lives. Tracked by an entity bent on revenge, these childhood friends are helpless as the culture and traditions they left behind catch up to them in a violent, vengeful way.

Lisa Frankenstein

A misunderstood teenager and a reanimated Victorian corpse embark on a murderous journey together to find love, happiness, and a few missing body parts.

Jen Pace Dickenson is the Youth Services Librarian for Polk County Public Libraries. For information about the library's resources, programs, and other services, visit polklibrary.org or call (828) 894-8721.

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Proposed Feagan Property Development discussed at Columbus Planning Board meeting

October 15, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Storme Smith| Section: Columbus | 271 Words OpenURL Link

COLUMBUS—On Monday night at the Womack Building, the Columbus Board of Planning and Adjustment held its regular meeting and discussed the proposed Feagan Property Development Project, a subdivision that would bring dozens of homes to the downtown area.

In a meeting attended by over forty citizens, the Board acknowledged early on that a representative from Quartz Properties, the project's developer, would not be attending due to Hurricane Helene-related issues.

The board, led by Catherine Elliot, then listed suggestions they would give the developer when they made their next appearance, along with a reminder to provide the studies already requested. The first suggestion was to recommend a new exit for the development instead of utilizing Weaver St. behind the CVS. The second recommendation was to change the development layout so homes would not be built in the floodplain.

The meeting then moved to the public comment section, where thirteen citizens from across Polk County spoke up to oppose the development. Residents' primary concerns centered around traffic on Highway 108 from the roundabout to Columbus Baptist Church and shoppers' ability to access and exit Food Lion. Other concerns from commenters included traffic, infrastructure, and property values of homes neighboring the development.

The board also discussed amending the Unified Development Ordinance regarding density in the Traditional Neighborhood Development zone. The board approved suggesting amendments to the UDO for townhomes to the Columbus Town Council regarding how many should be allowed per acre under the ordinance.

The Board of Planning and Adjustment will meet again on November 18 at 6 p.m.

The post Proposed Feagan Property Development discussed at Columbus Planning Board meeting appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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Tryon Concert Association announces changes to concert schedule

October 15, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Submitted article| Section: Arts | 250 Words OpenURL Link

TRYON—The Tryon Concert Association has postponed the performance of Trio Bohémo until January 28, 2025.

Due to Helene's severity and the damage it caused to so much of our area, the concert originally scheduled for October 8 could not take place. The Tryon Concert Association offers its greatest sympathy and concern for those who suffered losses due to the storm.

Trio Bohémo's program will remain unchanged, and the long-awaited performance will feature Smetana's Piano Trio in G minor, Dvořák's Piano Trio in E minor, "Dumky," and Paul Schoenfield's Café Music. Trio Bohémo is an ensemble of talented, passionate, and accomplished musicians who have managed to adjust their touring schedule to accommodate this change in plans.

Before Trio Bohémo arrives, however, TCA will present pianist Avery Gagliano on Tuesday, November 12. Ms. Gagliano's program will include Bach's French Suite No. 4, pieces from Schumann's Novelletten, a Chopin nocturne, four mazurkas, and a sonata. Ms. Gagliano is another of TCA's musicians who was unable to appear as originally scheduled—she was due to perform in a TGIF concert that was canceled due to Covid—but who will join us this season.

The remaining concerts will proceed as scheduled. The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center will present "Spanish Journey" on Monday, February 10, 2025, and the wind ensemble WindSync will appear on Thursday, April 3, 2025.

For more information about TCA 2024-2025, please visit tryonconcerts.org or call 888-501-0297.

Submitted by Anne De Sutter

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VOLLEYBALL: Polk celebrates Senior Night with sweeping victory

October 15, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Jed Blackwell | Section: News | 488 Words OpenURL Link

Senior Night festivities almost brought Molly Hill to tears.

To be fair, the Polk County volleyball coach had been fighting her emotions since a group text thread in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Helene, which threw life in Western North Carolina, including high school sports, into chaos.

"We missed our original Senior Night when we were out," Hill said. "Morgan (Yoder) actually texted our group chat, asking what was going to happen, and at that point I had no answers for her. It was kind of heartbreaking not being able to text back and have any kind of plan and tell them not to worry. That was tough.

"So when we did come back, that was a priority of mine. I wanted to make sure we celebrated these girls. They're really worthy of a celebration. We have relied so heavily on these six girls for the last four years. They deserved to have this special night."

Chase never had a chance.

Polk County's seniors – Lexi Belier, Hayden Blackwell, Mia Bradley, Kylie Lewis, Sophia Overholt and Morgan Yoder – along with junior Charley Dusenbury, engineered a 3-0 (25-8, 25-8, 25-7) victory over the Trojans to cap their celebration. Nobody besides those seven played a single point. They were never pushed.

More than half of the match's 99 points ended in either an ace or a kill for Polk County (14-3). Bradley and Overholt each had five aces, with Bradley adding ten kills. Overholt, meanwhile, notched 15 digs in her new (and likely temporary) spot at libero as she returned to the lineup from a knee injury suffered in early September.

"We're so excited that she's able to be back on the court with us," Hill said. "We wanted to just kind of start slow with her. She's got her brace, she's had a couple of practices in it, but we knew tonight would be a good night to just kind of see how she feels.

"I thought she did really great. She's an amazing passer anyway, and I knew she'd be confident and comfortable in that role. It gave Hayden a chance to hit, which was fun. I was proud of Sophia. I thought she made some really athletic movements, which was good to see from her. She's ready. She came off after the game and said she's ready to hit."

