

Kayakers become unexpected heroes in relief effort navigating dangerous conditions in streams around Saluda

October 3, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Staff Reports | Section: Community | 325 Words OpenURL Link

As the aftermath of Hurricane Helene continues to cripple communities across western North Carolina, kayakers like Mason Hargrove have become unexpected heroes, navigating treacherous rivers to deliver supplies and check on isolated residents.

The storm's destruction has left entire towns nearly unrecognizable, with roads washed out, homes destroyed, and landslides cutting off access to many areas.

"The rivers aren't even recognizable," Hargrove told WRAL News. He and others have been using their kayaks to navigate dangerous conditions, dodging submerged debris.

Hargrove and other kayakers have been posting videos from areas around Saluda on social media to help get the word out about the extent of the destruction and the urgency of getting food and aid to the most remote areas that have been cut off from larger towns and communities.

In places like Green River Cove, the damage is so severe that the only way to reach residents is by hiking eight miles through rugged terrain. Entire sections of communities near Saluda, including the Pearson Falls community and Green River Cove, have been virtually wiped off the map. Local officials say the scale of destruction is difficult to grasp, with many homes buried in mud or washed away completely.

Volunteers like Hargrove have become lifelines for isolated communities, bringing in food and water, conducting wellness checks, and offering hope amid the devastation.

The kayakers are part of a volunteer group led by Erica Shanks, a member of the environmental advocacy group Mountain True, which mobilized to fill the gap while waiting on government aid.

Hargrove said he plans to continue his mission in Green River and other hard-hit areas for as long as he is needed.

With so much of the region cut off from outside aid, these local heroes have become critical to the recovery effort, helping their neighbors survive and rebuild in the wake of Helene's devastating impact.

The post Kayakers become unexpected heroes in relief effort navigating dangerous conditions in streams around Saluda appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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It'll get better

October 3, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: M.M. Cochran| Section: Columnists | 418 Words OpenURL Link

It'll be the helicopters.

It'll be the helicopters I'll remember vividly as I recall this strange week one day. I'll think of the way I was sitting by our open window when the blades of the helicopters thumped out of nowhere, rattled the air above me, and then disappeared over the horizon.

I'll think of the way I repeatedly watched them all split through the sky--military traveling in packs, medic ones with red crosses, and little black ones zipping from one place to the other.

I'll remember the way I just stood there in front of my powerless house, wondering if the dozens of helicopters were carrying the victims of Helene, the wounded, the rescued.

When small town history talk comes up thirty, forty years later, like it does with Hugo or the blizzard of '93, they'll say, "Helene was a bad one. Tore up the valley like nothing else. Worse than the 2018 mudslide."

And I'll think about the time in 2024 when I stood at the sandy, eroded edge of the river along Hwy. 176 and saw where the Caro-Mi restaurant was washed off its foundation, bent and broken, screen door swinging open on its old hinges.

I peered into the dark restaurant across the muddy and destructive river and imagined the rooms within, where I'd sat with my late grandpa so many times, where my parents had their rehearsal dinner in 1994, where they had shared their first dinner with my boyfriend.

It was all over in just one stormy morning, in a roaring rain.

Friday morning feels like so long ago. And I don't say that because the lack of power or internet or cell service has made the days go slower. I say that because one day after the other, it just keeps sounding worse.

But it'll get better.

In 2018, the landslide created a painful memory for us all. But it got better, cleaned up, and remembered as a tragic moment that simultaneously created a community that grew through it. And this fall of 2024—it'll become a point in the Upstate's and Western North Carolina's history timeline where we'll stop and say, "It was bad. But it got better."

My Landrum readers, Tryon readers, Columbus, Saluda--wherever you are--if you've suffered in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, I'm thinking about you. And it might not mean much to you that you're heavy on my heart, but all I can do from here is tell you that it'll get better.

It always does.

The post It'll get better appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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M.M. Cochran, 'It'll get better', <i>Tryon Daily Bulletin, The</i> (online), 3 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFC75239954D70					



Harmon Field closed until further notice

October 3, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Staff Reports| Section: Community | 99 Words OpenURL Link

TRYON-Town officials want the community to know that Harmon Field is currently closed until further notice. This is due to the damage from Tropical Storm Helene.

Please do not move cones to access the park. Harmon Field is not currently safe to use.

Harmon Field remains closed to all persons. Contractors will be on the field working to clear the Arts & Crafts parking lot and the walking track.

The Town of Tryon will share an update when Harmon Field is once again open to the public.

The post Harmon Field closed until further notice appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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Lineman working north of Tryon post images, video demonstrating challenges crews are facing

October 3, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Staff Reports | Section: Community | 317 Words OpenURL Link

Linemen working tirelessly to restore power have been sharing their experiences on social media, providing a window into the immense challenges they are facing in the Western North Carolina mountains.

The posts on Twitter from one lineman, who was with crews north of Tryon on Wednesday, demonstrate the immensity of the situation for those tasked with bringing electricity back to storm-ravaged areas.

In one video, @Jnkerr13 panned the camera up and down a portion of the highway north of Tryon, showing the whole road with large chunks missing and guardrails hanging dangling off the edge.

