

Helene rescues top 2,100; death toll at 204 and rising

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(The Center Square) — More than 2,100 have been rescued in North Carolina, the federal government said Thursday as the death toll from Hurricane Helene reached 204, fifth deadliest in the last three guarters of a century.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency said 38 search and rescue teams are in operation, cellular connectivity is at 62%, and distribution of commodities, feeding and hydration is happening throughout western North Carolina. The Appalachian Mountain region from Virginia to South Carolina and Georgia absorbed 24 inches of rain in many places, and more than 30 in some locations.

Buncombe County, home of the region's largest city of Asheville at just under 100,000, has reported 61 deaths. Thursday marked the seventh day of search and rescue and eighth day since Helene crashed into the Big Bend of Florida as a Category 4 hurricane with sustained winds of 140 mph.

Damage estimates for the Southeast range from \$95 billion to \$160 billion, pending the metrics of inclusion up to and including economic loss. For example, property damage estimates are in the range of \$15 billion to \$26 billion; and published reports say a U.S. Department of Agriculture official estimated \$7 billion in insurance payouts for crop losses alone. AccuWeather estimates total damage and economic loss between \$145 billion and \$160 billion.

"The federal relief and assistance that we have been providing has included FEMA providing \$750 for folks who need immediate needs being met, such as food, baby formula and the like," said Vice President Kamala Harris on a visit to Augusta, Georgia, on Wednesday. "You can apply now for anyone who is watching this, who has been affected. There are FEMA personnel who are going door to door to interact personally with folks, especially those who do not have electricity.

"FEMA is also providing tens of thousands more dollars for folks to help them be able to deal with home repair, to be able to cover a deductible when and if they have insurance, and also hotel costs."

Midafternoon Thursday, the Carolinas, Georgia, Virginia and Florida still had more than 933,000 without power. That figure included 356,561 in North Carolina. It had been more than 1 million.

A release from U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards, R-N.C., says 142 water systems are on a boil advisory, 69 plants have no power and 47 systems are out of water. About 217,000 are without power in the western part of the state, the release says; 93% of substations have been restored online; and 16 CVS pharmacies are closed in his district.

According to DriveNC.org, Helene has caused 540 road closures as of 3 p.m. Thursday. The number has increased steadily over the previous 36 hours. It includes three interstates, 36 federal highways, 51 state roads, and 450 secondary roads. More than 100 roads have been reopened.

The infrastructure collapse has led to some areas only accessible by air, others by foot. Social media has shown a helicopter pilot finding someone who flashed a sun-kissed mirror in a grassy valley, enabling medicine to be delivered; and mules taking supplies to include insulin up the muddied paths once home to vehicles.

Edwards said in the release, "Please do not try to visit or travel through the areas hardest hit by the storm such as Henderson and Buncombe counties. However, I'm here to remind you that Cherokee, Graham and Swain counties are open, and they are desperately in need of visitors to support their economy. These counties have been going above and beyond for their neighbors to get supplies into the hardest hit counties, but could use some support, too.

"Small business owners in far western counties rely on tourism to get by each year."

Edwards said with the blanket "do not drive" to western North Carolina, the businesses in that southwestern-most pocket of the state have had cancellations pile up.

Eight hurricanes since 1950 have killed 100 or more people. Helene is only eclipsed — so far — by Katrina (2005, deaths 1,392), Audrey (1957, deaths 416), Camille (1969, deaths 256) and Sandy (2012, deaths 219). Thursday's reports pushed it past Diane (1955, deaths 184).

Asheville's flood woes are compared to 1916, when in fact mules hauling supplies were more the norm. In July that year, a hurricane made landfall from the Gulf of Mexico and trekked toward northern Alabama and Tennessee to dump rainfall in western North Carolina, and a second hurricane about a week later made landfall at Charleston, South Carolina, and headed for the mountains.

The sequence came to be known as the Great Flood of 1916.

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HEALING from HELENE

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BY THE NUMBERS

DEATH TOLL

95 people were killed by Hurricane Helene in North Carolina as of Thursday, according to CNN.

191 people were killed by Helene across the Southeast as of Thursday.

Hundreds more remain missing.

ROAD CONDITIONS

465 roads remain closed in Western North Carolina due to Hurricane Helene, as of noon Thursday. Officials are limiting access to the roads to local and hurricane response traffic. Visit drivenc.gov to check routes. Most of the primary routes have reopened, but all lanes of Interstates 26 and 40 are closed near North Carolina's border with Tennessee. The N.C. Department of Transportation sent more than 1,500 employees, 1,000 chainsaws, 8,000 barricades and signs and more than 1,500 trucks with graders, backhoes and loaders to the region on Monday and Tuesday.