The Wolverines had another player step up ready to hit, as Lewis led the team with 11 kills on the night.

"Kylie played great," Hill said. "I think this was one of her best games. She thrived tonight. I don't know if it was her family all being here, if she was just excited and ready to have a good night. I don't know what it was, but she played great. But Kylie's like that, though. She steps up when we need her. It was fun to watch her tonight."

The post VOLLEYBALL: Polk celebrates Senior Night with sweeping victory appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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Beech Mountain Town Council welcomes new K-9 officer, discusses Helene response

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Barb Holdcroft news@wataugademocrat.com | Section: Local | 531 Words OpenURL Link

BEECH MOUNTAIN — Mayor Weidner Abernethy spent several minutes recognizing individuals who helped deal with the disaster of Hurricane Helene at the beginning of the Beech Mountain Town Council meeting on Oct. 12

The mayor lauded the leadership efforts of Town Manager Bob Pudney as he organized the town employees and many other volunteers through the worst of the storm. Next, he thanked RC Excavating for heroic efforts, not the least of which was to rebuild Beech Mountain Parkway in two days. He then expressed his gratitude to the state and national officials for their constant support and contact throughout the ordeal, which was followed by remarks thanking all the volunteers who provided food, including the workforce, Jimmy Accardi, and the Beech Mountain Club.

Several items from the previous agenda for public hearings were either canceled or postponed until the meeting on Nov. 12. A motion to accept a K-9 service dog remained on the agenda, however, and the motion was passed. Sgt. Tyler Jones and Deegan, trained to be a search and rescue dog (a scent dog) about 1-year-old, were introduced.

The bulk of the meeting was turned over to Town Manager Bob Pudney, who outlined all the relief and recovery efforts involved in dealing with Hurricane Helene. The first item mentioned was that with the recorded 20-plus inches of rain, Buckeye Lake is full. However, it is also filled with debris that needs to be removed. On that site, Shane Park was completely destroyed. The town experienced a 100% power outage. Both roads of town access were declared impassible, so there was no way on or off the mountain. Additionally, the fog that set in ruined the opportunity to get relief from helicopter services.

Pudney explained that employees and volunteers were working 12-hour shifts, and since the town encompasses two counties (Watauga and Avery), expectations for assistance from these areas were anticipated, but none were immediately made available. Communications remained an issue, and a number of "contracts" with local businesses were conducted with a handshake rather than with a written contract. Several helicopter flights were why MREs and water were eventually made available to residents. Many generators failed, including at Fred's General Mercantile, which served as an epicenter for operations, and thanks to the efforts of Councilmen Stanford, Beckman, and Mayor Abernethy, emergency generators were acquired and delivered personally.

Pudney noted that the debris removal process is underway. Items must be left on the roadside for pickup and removal, and there was no timetable at the time of the meeting for that process to begin.

The expense of the relief and recovery effort is in discussion, and NCDOT has committed to reimbursement for the estimated more than \$80,000 for the road repair. However, banks and state institutions could not be contacted to ensure the coverage of all the expenses incurred. The current issue is the process of replenishing all of the costs for the disaster. Several options were under discussion, including Small Business Administration loans, recovery money from FEMA and USDA loans. The town will continue to evaluate options and determine the most effective way to address the issue.

The next meeting of the Beech Mountain Town Council will take place on Tuesday, Nov. 12.

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Blowing Rock Town Council hears hurricane impact update from FEMA, town manager

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Nick Fogleman nick.fogleman@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 625 Words OpenURL Link

BLOWING ROCK — The Blowing Rock Town Council heard from FEMA representatives and gave an update on the impacts of Hurricane Helene at its meeting on Oct. 8.

"I want to commend everyone in this county for their reliance," Jacob Swiatkowski, a FEMA representative, said.
"You have an outstanding emergency management system for the county of Watauga."

Catherine Anderson, a FEMA representative, told citizens where to sign up for FEMA benefits.

"I highly encourage anyone in your community affected to apply with FEMA and the Small Business Administration," Anderson said.

The Small Business Administration gives loans for damage and loss of revenue due to disasters.

Town Manager Shane Fox then gave an update on Hurricane Helene's impacts on Blowing Rock.

On Wednesday, Sept. 25, an EF-1 tornado touched down near Birch Drive and Hill Street, Fox said.

On Thursday, Sept. 26, the town prepared for Hurricane Helene.

"This included culverts, ditches, sandbags and things of that nature. Then we put together our overall communications plan," Fox said.

On Friday, Sept. 27, the Blowing Rock Police station lost power and the emergency generator broke due to water. Teams were then sent to BRPD Station 1.

That morning, the Blowing Rock Swift Water Team responded to requests from Boone Fire at the Walmart and along 321

"Power was out at one point to the majority of the town, but Town Central was able to come back pretty quickly," Fox said.

The wastewater and water plant lost power for multiple days, but emergency generators allowed for continued operation, Fox said.

The Green Hill Tank dropped due to a destroyed pipe, and the interconnect connecting Boone and Blowing Rock was washed away.

There were two major landslides in Blowing Rock, on Valley View and Wonderland Trail.

"We're waiting on estimates and expectations," Fox said. "These are not going to be quick fixes by any means."

On Sunday, repairs and assessments continued and donation centers were established in the town.

Town operations returned to normal Monday, Sept. 30.

"What we started on Monday was what we call the 'support' phase," Fox said. "How can the Town of Blowing Rock

do whatever we can to support our neighbors? We have capabilities, individuals with specialties and we have equipment."