"The roads going into the mountains are wrecked. No way to get poles in," the lineman said. "This is just disastrous. This is unbelievable, all the way up the road."

In another tweet, @Jnkerr13 posted another image of a road blocked by fallen trees and debris.

"This is what us linemen are up against," tweeted lineman @Jnkerr13. "The people here are amazingly resilient and always kind in spite of their hard times," he added, acknowledging the gratitude and strength of local residents despite the widespread destruction.

Navigating through the terrain has made the recovery process slow and arduous for @Jnkerr13 and other linemen.

Another tweet showed an impassable mountain road.

Hurricane Helene has left entire regions without power. Downed trees, landslides, and washed-out roads make it nearly impossible for repair crews to access certain areas. In some locations, linemen have been forced to take long detours around the mountains, adding hours to an already grueling process.

"It's slow going but this is what we're up against. Our line crews are trying to get through, but we often have to take alternate routes around the mountains just to patrol and get to our work," he tweeted.

Despite the obstacles, linemen remain committed to reconnecting isolated communities.

"We're pushing forward though!" @Jnkerr13 posted.

The post Lineman working north of Tryon post images, video demonstrating challenges crews are facing appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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Power restored to downtown Tryon

October 3, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Staff Reports | Section: Community | 114 Words OpenURL Link

TRYON—After nearly a week in the dark, power was restored to downtown Tryon Thursday afternoon around 4:45 p.m.

Residents who had gathered along Trade St. at Huckleberry's Restaurant erupted in cheers and applause.

Sections of downtown had power restored about an hour earlier, but when the full stretch became fully functional, the relief was palpable.

"Thank God," one resident said. "There are so many out there still suffering. Little by little, we are getting back to normal."

Tropical Storm Helene tore through the area Friday morning, leaving unfathomable damage and destruction in its wake.

Columbus and Saluda downtowns had power restored Tuesday and Wednesday, respectively.

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World's first fully-equipped hospital on wheels being set up at TIEC to help with disaster relief efforts

October 3, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Staff Reports | Section: Community | 336 Words OpenURL Link

A Charlotte non-profit hospital network has deployed its state-of-the-art MED-1 mobile hospital to Tryon International Equestrian Center to support disaster response efforts in the region.

As the world's first fully equipped hospital on wheels, Atrium Health's MED-1 is designed to provide comprehensive medical care to communities in need, ensuring that emergency healthcare remains accessible in the midst of devastation.

In a video on the company's Facebook page, Brian Sutton, the nurse manager of MED-1, offered a behind-thescenes look at the intricate preparation required to deploy this mobile emergency department.

"This is more than just a mobile clinic," Sutton said, highlighting the hospital's advanced capabilities. MED-1 is equipped with digital x-ray, ultrasound, an in-house pharmacy, a lab, and a 14-bed acute care unit. The facility also features a two-bed operating room, allowing for a full range of emergency and urgent medical treatments.

"We're committed to providing immediate and long-term disaster response and recovery for our communities," Sutton added. "Our mission is to improve health, elevate hope, and advance healing for all."

The MED-1 unit's deployment to Tryon comes at a crucial time as the region continues to grapple with the aftermath of Helene, which left behind widespread damage and strained local medical infrastructure. The mobile hospital is part of Atrium Health's broader commitment to bring healthcare directly to affected areas, offering a lifeline for residents and first responders in times of crisis.

Headquartered in Charlotte, Atrium Health is part of Advocate Health, the third-largest nonprofit health system in the United States. Known for its pediatric, cancer, heart care, organ transplants, and specialized treatments, Atrium Health is also a leader in virtual care and mobile medicine, which makes the MED-1 deployment particularly significant.

The organization's core academic institution, Wake Forest University School of Medicine, continues to lead in groundbreaking research and experiential medical education, ensuring that Atrium Health's mobile medical services are at the cutting edge of healthcare innovation.

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Columbus Town Council holds emergency meeting

October 3, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Storme Smith| Section: Community | 276 Words OpenURL Link

COLUMBUS—On Wednesday, October 2 at 11 a.m., the Columbus Town Council held an emergency meeting to discuss water and sewer infrastructure, postponing automatic payments for water bills and an upcoming shipment of supplies.

The meeting was attended by approximately a dozen local citizens and commenced with a discussion about the current state of the water and sewer systems in the Town of Columbus. Town Manager Tim Barth and Mayor Pat McCool stated that despite significant pressure, the systems performed remarkably well and are now back to normal.

The council also decided to postpone automatic payments for water and sewer bills from October 5 to October 10. This change only applies to individuals using automatic payments.

The council then addressed the incoming supplies, Meals Ready to Eat (MREs), and water that are expected to arrive, with a major portion designated for the more severely affected areas of Sunny View and Saluda. Barth informed the attendees that the supply truck had not yet arrived, and updates regarding the arrival and distribution of these supplies will be provided through the Nixle alert system and posted on the town bulletin board in front of the Town Hall.

Additionally, Columbus Police Chief Scott Hamby reminded attendees to contact the police or sheriff's office with any concerns about missing persons in the area, and they will follow up and check on them.