HOW TO HELP

There are shortages of water, power, gas, food and communications in Western North Carolina. The following agencies are raising money and accepting supplies to help. Among the suggested items needed are: bottled water, lighting, sports drinks and hydration packs (powdered packets), baby wipes, diapers for children and adults, baby formula, baby bottles, bug spray, sunscreen, plastic utensils, manual can openers, trash bags, paper products, nonperishable food, cleaning supplies, plastic sheeting or tarps, toothbrushes, toothpaste, toiletries, sanitation items, pet food for cats and dogs, sanitizer, feminine hygiene items, heavy duty work gloves, rubber boots and socks, all sizes and unopened.

Reported drop-off locations

Harnett County C.A.R.E.S. (Community Aid, Relief and Essential Support) drop off locations during business hours include the Harnett County Sheriff's Office, Harnett County Courthouse, all local police departments in Harnett County, the Dunn License Plate Agency, the Lillington Area Chamber of Commerce, Black River Fire Department and Mt. Pisgah Church in Erwin. Check donations should be made payable to DUMA (Dunn United Ministerial Association) with "Hurricane Relief" in the memo line. Deadline to donate is Oct. 21.

Harnett County Agriculture Center, located at 126 Alexander Drive, Lillington, will accept donations until Friday, Oct. 4.

Miracle Movers of the Sandhills continues to collect donations in the Carolina Lakes Lakeside Realty parking lot at 83 Carolina Lakes Road, next to the Carolina Lakes Golf Course in the Sanford area of Harnett County. The truck will be there every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. until it is full.

Summerville Bunnlevel Fire & Rescue Station 2, located at 6825 U.S. Highway 401 S., Bunnlevel, is partnering with the Little River Baptist Association. Donations will be accepted from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and other times

by appointment through Chief Brian Heath at 919-793-7516.

Roberts Grove Church located at 720 Robert's Grove Road, Dunn, is serving as a collection site for water and non-perishable food items for the denomination's retreat center and summer camp Cragmont Assembly in Black Mountain. Cragmont has teamed up with a ministry to serve food to residents of Black Mountain and surrounding areas.

Midway High School will collect items at Friday's football game. The Athletic Boosters are joining Sampson County Football and Salemburg Baptist Church in this effort.

Benson Fire Department will collect supplies until 3 p.m. Friday to send to Avery County. Drop donations off at the station at 313 S. Elm St.

Benson Global Methodist Church is collecting supplies to send to Avery County the first of next week. Paul Dunn with Mule City Feeds will be sending his truck. To drop off supplies, call the Rev. Billy Olsen at 910-544-6921. If you prefer to donate money to purchase supplies, write a check to Benson Global Methodist Church and put "For Hurricane Relief" in the memo line. Checks can be dropped off at the church office, 205 E. Church St., or in the mail slot at the Benson Area Chamber of Commerce office, 122 E. Main St.

Dunn Rotary Club is accepting donations for hurricane relief in the Food Lion parking lot at 1243 E. Cumberland St. in Dunn between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 6. Donated items will be delivered to the Black Mountain and Swannanoa areas. Also, a member of the Dunn Rotary Club family lives in Black Mountain and their home was flooded and damaged by the storm. Anyone who would like to contribute can send checks made payable to the Dunn Rotary Club c/o Larry Snipes at 721 Westbrook Ave., Dunn, NC 28334.

North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund donation information is available by visiting nc.gov/donate . Donations made to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund will go to nonprofits working to meet the immediate needs of storm victims such as food and water, cleaning supplies and other emergency supplies. All of the donations made will go to disaster relief.

Donations can also be mailed to: NC Disaster Relief Fund, 20312 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-0312; or NC Disaster Relief Fund, c/o United Way of NC, 1130 Kildaire Farm Road, Suite 100, Cary NC 27511.

Campbell University is collecting items in partnership with Baptists on Mission, a nonprofit organization already on the ground in hard-hit areas serving meals and providing units for showers and laundry. The organization is in need of laundry pods (unscented); tall kitchen garbage bags (unscented); paper products such as plates, towels, baby wipes and toilet paper; and gift cards to large retail stores like Walmart and Food Lion. Bins are available at the Oscar N. Harris Student Union, Wallace Building, Butler Chapel, Cornelia Campbell Alumni House and Leon Levine Hall of Medical Sciences in Buies Creek and the Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law in Raleigh. Requested items will be accepted at those locations through Oct. 7. Future collection needs will be announced in the coming days.