The Blowing Rock police, public works, fire department, landscaping department, park and recreation, planning and zoning and town administration have all been working to assist the community and neighboring communities with disaster recovery.

"They have been unbelievable in assisting and helping in any way they can," Fox said.

The Town of Blowing Rock has also participated in daily meetings with regional and local stakeholders to assist with disaster recovery.

"It is such a nice breath of fresh air because everybody has been working together," Fox said.

Fox said the next phase would be a town cleanup.

SDR trucks began on Oct. 9 to clear debris.

Fox told community members not to place debris in ditch lines and to separate flooded materials from storm debris.

Council members then discussed the storm recovery.

"I just want to say thank you to everyone," Council Member Cat Perry said.

"A reminder that this is not a sprint recovery, this is a marathon recovery," Council Member Melissa Pickett said.

"We've had an outpouring of help that we just don't see much of anymore," Council Member Doug Matheson said.

Council Member Pete Gherin then asked Fox to discuss communication issues during the storm.

"We did have issues in the height of the storm with communications. We did have communications failures that did take place. Our plan is to meet over the next couple of weeks and go over those details and what options there may be," Fox said.

Fox then gave an update on town projects which were put on hold for the storm and recovery.

"Pausing things, not trying to be in the roadways, allowing DOT and lineworkers access was our goal," Fox said.
"Our work has started back up."

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Watauga BOE approves Valle Crucis School student relocation plan

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 779 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — The Watauga County Board of Education has approved a Valle Crucis School relocation plan for students and staff after Hurricane Helene severely damaged the current school.

The approved plan — which gives BOE Chair Gary Childers and WCS Superintendent Leslie Alexander the authority to execute any lease agreements and licenses to relocate the students from the Valle Crucis School — will mean the Valle Crucis Conference Center will host kindergarten through 5th graders and Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute will host 6th through 8th graders. PreK is tentatively planned to be held at Appalachian State University's Child Development Center.

Approximately 100 students will be at CCC&TI, approximately 180 will be at the VCCC, and 18 will be at the pre-K location.

The current school flooded during Hurricane Helene, while the new school—still being built—did not sustain any damage.

School staff met on Tuesday, Oct. 15, to begin planning for the transition.

At the meeting, Valle Crucis School Principal Bonnie Smith said they will layout everything going on, the expectations and start working on the master schedule and the plan moving forward. The master schedule — which needs "significant modifications" — for both locations will take into account transportation and academic requirements, among other needs.

"Right now, us being together as much as possible is key to keeping that Valle Crucis spirit alive," Smith said. "It's a lot of work, but now that this has been approved, we're ready to go start planning and get kids back in school."

Moving Forward with Relocation During the Board meeting, WCS Superintendent Leslie Alexander said the new Valle Crucis School — which is still being built — did "really well." The only water that came in was in area C, but if there was ever a thought that there would be another flood event like that, they could put up a floodgate and be fine.

After giving more of an update on the new school, Alexander turned to the current school and how it faired with the flooding.

"We were used to some flooding in that school, but this was significant flooding. We had about four feet of water in parts of the building," Alexander said. "Currently, the county inspector has inspected it and has a 'Do Not Enter' sign on the door, and we have no trespassing signs on the property, so I think it's important for everyone to honor that so that we can secure the building and then analyze what needs to happen with it moving forward."

Alexander said no one is allowed on the property without permission from the school systems director of maintenance.

After public comment — which mostly centered around Valle Crucis School and reopening from four speakers — Alexander moved on to the relocation plan.

When making this plan, the school system prioritized keeping Valle Crucis students and staff together as much as possible and as close to the Valle as possible and finding a safe location for 350 students and 50 staff.

"We want to get students back to school as soon as possible," Alexander said.

The current Valle Crucis School area will be used as transportation hub with students being transported to the VCCC campus and CCC&TI Watauga Campus. Elementary car rider drop off/pick up will take place at the VCS property and middle school parent's will have the option of dropping their student of at Valle Crucis or CCC&TI.

District staff, administrators, maintenance, and other agencies have toured each location to ensure its safety and compliance with guidelines.

SRO's will work together for campus security as CCC&TI already has a SRO and the current Valle Crucis School SRO would be at VCCC.

Meals will still be included each day at breakfast and lunch, with more firm plans being worked on.

Each classroom will be outfitted with the basic instructional technology and staff will ensure each site as adequate and safe access to the internet.

With the new plan, they will not be able to house the afterschool programming, but conversations are taking place to consider shutting those participating in the program to other schools.

Immediate needs are basic classroom supplies and furniture. Longterm needs include materials for the new school. The Valle Crucis School PTSO will help collect the needed supplies. To donate, visit vallecrucisptso.com.

Moving forward, as the relocation plans become more solidified, the school system will communicate to affected parents about the return-to-school process for arrival, dismissal, and overall communication.

Staff will reconvene on Friday to assess their situation and, hopefully, Smith said, have everything ready to go to return to optional days and "things like that."

"It just fills my heart seeing the parents and the community members who want what's best for their kids and how the community loves their kids and wraps their arms around us," Smith said.

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Community Care Centers winding down

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 372 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — Community Care centers are winding down as more and more needs are met within the county.

Watauga County Emergency Services Emergency Planner Kristi Pukansky said that the centers have not seen as much use since the power has been fully restored.