The council also discussed the process for applying for disaster assistance from FEMA, which can be done by phone or through htwww.disasterassistance.gov. Those considering filing for assistance were advised to take plenty of pictures of damage from Tropical Storm Helene.

The post Columbus Town Council holds emergency meeting appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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Polk County Update: Information about beginning claims process with FEMA, maximizing impact of donations, volunteer efforts

October 3, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Staff Reports | Section: Community | 377 Words OpenURL Link

Officials from Polk County have issued the following update about recovery and relief efforts in the area:

Damage Repair and Information

As we move forward, we know many are eager to begin repairs and restore a sense of normalcy. Our responders

have already begun assessing the overall damages and documenting the situation. We encourage you to take detailed

photos and document all personal damages and necessary repairs.

To begin the assistance claim process, please visit FEMA's Road to Recovery Assistance Program.

We will continue to provide additional information as it becomes available and will bring in both state and federal

experts to ensure our community has access to all available disaster assistance. Thank you for your patience and cooperation as we navigate this together.

Essential Needs Distribution:

The following drive-through locations will be open to distribute water and basic food. Distribution will be on a first-come, first-served basis and will continue on a day-to-day basis per availability and need.

Distribution Locations - October 4th - Time: 1 to 5 p.m.

25 International Blvd, Mill Spring, NC

95 Walker St, Columbus, NC

214 E Main St, Saluda, NC

301 N Trade St, Tryon, NC

86 Sunny View School Rd. Mill Spring, NC 28756

Maximizing the Impact of Donations and Volunteer Efforts

To ensure that all donations and volunteer support are used effectively, we kindly request that you coordinate through BEOC@NCDPS.Gov. This will help us manage resources properly and maintain a safe, efficient response. Please help spread the word: Unsolicited donations cannot be accepted due to logistical challenges and

safety concerns. Your cooperation allows us to focus on what matters most—assisting those in need.

Meals on Wheels

We are dedicated to ensuring that all clients registered for Meals on Wheels in Polk County receive not only meals but also physical contact during each delivery. Our priority is to provide consistent support, care, and essential nutrition to every client.

Landfill

Open Monday - Friday 8 am - 4:30 pm / Saturday 8 am - 4 pm

Residential Trash - \$10.00 Service Fee Waived October 1st through October 8th

Moving Forward

"In the wake of Hurricane Helene, Polk County stands united in the spirit of rescue and recovery. Together, we will support one another, heal our community, and build a future grounded in hope and resilience."

The post Polk County Update: Information about beginning claims process with FEMA, maximizing impact of donations, volunteer efforts appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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A level-1 trauma storm: Mental health effects from Hurricane Helene could be drastic, experts say

October 3, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Chloe Nelson Adams Publishing Group| Section: Local | 803 Words OpenURL Link

After Hurricane Helene rampaged through six southern states last week, approximately 200 people have been reported dead, with experts estimating up to \$26 billion in property damage.

Residents across Florida's Big Bend and into the Carolinas are battling power outages, destroyed homes and hundreds of closed roads.

With missing family members and limited connection to the outside world, many are battling a mental struggle experts said could grow in the coming days.

Dr. Chris Cortman, a 40-year trauma psychologist in Venice, Florida, said the longterm mental effects of the devastation can be drastic if left untreated.

Of the 107 dead, 30 were from Buncombe County, North Carolina alone.

In the same county, nearly 600 people are still unaccounted for.

With a significant event like Helene "shaking us to the very core," Cortman said control can start to slip, leaving some people feeling vulnerable.

"Horror is the first feeling," Cortman said. "Lots of times, it flies in the face of what we think we can expect out of life."

While a sobering moment in a person's life, a natural disaster offers a community the chance to rebuild connections and reestablish their faith.

For some in North Carolina, communication is not possible.

Isolation, fear leave many in mortal danger

Asheville, western North Carolina's largest city, has been cut off from support or aid by damaged roads, flooding and a lack of power and cellphone service.

As A/C and cellphone service putter out, isolation sets in.

The condition, Cortman said, is a dangerous one, not just emotionally, but medically.

Cortman referenced U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, who compared the mortality impact of being socially disconnected similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.

"We could lose as many as 15 years off of our lives if we have chronic isolation," Cortman said.

Dr. Johnathon Abramowitz said PTSD and other longterm disorders could develop from untreated trauma and anxiety associated with Hurricane Helene.

The University of North Carolina director of clinical training said feelings of helplessness, fear for future storms and

an overwhelming sense of loss are all possible factors that should raise flags for lowering mental health.

"Over time, they might experience symptoms related to trauma, such as flashbacks, nightmares, or avoidance behaviors," Abramowitz said.

For those struggling with fear-induced or health-related anxiety, both experts recommend a strong support system and a clear, reliable source for information about how to stay safe for the next major storm.

"Giving folks a sense of control, even over small aspects of their health and safety, can help reduce anxiety," Abramowitz said.

Physical health threats from Hurricane Helene

North Carolina's Department of Health has issued an array of health advisories to help ease resident concerns in flooded areas.

To avoid contracting waterborne diseases, washing hands frequently during clean-up and wearing rubber gloves, a disposable dust face mask and waterproof boots have been recommended by state officials.