The Community Care Centers are winding down and the trailers are being moved from those locations as they are no longer being used as people have regained power. Hot meals will have their last deliveries to these locations:

Foscoe Christian: last meals today (Wednesday)

Pleasant Grove: last meals today (Wednesday)

Western Watauga Community Center: last meals will be Thursday

The emergency operations center is still in operation, with briefings Monday, Wednesday, and Friday as resources begin to shift.

Over the next several weeks, the community will continue to see property inspections from planning and inspections, with additional staff support from local municipalities and other agencies. Debris pick-up across the county will also continue.

Due to severely compromised roads and ongoing emergency operations, a curfew from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. remains in place for Watauga County, the Town of Blowing Rock, and the Town of Boone until further notice.

According to WCES Director Will Holt, the National Guard will remain in the area likely for several weeks serving in various logistics roles but could be shorter if progress in recovery exceeds expectations.

"Watauga County is grateful for those who paused their own lives to serve our community in one of our greatest times of need," Holt said. "These partners have worked long hours shoulder to shoulder with our own citizens to help in recovering from the impacts of Hurricane Helene. While we are nearing the end of the sprint that was the emergency response, we are just becoming the marathon of recovery. We will continue to be here throughout that process with our local partners to help guide that path to becoming an even stronger, more resilient community than before the storm."

Local nonprofits and organizations in the area are requesting donations to help them provide additional services to Hurricane Helene survivors. Nonprofits and organizations that are currently accepting donations are listed on the following dashboard at supportingwnc.com.

Those who wish to be added to the dashboard can request it using the "Submit a Donation Center" button on the dashboard.

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Business owners receive updates from DBDA

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Main Street| 741 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — Business owners received updates from the Town of Boone and Downtown Boone Development Association officials at the DBDA's special meeting on Friday, Oct. 11.

Town of Boone council member Eric Plaag began the meeting by providing a slew of updates to the board.

As of publication, Appalachian State University has yet to announce the homecoming football game against Georgia State, which is scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 26. The university is also considering potentially hosting home games at sites off the mountain.

Plaag continued by stating that the curfew from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. in the Town of Boone and Watauga County will continue for the foreseeable future.

"The curfew is being strictly enforced, and we ask that businesses observe the curfew by limiting hours accordingly and allowing plenty of time for your staff to return home before the curfew starts each night," Plaag said.

Furthermore, the town's boil water advisory has been lifted, and the water treatment plant is operating at full capacity. The town's public works department continues to repair water and sewer line breaks throughout town.

Plaag said the town is also asking people to not use power washing equipment to clear remaining mud and other debris from sidewalks and parking lots in front of businesses due to the town's severely strained sewer lines. Public works is continuing to address blockages in the town's gutters and drains.

Regular trash service for household trash has continued in town. Storm debris pickup started Wednesday, Oct. 9. Plaag said recycling services are expected to begin once more on Monday. The Horn in the West parking lot, where FEMA is currently set up, is the only state-approved site in town for debris staging.

Council member Edie Tugman then provided an update on FEMA, saying that the agency has, as of Thursday, Oct. 10, approved more than \$60 million in housing and other types of assistance for 51,000 households.

Plaag said the town had condemned approximately 200 units, but he noted that "condemned" by the town's definition does not mean the units have to be destroyed but must be repaired before they are habitable. Plaag said he was embedded with planning and inspections for several days while they assessed the damage.

"I would say for every unit that we were condemning, there were another two or three that had two or three feet of water in them. But once a drywall coat was done, and that process had started, they were still habitable. That doesn't mean that those people are still in those units," Plaag said.

Those who need assistance applying for FEMA disaster assistance can receive support by visiting WAMY Community Action, the Enterprise Center at Poplar Grove Connector and Watauga High School.

Due to the hurricane's impact and ongoing recovery efforts throughout the region, the Sugar Mountain Oktoberfest, the Valle Country Fair, and the Woolly Worm Festival have been canceled.

The town's Boone Boo! will continue as scheduled on Thursday, Oct. 31, from 5 to 7:30 p.m.

Lane Moody, Downtown Development Coordinator, then provided her update. She reiterated that businesses who

are applying for assistance need to document everything.

From communications she's had with NC Main Street, she said many downtown areas in western NC have come out of the storm relatively unscathed with the exception of Spruce Pine and some others.

She added local business organizations are revisiting their messaging to tourists and encouraging them to "tread lightly" when they visit the area. She also discussed updates to the Main Street work plan.

High Country Host has gathered a resource on business hours for local businesses and current deals businesses are offering for locals. The town is also considering holding a larger First Friday event in November to help support local businesses.

Moody also discussed resources being offered to local businesses through the Small Business Administration and Mountain BizWorks. More information can be found atmountainbizworks.org/helene/fund.

Board members, town officials, and local business owners then discussed various issues. The local business owners in attendance said many of them are treading water to keep their businesses afloat while recovering from Hurricane Helene.

Many of the business owners said their businesses are hurting, and many of them are ready to get back to work. A further discussion was held on whether the messaging by the town, county, and chamber was hurting the local economy by continuing to tell tourists to stay out of the area.

One local business owner said taking out a loan at this time would only further challenge his business, so he asked what grants may be available.

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Chanticleers lend helping hand to Watauga County

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Zach Colburn | Section: Sports | 273 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — Watauga County received a nice assist from one of Appalachian State University's fellow members in the Sun Belt Conference.

The Coastal Carolina women's soccer program stopped by Watauga High School on Thursday morning, Oct. 10, with some donations, including non-perishable food items, to aid the county in its recovery from Hurricane Helene.