"Assume that everything touched by flood water is contaminated and will have to be disinfected or thrown out," officials posted online.

Unopened bottled water is the safe choice in hydration, though officials said boiled water or disinfected water with bleach filtration is safe to drink, too.

Though infants under six months and pregnant women should not drink boiled water due to harmful nitrates present, officials said stayed hydrated with the resources available is more important.

Flooded areas, regardless how high, should be avoided due to a rise of breeding grounds for disease-carrying insects like mosquitoes.

As for flushing the toilet amid a massive power outage, officials urge residents to not come in contact with sewage or drainage issues to avoid any effects to health or home.

"Do not use your plumbing system if sewage water has backed up into your home," NCHD officials said.

For information on repairing or constructing a septic tank system, residents can contact their county health department directly.

Use survivor's guilt for good

According to the North Carolina Health Department, there is no "right or wrong way" to feel during or after a hurricane.

But for many survivors of a hurricane that left some of their neighbors not so lucky, guilt will grow.

Cortman said that negative energy of beating oneself up should be channeled elsewhere.

"It doesn't make the world a better place," Cortman said. "If you're wallowing in survivor's guilt, go next door and help that little old lady who's struggling."

Though not everyone will have these effects, the UNC professor said, meeting a struggling person's basic needs, food, hygiene, clothing and shelter, can provide immediate emotional support.

Resources like cognitive-behavioral therapy can help individuals process the traumatic event in a "psychologically healthy way," Abramowitz said, and offer longer-term aid, too.

According to Cortman, just lending a helping hand could not only make the difference in a victim's life, but also ignite the public's sense of resiliency like after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

"It wasn't just red and blue; we were just Americans," Cortman said. "We're rebuilding and we're strong together. And that has to happen in these communities."

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Legal Aid of NC reminding tenants of their rights

October 3, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 500 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE – Many tenants and homeowners throughout Watauga County and western North Carolina face uncertainty in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. In response to these circumstances, Legal Aid of North Carolina is helping tenants understand their rights and how to seek assistance.

According to Legal Aid of NC, for tenants whose rental home has been destroyed or so badly damaged by a natural disaster that the unit is no longer sanitary or safe to live in, NC law gives them the right to cancel their lease within 10 days of the date of the damage.

Tenants must give the property owner or manager written notice of their intent to cancel the lease and are required to pay any rent that is due.

Moreover, the landlord may also end the lease if the damage is too severe for them to repair. If this happens, the landlord must notify the tenant as the lease requires. If the lease does not specify, the amount of time is set by law. For example, on a month-to-month lease, the landlord must provide at least a one-week cancellation notice.

If the tenant chooses to live in the home, the landlord is required to make repairs to make the home safe, decent and sanitary and must do so in a reasonable amount of time. However, the repairs are only legally required if the landlord is aware of the damage.

Tenants must inform their landlord of the needed repairs right away and keep a record of the date and conversation. It is best to make the request in writing, including a handwritten letter, email, text message, or social media message.

Furthermore, if tenants have to move out while repairs are being made, they are not required to pay rent for the time they are not living in the unit. During this time, tenants are responsible for their living expenses, including rent elsewhere, while repairs are being made. FEMA may be able to help with rental costs while displaced.

Landlords can also evict tenants for failing to pay rent even if they are affected by a natural disaster. Tenants who are unable to stay in their home or pay rent should stay in contact with their landlords and try to reach an agreement.

In general, landlords are not responsible for tenants' belongings damaged by a natural disaster. Those with renter's insurance should file a claim. Tenants should also take pictures and document the damage. Those who are uninsured could still receive compensation from FEMA.

Legal Aid of NC is offering immediate assistance by providing survivors with information about their rights, answering questions about insurance claims and advocating for those applying for recovery assistance and appealing decisions.

The nonprofit law firm also helps people apply for assistance from FEMA, appeal decisions, offer long-term support for homeowners and renters, assist long-term recovery groups, and support fraud victims, among other services.

For more information, such as how to apply for FEMA assistance, unemployment aid and other forms of support, visit legalaidnc.org/helene.

The nonprofit's disaster relief hotline can also be reached at (866) 219-5262.

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More than 200 units condemned in Boone

October 3, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 267 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE – Boone's planning and inspections department has condemned more than 200 units due to damage sustained by Hurricane Helene.

During the Boone Town Council's emergency meeting on Wednesday, Oct. 2, Town Manager Amy Davis reported that on Wednesday, planning and inspections had condemned 12 additional units for a total of a little more than 200 units after the storm severely impacted the region beginning on Wednesday, Sept. 25. Town inspections of damaged property are ongoing.

Davis said the town classifies a unit as anything beyond the property's front door, including apartments, multifamily, and commercial property. A unit does not mean individual buildings.

During a joint press conference between the Town of Boone, Watauga County and Appalachian State University on Tuesday, Oct. 1, Mayor Tim Futrelle spoke on the expected timeline before the town is able to know the full extent of damages.

"We don't yet have any type of timeline really on it," Futrelle said. "It will be days and possibly weeks to come before we find exactly what the full extent of damage is."