Members of the Lady Chanticleers and volunteers from Watauga High School and Innovation Academy worked together to help restock the Auxiliary Gymnasium at the school, which served as one of the donation drop-off points.

According to the post, every Coastal Carolina University team plans to load up their team bus when they come into town and unload supplies for the county.

"Thank you so much for your support Coastal Carolina University. We look forward to a visit from your volleyball and football teams in the coming weeks," Watauga County Schools said in a statement on its Facebook page. "Our schools and county are really feeling the love from our South Carolina neighbors."

The women's soccer team was the first program as it delivered to the school prior to its match with the Lady Mountaineers on Thursday afternoon at the Ted Mackorell Soccer Complex.

Following Hurricane Helene, the match was originally slated to be played at Queens University in Charlotte. However, Appalachian State announced on Wednesday that it had been moved back to Boone.

The match, which ended in a 2-2 draw, was the first Mountaineer athletic event played in Boone since Sept. 27 and the Lady Mountaineers first true home match since Sept. 5.

In addition to women's soccer, the Lady Chanticleers volleyball program is scheduled to play at Appalachian State on Oct. 24 and 25.

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Watauga soccer charges past Patriots

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Zach Colburn | Section: Sports | 637 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — The Watauga boys soccer team had a delayed start to its bid for a Northwestern 4A/3A Conference championship due to the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

But the Pioneers made up for some lost time with a 6-1 win against Freedom in the conference opener on Monday night at Jack Groce Stadium.

Playing its first game since Sept. 21 (the original league opener on Sept. 25 against South Caldwell was postponed due to bad weather), head boys soccer coach Josh Honeycutt was glad to finally get back on the pitch after the break.

He also admitted that the break was a good opportunity to get some players healthy.

Two players, David Ganley and Jude Jackson, were able to get healthy and made contributions on Monday.

Ganley scored twice in the match and Jackson, whose been out of action since the end of August, returned in goal.

"It feels great. I can't express enough how much I'm excited for these guys to get back to something normal. It's good for these kids and I appreciate the school and the school board, the athletic director and everybody getting this back in place so they can get back to some normal life," said Honeycutt. "It's great to get Jude back, he was able to practice all week. Of course, this is his first competition game back since his concussion, so it's great to have him back. David's ankle was kind of bothering him, so he had a couple weeks to try to get it healthy. It was a weird couple of weeks, but it actually wasn't terrible for health reasons, you know, getting guys healthy again."

Goals on Monday came in quick succession as the two clubs combined for three goals in a 90-second span.

Ganley and Alex Aguilar, with goals in the third and fourth minutes, respectively, gave Watauga (9-3-2, 1-0) a 2-0 lead.

After the Patriots (4-10, 0-4) cut the Pioneer lead in half in the fifth minute, the advantage stayed the same despite both teams having multiple chances.

But Ben Myers extended the lead for Watauga with a goal with 32 seconds left in the first half. The junior pushed the lead to 4-1 less than two minutes into the second half with a header.

Curtis Sevensky had a chance to break into the score column in the 63rd minute, but his shot attempt was deflected by Freedom's goalkeeper Landon Yax.

Freedom was unable to clear the live ball, so Ganley was there to put the rebound home. The senior Sevensky made good a minute later with a score of his own to extend the advantage to five.

"I don't think we should have let up a goal, and I think we should have scored more goals, but a win's a win, and first play in the conference is a win, and first game back after a couple of weeks, a weird couple weeks off, I'll take it," said Honeycutt. "I think there's definitely some things we can do and I think we did improve significantly in the second half. Our quality of play was much better, and I think if it would have been that way for both halves, it would have been a different game."

The Pioneers will have a busy end to the regular season. Monday's match was the first of 10 matches over the next three weeks.

Watauga returns to the pitch on Wednesday when it faces Freedom at Mountain View Elementary in Morganton. They'll be back home on Monday for a hotly-contested match with defending conference champion Hibriten.

Watauga 6, Freedom 1

Freedom; 1; 0-1

Watauga; 33-6

FIRST HALF

WHS — David Ganley, 3rd minute

WHS — Alex Aguilar, 4th minute

FREE — goal, 5th minute

WHS — Ben Myers, 40th minute

SECOND HALF

WHS — Myers, 42nd minute

WHS — Ganley, 63rd minute

WHS — Curtis Sevensky, 64th minute

Saves— Jude Jackson (W) 1. Assists — Curtis Sevensky, Lucas Hamilton, Alex Aguilar, Ben Myers, Quincy Honeycutt. ©2024 Watauga Democrat - Mountain Times Publications, All rights reserved.

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Blowing Rock American Legion building becomes hub for donations

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Nick Fogleman nick.fogleman@wataugademocrat.com | Section: News | 202 Words OpenURL Link

BLOWING ROCK — As communities in Western North Carolina responded to Hurricane Helene, the American Legion building in Blowing Rock became a distribution center to support counties that were devastated by the storm.

"We had resources, and we wanted to help," Cathay Barker of the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce said. "Everybody in our community was reaching out asking how to help.

Donations came into Blowing Rock from across the country, and the American Legion building was soon full of clothes, food, diapers, pet food, blankets, and even hand-knit sweaters.

"It's people helping people," Barker said.

Volunteers began getting calls from other counties about the resources they needed and were able to act fast and get them to the right people.

"We're the very back end of the supply chain," said Sam Garrett, whose non-profit Love-Give has been supporting the efforts.

The effort was supported by the Town of Blowing Rock, The Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce and Blowing Rock Tourism Development Board.

Chef José Andrés of World Central Kitchen even landed a helicopter to pick up warm food brought to Blowing Rock from a Raleigh catering company to deliver to Banner Elk.

"The kindness and the hearts of these people have just been nonstop. It's amazing," Barker said.

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Samaritan's Purse utilizing Boone Airport to conduct large-scale civil air relief effort

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local| 1055 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — Throughout his lifetime, the Rev. Billy Graham maintained a deep belief and interest in angels. In the case of Samaritan's Purse, the angels who have come to support those most impacted by Hurricane Helene arrived in Black Hawk helicopters, Chinooks, and other aircraft.

The operation is the largest civilian airlift operations in U.S. history, conducted and coordinated by the nonprofit Christian relief organization, according to Samaritan's Purse.

Samaritan's Purse has completed more than 290 helicopter and fixed-wing missions to deliver emergency relief supplies to some of the most isolated and hard-hit areas in 17 counties, including 15 in North Carolina and two in Tennessee.

The effort has delivered 1,800 generators, 1,700 heaters, 24,000 bags of food, 11,500 blankets, 15,000 solar lights, 60,000 gallons of water, 20,000 to 30,000 gallons of fuel, 15,000 solar lights and close to 100 Starlink terminals, 50 of which are currently operational.

SP has also set up water filtration centers in Swannanoa, Asheville and Burnsville. Supplies are delivered to local churches and fire departments for further distribution in some of the most secluded areas in the state.

"All of this has come out of the Boone Airport, which is a 1000-foot airstrip that's 40 feet wide and has been the epicenter of this massive airlift," said Samaritan's Purse President Franklin Graham.

As part of the effort, SP has also received support from state and local governments, as well as those who have been loaning their own private helicopters, such as racing team owners Joe Gibbs and Rick Hendrick.

Graham said they even had a retired four-star military general who flew from Washington to lend his resources and expertise.

"What we do is out of the hangar here at the Boone Airport, a helicopter comes in and we give them a flight. We load the helicopter. We give them fuel, and they take off. Once they come back, we do it again. We give them another assignment, another place to go and load them up with fuel, load them up with cargo and they take off. It's just been an incredible operation," Graham said.

As road conditions across western North Carolina and east Tennessee continue to improve, Graham said they are looking to begin phasing out a large extent of their air operations on Wednesday afternoon, although they may still utilize the Black Hawks and the organization's own helicopter for a few more days.

While much relief has come to the area via the skies, SP has completed substantial work through its boots on the ground. More than 16,000 volunteers nationwide have aided the organization by completing 6,170 work orders that have helped more than 1,100 homeowners.

"One thing that impressed me about this is it's neighbor helping neighbor," Graham said. "This has been (aircraft) privately funded and managed by Samaritan's Purse, and it's been the 82nd Airborne, it's been the North Carolina Air National Guard, business helicopters, and just a lot of people that made it happen."

Graham added that the operation at the airport has been a sight to behold, as many locals have stopped by to have picnics, watch the aircraft come and go, and offer their support.

The organization is also fulfilling the spiritual mission of its namesake by not only responding to the material loss that many in the region face but by also addressing some of the deeper struggles and questions that people are dealing with as they face the long road of disaster recovery.

"We always share the hope that we have, and that's our faith in Christ," Graham said. "I think when a person has been knocked down in the ditch along life's road, and you stop and help them, they're interested and ask, 'Why did you stop and help me?' And it just gives us an opportunity to share with them God's love for them. God loves them, and we want them to know that. And sometimes, during storms, people ask, 'Is God mad at me? Is he judging me? Why have I lost my house? Why have I lost my loved one? Why did my driveway wash out?'

"So many people are just confused. I just want them to know that Jesus even went through storms in his life. And all of us have storms. It may be a financial storm, it may be a marriage problem, but every one of us goes through storms, and I want people to know that they could put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ, and he'll get you through that storm."

In addition to air missions, SP has also deployed Disaster Relief Units — tractor-trailers stocked with tools and equipment — to Asheville, Boone and Burnsville, North Carolina; Perry and Tampa, Florida; and Valdosta, Georgia. Volunteers continue to serve families in need by mudding out flooded homes, clearing debris, removing downed trees and tarping damaged roofs.

As the recovery efforts progress, Graham said SP will continue to respond to the needs as they present themselves, especially in some of the hardest-hit areas, such as Burnsville, Black Mountain, Swannanoa, Asheville, and the Lake Lure and Chimney Rock areas.

"It's incredible the damage done in these areas. If not months, it could take years for some of these areas to come back. But we're going to just continue to help look for people that didn't have insurance, didn't have flood insurance, people that are going to fall through the cracks, and we're going to do what we can to try to help them in the months and years to come," Graham said.

While SP may be winding down its activities at the Boone Airport, the work that will continue throughout the long haul is just beginning. Nevertheless, help has already come to thousands of people as relief arrived through the skies.

"When you've been cut off, and one of those helicopters shows up, and they unload generators and fuel and food, they may think the angels have shown up. Of course, we want them to know that it all comes from God, and we give it in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ," Graham said.

Based in Boone, North Carolina, Samaritan's Purse responds to the physical and spiritual needs of individuals in crisis situations—especially in locations where few others are working. Led by President and CEO Franklin Graham, Samaritan's Purse works in more than 100 countries to provide aid to victims of war, disease, disaster, poverty, famine and persecution.

For more information, visit samaritanspurse.org.