Boone Fire Chief Jimmy Isaacs spoke further on the matter, saying the town is evaluating structures for damage that would make them hazardous to live in, including damage from flooding and structural damage.

"They've removed power from a lot of buildings, and they have had a couple of buildings that have made some emergency repairs and got power back, but that process is going to be ongoing. There is a lot of area to cover," Isaacs said.

There is currently no timeline for when the town will have a dollar amount for damages caused by Hurricane Helene.

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140 units condemned in Boone

October 3, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 302 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE – Boone's planning and inspections department has condemned approximately 140 units due to damage sustained by Hurricane Helene.

During the Boone Town Council's emergency meeting on Wednesday, Oct. 2, Town Manager Amy Davis reported that on Wednesday, planning and inspections had condemned 12 additional units for approximately a total of 140 units after the storm severely impacted the region beginning on Wednesday, Sept. 25. Town inspections of damaged property are ongoing.

Davis said the town classifies a unit as anything beyond the property's front door, including apartments, multifamily, and commercial property. A unit does not mean individual buildings.

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There is currently no timeline for when the town will have a dollar amount for damages caused by Hurricane Helene

The number of condemned buildings is as of publication.

This story was corrected with new information on the number of condemned buildings. Initially, town officials said more than 200 units had been condemned, but that number was updated to approximately 140.

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Valle Country Fair, Woolly Worm Festival canceled

October 3, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com | Section: Local | 539 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA/AVERY — The destructive path of Hurricane Helene has forced the cancellation of two popular High Country events as the community works to recover from the devastation.

According to organizers, the 46th Annual Valle Country Fair will not take place on Oct. 19 as originally planned.

The event's co-sponsors, Holy Cross Episcopal Church and the Valle Crucis Conference Center, are working on alternative plans to provide necessary human and financial resources to the non-profit agencies and families in need that we so faithfully serve.

"In the meantime, please keep our entire region in your thoughts and prayers," organizers said in a release. "Godspeed to all the first responders and local service agencies who are working mightily in this time of unprecedented need."

Following the announcement of other closings and cancellations across Avery County and the region, officials announced on Wednesday, Oct. 2, that the 47th Annual Banner Elk Woolly Worm Festival, a tradition that attracts thousands annually to the High Country, has been canceled as a result of the devastating damage inflicted by the recent storm Helene.

"It is with pure heartbreak that I bring you the official decision that the 47th Annual Woolly Worm Festival has been canceled," Festival Chairperson Victoria Bowman shared in an email to the community. "The main goal for this year's festival was to connect our entire community to showcase how wonderfully unique Avery County truly is. We wanted so badly to be able to share our magic with you all, but we simply can't do that justice when so many of our locals are suffering."

Bowman noted that the spirit that drives the festival is being exemplified by the connection and galvanized heart of Avery County and its people.

"I suppose the irony in this horrific circumstance is that we are indeed showcasing the county to the world, maybe not with racing worms and funnel cakes, but with the strength and resilience that our people have. Mountain folks are truly built differently; they take care of one another regardless of circumstance," Bowman added. "I experienced it firsthand as my neighbors sheltered and fed us as our property was destroyed before our eyes. Everywhere I look, I see examples of selflessness, determination and tenacity. From our county and town leaders to our first responders, linemen and local business owners, everyone has jumped in to help. We are simply blessed to call this place home and I know we will build back stronger than ever."

Bowman recognized the logistical complications of the festival's cancellation, but provided some insight to plans moving forward.

"We realize that there are financial ramifications for a lot of our attendees with this cancellation, but we do hope that you make plans to attend next year instead. When we are back on our feet, our businesses will need your full support to help regain what has been lost in this," Bowman explained. "The planning committee is dedicated to maintaining the magic of this weekend for our vendors, volunteers, locals and tourists alike. The 2025 festival will be all that more special because of what has transpired this past week. Please be patient as we navigate through the e-ticket refunding process. Vendors, Sponsors and Partners will be contacted directly with a move forward plan as our communication infrastructure is rebuilt."

• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com, 'Valle Country Fair, Woolly Worm Festival canceled', *Watauga Democrat, The*(online), 3 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFBB8C2775B710



Pair of area Walmart stores offering amenities to hurricane victims

October 3, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff report News@wataugademocrat.com| Section: News| 95 Words OpenURL Link

HIGH COUNTRY — Walmart stores in both Boone and Spruce Pine are offering victims affected by Hurricane Helene amenities at no cost at their locations.

The Walmart Supercenter #2496 located at 200 Watauga Village in Boone is offering portable restrooms, laundry, showers, and water. The water distribution is in partnership with the Red Cross, beginning at 2 p.m.

In Spruce Pine, the Walmart Supercenter #2749, located at 2514 Halltown Road is providing portable restrooms, laundry, showers, WiFi hotspot and charging stations via Information Technology Disaster Resource Center Mobile Units, and water distribution beginning at 11:30 a.m.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff report News@wataugademocrat.com, 'Pair of area Walmart stores offering amenities to hurricane victims', *Watauga Democrat, The* (online), 3 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFF5DE5E8CCD00>



Watauga Board of Elections working hard to prepare for Nov. 5 election despite hurricane

October 3, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com | Section: Local | 346 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — Despite the hardship that Hurricane Helene has brought to the community and Western North Carolina, the Watauga County Board of Elections is hard at work preparing for the Nov. 5 election.

Though the hurricane has caused significant disruptions, Watauga election staff and the bipartisan BOE are determined to ensure that every eligible Watauga County voter can vote in this cycle. The Board's motto is: "adapt and overcome."

To reassure the community that elections officials are hard at work preparing for the election and are diligently handling hurricane-related challenges caused, the Board wishes to bring the following developments to the public's attention:

Since Monday, Sept. 30, election staff have been back in the Board's office in the Watauga County courthouse on King Street. Staff are taking calls at (828) 265-8061 and can meet by appointment. Election staff is in regular contact with the North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE), county management, and representatives in the General Assembly, and is coordinating with local agencies. Election staff have evaluated tabulators and laptop computers used for elections and determined that they have not been damaged. Security of all election facilities and equipment has been maintained. Despite internet and cell phone outages, election staff have established a secure connection to the state information system, allowing staff to process registrations and requests for absentee ballots. Election staff and the Board are assessing the viability and availability of voting sites, as well as the availability of election officials. Election staff have received absentee ballots and mailed out absentee ballots. They have also received and sent out electronic ballots to military and overseas voters. Consistent with state law, the Board will meet on Thursday, October 3 to begin approving "absentee by mail" ballots. The Board will continue to hold regular meetings for this purpose through election day. Beginning the week of October 8, election staff will begin training election officials.

"The Board is grateful for the dedication of our election officials, who have made clear that they are available and ready to work," the BOE stated in a press release.

The Board encourages the public to monitor developments at wataugacounty.org/App_pages/Dept/BOE/home.aspx.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com, 'Watauga Board of Elections working hard to prepare for Nov. 5 election despite hurricane', *Watauga Democrat, The*(online), 3 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFBB8C316439E0>



Gov. Cooper stops in Boone as High Country continues to work toward recovery

October 3, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local| 694 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper stopped in Boone to assess damage and relief operations, thank volunteers, and speak with people who were impacted by the storm.

During his Oct. 3 visit, he walked along King Street with Mayor Tim Futrelle and Rep. Ray Pickett as he talked to various community members and business owners. He also went into F.A.R.M Cafe and spoke to those inside. Cooper also stopped at the Holmes Convocation Center American Red Cross Shelter.

He also visited Lansing in Ashe County and was headed to Avery County after leaving Boone.

After he walked around around King Street, he held a press conference front of Betty's Biscuits.

"This has been an unprecedented devastating storm for the people in western North Carolina," Cooper said. "I think the widespread nature of this storm is astounding. So many communities have been hurt."

He said 31 aircraft continue to help with search and rescue and also help by "surging commodities into all parts of Western North Carolina."

He said they are in constant contact with the utility companies and that progress is being made to restore power. He also said that they are continuing to work to open arteries into the area to provide for supplies and rescue teams. He said this response is a team effort.

"We're grateful for all of our volunteer organizations and people of faith that have been coordinating to work throughout Western North Carolina," Cooper said. "If there was ever a time that we needed you, it is now. We know that the people of Western North Carolina are resilient. This is gonna be a strong short-term response and a strong long-term recovery."

For many in Watauga County and Western North Carolina, it will be a long recovery process as some lost everything.

"To wake up one morning and everything that you own be gone is a tragic situation," Cooper said. "This is an unprecedented situation that is gonna require an unprecedented response. We are working to turn on every avenue of resources that we can to help people."

Cooper wants those impacted by the storm to apply for disaster services through FEMA, which can be done at disasterassistance.gov, through the FEMA App or by calling 1-800-621-3362.

Already, Cooper said more than 50,000 people have registered for FEMA assistance and approximately \$6 million has already gone out.

"We want to help people in that way in the short term, but there are also longer-term solutions for people who have lost their homes, and we want to be there for them," Cooper said.

With many community members not being covered by flood insurance in the area, Cooper said he thinks there will be a comprehensive effort to deal with the flooding disaster that is here because "you really don't see many private insurance policies covering flooding."

"We know that's going to be a special effort both at the federal level and at the state level," Cooper said.

According to Boone Mayor Tim Futrelle, more than 200 units have been condemned so far in Boone.

As for the infrastructure, Cooper said that Hurricane Helene caused "complete devastation" to the transportation infrastructure and to a lot of the water infrastructure.

"We are concentrating first on the primary arteries that can help us get supplies, repair crews, medical assistance through," Cooper said. "For example, we're working with hospitals, utility crews, cell phone crews. Where are you having trouble getting to? And our department of transportation is going and trying to help to clear a way or to make temporary repairs and to find routes into communities that are very difficult to get to. So that's the short term. The long term is it's gonna take billions of dollars to make sure that we bring this transportation (infrastructure) back up where it needs to be."

He said that when Western North Carolina is rebuilt, which "we will," it needs to be done in a more resilient way.

"People had never seen this kind of destruction and raging water before," Cooper said. "Now we know that it can do this, so as we rebuild, we have to think that this can happen, so we have to make the investment, which is gonna be more, but make the investment to make it more resilient."