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Red Cross shelter at Holmes Convocation Center closes

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 230 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE - The Red Cross shelter at the Holmes Convocation Center closed on Friday, Oct. 11, as those still requiring housing were transitioned to shelter elsewhere as App State prepares to continue classes on Wednesday, Oct. 16.

According to Mike DeCinti, the Regional Communications Director for the North Carolina Region of the American Red Cross, the shelter had seen a total of 470 combined overnight stays around the time the decision was made to close.

Moreover, the Red Cross has served nearly 6,000 meals throughout its six shelters in Watauga County. The American Red Cross opens shelters in conjunction with emergency management partners, community partners, and state and local officials.

"Working with those local partners, as the shelter at App State was closing, the Red Cross worked to transition those staying at the shelter to another shelter to continue to provide resources including safe shelter, food, disaster health services, and more," DeCinti said.

The Red Cross is coordinating with local partners to identify shelters and provide transportation for future emergency shelter needs in Watauga County.

Previously, the Red Cross has classified Hurricane Helene as a seven, the highest classification for natural disaster response given by the humanitarian aid organization.

The Red Cross at the national level deployed 300 additional service workers to help respond to the hurricane's aftermath in the state.

Those who may need shelter or other assistance are encouraged to call 1-800 RED CROSS.

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Lady Pioneer spikers turn back South Caldwell

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Zach Colburn | Section: Sports | 529 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — Watauga's volleyball team kicked off the second half of its abbreviated Northwestern 4A/3A Conference schedule on Monday evening with a 3-1 win against South Caldwell inside Lentz-Eggers Gym.

With the win, the Lady Pioneers (8-7, 5-1) can do no worse than a share of second place in the conference (and they're still in the running for a conference title) heading into the final week of the regular season.

That final week also includes a key showdown at home against Ashe County on Thursday.

Due to the effects of Hurricane Helene and the delay of the upcoming North Carolina High School Athletic Association 4A playoffs, which begin Oct. 22, the remaining five-game league schedule was cut to three for seeding purposes the Lady Pioneers.

They can clinch the league's top 4A spot for the upcoming NCHSAA playoffs with a win at home on Tuesday evening against Alexander Central (8-8, 4-3).

Watauga won the first and fourth sets by the same 25-17 score, but the Lady Spartans (11-8, 4-4) gave the hosts all it could handle in the second and third sets.

South Caldwell built its lead to as many as eight in the second set at 16-8 but kills from Emma Pastusic and Grace Tillery trimmed the deficit to as little as three (17-14).

Kills from Keira Reid and Anna Hughes pushed the Lady Spartan lead back to four as it became the only league team, besides Ashe County, to take a set from the Lady Pioneers this fall with a 25-20 win to even the match up at one apiece.

The Lady Spartans built an 8-7 lead in the third set, but Watauga came roaring back and scored the next five points to retake the lead (12-8) with a Lilli Combs ace.

The Lady Pioneers and South Caldwell were tied at 15 and that prompted head coach Kim Pryor to use a timeout to help her team regroup.

Watauga's break paid off as Pastusic connected on two of her match-high 21 kills to open up an advantage, and Hadleigh Windish pushed the lead to 22-19 with a kill of her own.

After a South Caldwell block cut Watauga's lead to 23-22, Gracyn Phelps delivered off the bench with two of her three kills in the match to close out the set and put the Lady Pioneers ahead.

Grace Tillery complemented Pastusic with 12 kills and Kora Knight and Windish added eight and six, respectively.

Lainey Gragg had a busy night at setter as the sophomore piled up 46 assists while four players finished with double-digit digs, led by 24 from Kaitlyn Darner. Pastusic (16), Caroline Childers (16), and Lilli Combs (10) also had double-digit digs.

Watauga Player Stats

Gracyn Phelps (Fr.) — 3 kills, 1 dig

Lilli Combs (Jr.) — 3 aces, 10 digs

Hadliegh Windish (Sr.) — 6 kills, 1 assist, 6 digs

Kora Knight (Jr.) — 8 kills, 1 dig

Kaitlyn Darner (Sr.) — 2 aces, 24 digs

Lainey Gragg (So.) — 1 kills, 46 assists, 5 digs

Addison Parker (Sr.) — 2 digs

Grace Tillery (Sr.) — 12 kills, 1 dig

Emma Pastusic (Jr.) — 21 kills, 2 blocks, 2 aces, 16 digs

Bella Wade (Jr.) — 1 ace

Caroline Childers (Fr.) -1 kill, 1 assist 1 ace, 16 digs

Ashlyn Smith (So.) — 3 kills, 4 digs

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Local Mountaineer football players feel sense of duty to give back

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Zach Colburn | Section: Sports | 806 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — Carter Everett took a few extra minutes to work on his kickoffs after the rest of his team members left the field following the conclusion of Appalachian State's football practice on Oct. 8.

The game of football has served as a distraction for the 2022 Watauga graduate as he and the Watauga County community continue to clean up and look to recover from the events of Hurricane Helene.

But Everett also knows that the team has had to learn to adjust on the fly. Their season was briefly put on pause before the cancellation of the home game with Liberty on Sept. 28, and it's still unknown if they'll be able to host a game at Kidd Brewer for the remainder of the season.

"We are very fortunate to still be able to play this game and have these facilities and stuff while people are without power and water," said Everett. "We kind of assumed we wouldn't play Liberty, especially after midday Friday when you woke up to what had happened over that Thursday night, Friday morning. We love home games, we only get so many of them; it wasn't the greatest, but also, there was no way you could do anything in kind of what happened."