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Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com, 'Gov. Cooper stops in Boone as High Country continues to work toward recovery', *Watauga Democrat, The*(online), 3 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFF5DE586A6D60>



Chamber Foundation to cover October tuition costs for licensed early childhood centers

October 3, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com | Section: Local | 357 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — The Boone Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation Board of Directors agreed to allocate \$125,000 toward the cost of tuition payments for the month of October at licensed early childhood development centers throughout Watauga County.

These funds will be allocated to The Children's Council of Watauga County and distributed to the licensed facilities and licensed in-home facilities.

In response to the community-wide devastation felt from the effects of Hurricane Helene, the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Commission, Inc Foundation (Boone Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation) has been soliciting funds for business community stabilization and community support.

"Our foundation board felt this was a direct way to ensure stability in the critical early childhood industry while also freeing up cash for families to cover other storm-related expenses at this time," said David Jackson, President/CEO of the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce. "The Children's Council of Watauga County will work directly with the centers on getting cash in their accounts by early next week because we know time is of the essence in keeping these businesses open. As more of our community is able to return to work, these centers are going to be part of that critical infrastructure that allows that to happen."

"You have saved lives with this donation," said Elisha Childers, Executive Director of The Children's Council of Watauga County. "You have made it possible for our child care centers, who are small business owners, to pay their staff and to survive while their centers cannot be open and fully operational. For the small family childcare home provider, this is their livelihood. These are businesses that were already struggling to survive. Providers have been so worried, not only for themselves but for their workers. I do have words to fully describe what this truly means to this community. Thank you to all who have contributed and made this possible. It is overwhelming generosity."

The Boone Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation continues to solicit donations for additional support for the business community and will work in the coming days to identify additional funding disbursements as money allows. Donations can be made at www.boonechamber.com/foundation or by calling (828) 264-2225.

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Some communities in Watauga may be without power until Oct. 11

October 3, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 208 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — Some communities in Watauga County could be without power until Oct. 11.

Due to the severe damage, Shulls Mill, Beech Creek, Peoria, Bethel, Kellersville, Valle Crucis, Elk—Triplett, Rominger, and Laurel Creek may not see their power restored until midnight on Oct. 11, according to Blue Ridge Energy.

Other areas are expected to have power by midnight on Oct. 6.

Some isolated pockets will take longer due to the most significant damage.

BRE had had more than 400 broken poles across the system.

On average, in perfect conditions, it takes a crew of 4-5 nearly eight hours to remove, replace, rewire, and prepare a three-phase pole for the grid. Even a standard pole that carries lines to a home takes roughly four hours to repair.

An army of over 500 line technician crews, along with tree and grading contractors, are working 24/7 restoring power to Blue Ridge Energy members after Hurricane Helene left behind historic damage to western North Carolina.

"Over 80 percent of our 8,500 miles of line, power poles and substations were destroyed or severely damaged—it's a herculean effort to rebuild a system that originally took years to construct, said Renee Walker, director of public relations.

Crews are working to restore the remaining 20,309 members without power as of 5:30 pm Thursday.

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Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com, 'Some communities in Watauga may be without power until Oct. 11', *Watauga Democrat, The* (online), 3 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFF5DE488F3150>



Spectrum opens nearly 90,000 out-of-home WiFi access points through Oct. 7

October 3, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com | Section: State | 437 Words OpenURL Link

Spectrum has opened nearly 90,000 out-of-home WiFi access points across Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and bordering areas that will be available to all users at no cost through Oct. 7.

Spectrum WiFi access points are typically found in public parks, marinas, city streets and other public areas and will help ensure available connectivity as the recovery continues. Spectrum Mobile and Internet customers will continue to get free, unlimited access to nationwide Spectrum Out-of-Home WiFi on-the-go.

Access points can be found at https://www.spectrum.com/internet/wifi-access-points?opredirect=wifi-hotspots?opredirect=wifi-hotspots&opredirect=wifi-hotspots.

In addition, Spectrum is coordinating with state and local agencies to provide temporary connectivity to relief and shelter locations where possible.

Spectrum technicians and engineers are actively working to restore service in impacted areas. Teams have been staged and ready to quickly assess damages as soon as areas are deemed safe and make repairs to restore service to impacted customers as power is returned. Often, services are restored for customers as soon as power comes back online. Understanding the inconvenience of being without service, Spectrum will continue to provide updates to customers as they become available.

Spectrum provides the following resources to help customers prepare and stay connected to news and information before, during and after Hurricanes and major storms:

Customers can sign into their accounts and update their notification preferences to stay up to date with any alerts. The Spectrum Storm Center is updated with information regarding outages or other issues that may affect Spectrum services. With the My Spectrum App customers are able to manage their services from a mobile device. Spectrum Reach is providing clients with creative and messaging support to help them communicate to their impacted customers through its Right Message Guarantee that gives advertising partners the ability to quickly change their creative at no charge when there is a large-scale change in circumstances. Spectrum also provides a Hurricane Supply Checklist to help customers get prepared prior to a storm's arrival.

Spectrum has also announced it has committed \$1 million, including \$250,000 in cash contributions and \$750,000 in in-kind public service announcement (PSA) airtime to support Hurricane Helene relief efforts. The contributions will assist organizations in providing much-needed aid and assistance to impacted communities. Spectrum will donate \$50,000 each to the OneSC Fund, to the Volunteer Florida Foundation, and to the NC Disaster Relief Fund. An additional \$100,000 will be donated to local organizations in the hardest hit areas of Georgia; along the Western Florida coastline; and impacted communities in and around Asheville, NC and Spartanburg, SC. The Company is also offering \$750,000 in PSAs that will air at no cost to assist these organizations, and other community partners, with fundraising and awareness for disaster relief efforts.

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Harris, Biden assess Helene damage - Harris, Biden take in Helene's destruction in separate visits to Carolinas, Georgia

October 3, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)

Author: CHRIS MEGERIAN and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press | Section: B | 1074 Words

Page: 5 OpenURL Link

AUGUSTA, Ga. - Vice President Kamala Harris praised the workers straining to "meet the needs of people who must be seen, who must be heard" Wednesday, as she and President Joe Biden surveyed Hurricane Helene 's path of destruction in separate visits to Georgia and the Carolinas.

Biden flew over toppled trees, twisted metal and towering piles of debris in the normally tourist-friendly downtown of Asheville as he took an aerial tour of some of the hardest-hit parts of North Carolina.

Nearly 200 miles to the south in Georgia, Harris was in Augusta, where fallen trees littered the sides of the highway, their trunks cracked like matchsticks.

"I've been reading and hearing about the work you've been doing over the last few days, and I think it really does represent some of the best of what we each know can be done," Harris said. "Especially when we coordinate around local, state, federal resources to meet the needs of people who must be seen, who must be heard."

She added, "I am now listening."

The death toll climbed to at least 179 people, and power and cellular service remained unavailable in some places.

Many highways in the hard-hit parts of North Carolina remained inaccessible. From his Marine One helicopter, Biden saw flooded roads, piles of shredded lumber and displaced sandbags, emergency trucks and downed powerlines. In one area, homes were partly underwater, and it was hard to distinguish between lake and land.

The role was familiar for Biden, who frequently was called on to survey damage and console victims after tornadoes, wildfires, tropical storms and other natural disasters. But it's less so for Harris until now, as she vies to succeed him as president. Both also seek to demonstrate a larger commitment and competence in helping devastated communities after Donald Trump's false claims about their administration's response.

Biden wore a vest and boots. Before his air tour, he hugged and grabbed the hand of Asheville Mayor Esther Manheimer who was at the airport in Greenville, S.C., to meet him. The White House said he would visit Florida and Georgia on Thursday.

Manheimer noted they could not close down the area's one operable road for Biden's motorcade. The White House said Harris also spoke to the mayor and plans her own trip to North Carolina in coming days.

Before leaving Washington, Biden made a point of mentioning how an ongoing dockworkers strike could make getting supplies to hard-hit areas more difficult.

"Natural disasters are incredibly consequential. The last thing we need on top of that is a man-made disaster that's going on at the ports," the president said. "We're getting pushback already, we're hearing from the folks regionally that they're having trouble getting product that they need because of the port strike."

Harris' trip, meanwhile, presented an additional political test. She's trying to step into a role for which Biden is well known - showing the empathy that Americans expect in times of tragedy - in the closing stretch of her White House campaign.

The vice president last visited scenes of natural disasters as a California senator, including when she went to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria in 2017 and when she walked through charred wreckage in Paradise, California, after the Camp Fire in 2018.

Julie Chavez Rodriguez, Harris' campaign manager and former state director in her Senate office, said the vice president uses her experience consoling victims as a courtroom prosecutor to connect with people after tragedies.

She said the trip to Georgia was a chance for Harris "to continue to show her leadership and her ability to get things done, versus Donald Trump and JD Vance who want to dismantle the basic services and the role that the government should play."

Trump, the Republican nominee, traveled to Valdosta, Georgia, on Monday with a Christian charity organization that brought trucks of fuel, food, water and other supplies. The former president accused Biden of not responding to calls from Georgia Republican Gov. Brian Kemp. However, Kemp spoke with Biden the prior day, and the governor said the state was getting everything it needed.

Biden was infuriated by Trump's claim, saying Trump was "lying, and the governor told him he was lying."

The White House said as many as 1,000 active-duty soldiers will help deliver food, fuel and supplies in the region.

"Even before Hurricane Helene hit, I directed my team to do everything possible to prepare to support communities in the storm's path," Biden said. "I mobilized the entire Federal government to bring every possible resource to the fight to save lives and help those in urgent need."

He later headed to Raleigh, N.C., for a briefing.

Trump claimed without evidence that Democratic leaders withheld help from Republican areas, an accusation that better describes his own approach to disaster relief. He recently threatened that he would withhold wildfire assistance from California because of disagreements with Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom.

When Trump was president, Puerto Rico was devastated by Hurricane Maria, which killed 3,000 people. Trump's administration waited until the fall of 2020, just weeks before the presidential election, to release \$13 billion in assistance for Puerto Rico's recovery. A federal government watchdog found that Trump administration officials hampered an investigation into delays in the aid delivery.

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