Everett's teammate Anderson Castle, who's also from Watauga County, echoed the sentiment that football helps bring some normalcy to the current situation.

Castle, a 2020 Watauga graduate, was also a member of the Mountaineers football program during the Fall 2020 season when the school had to deal with the safety issues brought on by COVID.

When asked about the comparison between the two in terms of preparation and safety, there were some similarities despite being different situations.

"It felt a little weird Friday and Saturday because not a lot of people could get out — I couldn't really. The roads out my way were kind of closed, and so it threw it back a little bit to COVID," Castle said. "But at the same time, they're very different, this is more right now. We don't even have school, so we're just locked in on football; we're basically pro athletes, and I'm trying to capitalize on that.

"In a way, it definitely has served as a distraction; it's been good and bad. It's served as a good form of normality — you come out here and you're playing football," added Castle. "But then you realize that there's still a lot of people hurting, and so there's kind of a two-way thing, but we've been blessed to be able to help them out when we can."

Castle, Everett and the rest of the Mountaineers have had opportunities to serve the community they've grown up in.

The Mountaineers have been involved in various activities, including helping to assist Samaritan's Purse with loading emergency supplies such as generators.

Castle couldn't help but feel a sense of gratitude about being able to give back to the community in a time of need.

"I've always known, growing up here, that there's a reason I wanted to stay here — it's a strong community, people have got each other's backs. Even if it's just one family or one person, there's going to be countless people helping them out, they've really showed that. That's just part of the reason why I love being here, and I'm proud to call it home," said Castle. "It's been crazy. People say it's historic and that's the truth — it's never happened, stuff like this, and so it's completely just new and just been weird for everybody. But at the same time, throughout these

past two or so weeks, you've really seen how strong Watauga County and the rest of Western North Carolina is, how the people come together, and that's been great to see."

Much like Castle, Everett feels the exact same way about the community coming together.

Everett admits that they're in a great position back home, so they can help and send stuff where it is needed.

The redshirt sophomore says he feels a responsibility to give back and wants to anytime that he can — one example that he gave was helping out a teammate's elderly neighbors who were stuck in their house during the events.

"I'm just glad that we were fortunate enough to be able to be in that position. We've taken a couple of groups to the airstrip and loaded some helicopters that are going further towards that Asheville area, so it's really nice to be able to contribute towards this community," said Everett. "It gave so much to me growing up with Watauga and App; then just being a part of the community growing up, coming to these App games, you never notice how much this community loves App State football until you're growing up in it, like just around it enough and so it's awesome just to give back towards it and show some appreciation."

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Pioneer student-athletes making most of current situation

October 15, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Zach Colburn | Section: Local Sports | 620 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — Watauga High School student-athletes, many of whom are in the process of restarting their seasons, spent last week helping put together the Care Closet inside the school's Media Center.

The Care Closet was open this past Thursday and Friday for Watauga County residents to come in and take any articles of clothing they may need for free.

According to Donna Wellborn, who helped oversee the operation along with the Watauga Athletes for Good club, shipments and donations started coming in on Monday of that week, and AFG worked diligently over the next two days to put everything together.

"It was over the weekend that I just posted we can all take donations because people were asking about that, about clothes, and we didn't really have a place designated for them, and so, this is the Athletes for Good Club and we decided to do a clothing drive, which turned into massive amounts of clothing," said Wellborn. "We wanted it to be a store, not just a come and pilfer through bags and bags of things and try to find something because the people who came in here yesterday (Thursday), we worked with orders for a family with kids. We've had neighbors coming in buying for their neighbors, and we wanted to do something that would make it easier for them to find something they wanted."

In addition to accepting donations from the community, several local businesses pitched in to donate items, both clothing and non-clothing.

Some of the businesses that contributed were Carroll Leathers Goods, who donated brand-new leather coats, and the Mast General Store, who helped them with racks to put clothes on and hangers.

Wellborn also noted that a church in Georgia drove up on Monday with a huge truckload of items and brought the students pizza to show appreciation for all of their hard work.

"The clothes have come from all over. I mean, they really have. We even had a lady drive up yesterday from Charlotte, and we've just had a surplus," said Wellborn. "A lot of them have been new or at least close to new, and these kids have worked around the clock, and it took a long time to sort everything and put everything on a hanger.

"The kids have been working on roads and they've been in here shopping for their parents and taking care of their siblings and all kinds of things, so they've had to grow up very quickly."

Of all the articles of clothing that were donated and "purchased" — free of charge — winter clothing (i.e., hats, coats, scarves, gloves) were the first to go, but also the ones most in need heading into that season.

Even though they're no longer accepting donations, Wellborn says that the organization will find other ways to help serve the community going forward since there will still be a need for the items well after the conclusion of Hurricane Helene's events.

"Somebody today who couldn't get a coat yesterday because we didn't have their size of the one that they wanted, all it took was for us to reach out to a community member and say, 'any chance, can I get another one of that size', and it's going to be here Monday," said Wellborn. "We're not going to be open on Monday, but we are going to be doing this because, at this point, we have to now shift our mindset back to eventually returning to school — this

eventually has to get back to being a library, which is what it was intended to be.

"But right now, the school did what the school should do, which is be here to serve the needs of the community. That's what a school's supposed to do, and so it's done that."

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OpenURL Link

Musician helps his beloved Asheville recover - Steep Canyon Rangers musician helps his beloved Asheville recover from Helene

October 15, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: NANCY MCLAUGHLIN Staff Reporter | Section: A | 610 Words Page: 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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