A wide range of groups are supporting the hurricane relief effort, including the American Red Cross, Baptists On Mission, Samaritan's Purse, the Salvation Army, United Way of North Carolina and Catholic Charities USA, just to name a few.

Visit www.ncdps.gov for more information and to find resources available to assist victims of Hurricane Helene.

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SECU Foundation donates \$3.75M in disaster relief

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RALEIGH — In response to the catastrophic flooding, landslides, and widespread destruction in Western North Carolina from Hurricane Helene, the SECU Foundation Board of Directors approved a \$3.75 million disaster relief package to assist communities affected.

Funding will be awarded to five organizations that have operations underway to immediately provide water, food, supplies, shelter, and other emergency services to those in need. Grantees include:

\$1 million to Feeding the Carolinas\$1 million to The Salvation Army of the Carolinas\$1 million to Baptists on Mission\$500,000 to the American Red Cross North Carolina\$250,000 to Meals on Wheels North Carolina

These funds are designated as general purpose to give the organizations the maximum flexibility to serve their communities.

"The impacts of Hurricane Helene will be felt for a long time and the needs of those affected are many," said SECU Foundation Board Chair Chris Ayers. "The Foundation grants will provide some much-needed relief to help address the increased demand for services as these organizations respond to community needs. We are grateful for the unwavering commitment of these non-profits and their volunteers."

"The devastation that Hurricane Helene brought to our Western North Carolina family, friends, and neighbors is tremendous," said SECU Foundation Executive Director Jama Campbell. "North Carolina faces unbelievable challenges, and we need each other now more than ever. Our Foundation will continue to monitor relief efforts and help our communities on this long path of recovery."

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Campbell University collecting supplies for WNC

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Campbell University announced efforts to gather and send supplies and aid to areas of western North Carolina devastated by Hurricane Helene. Support is also available for Campbell students and their families affected by the storm.

Vice President for Student Life and Christian Mission Rev. Faithe Beam said the university is collecting items in partnership with Baptists on Mission, a nonprofit organization already on the ground in hard-hit areas serving meals and providing units for showers and laundry. The organization is in need of laundry pods (unscented); tall kitchen garbage bags (unscented); paper products such as plates, towels, baby wipes and toilet paper; and gift cards to large retail stores like Walmart and Food Lion.

"We have long partnered with Baptists on Mission to help support disaster relief," Beam said. "In the coming days and weeks, Baptists on Mission volunteers will be washing thousands of loads of laundry. Based on what they recommended we decided that collecting specific items to support the laundering of clothes were some of the easiest items for students to donate. Our students are familiar with that need."

Bins are available at the Oscar N. Harris Student Union, Wallace Building, Butler Chapel, Cornelia Campbell Alumni House and Leon Levine Hall of Medical Sciences in Buies Creek and the Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law in Raleigh. Requested items will be accepted at those locations through Monday, Oct. 7. Future collection needs will be announced in the coming days.

Monetary donations are also needed. Campbell University encourages those wishing to give to contact Baptists on Mission, the American Red Cross and the United Way. Beam said for those who want to help, but can't afford such purchases or donations, prayer is also appreciated.

The Office of Student Life also announced on Tuesday that support is available for students, faculty and staff who have been impacted directly by the storm or who have close connections to areas hit hardest. Counseling services are available, and appointments can be made online at campbell.edu/counseling-services.

"It is critical to care for yourself when traumatic events of this scale occur," said Laura Rich, dean of student well-being. "We have all been stressed by continued images of the suffering of our neighbors and giving careful attention to our own ability to process traumatic information allows us to use our energy in helpful ways. Connecting regularly with supportive friends and family, incorporating regular physical movement, setting reasonable limits on media consumption, and finding ways to contribute are all healthy responses to help us cope with disasters of this scope."

The Office of Spiritual Life is also available to offer prayer and pastoral care for the community. Contact Rev. Louisa Ward, dean for spiritual life and campus minister at ward@campbell.edu or visit Butler Chapel to meet with a minister. There will be a campus-wide time of prayer at Campus Worship Night at 6 p.m. Monday in Butler Chapel. Those unable to attend can livestream the service. All are welcome.

Visit Campbell University's Hurricane Helene relief page online at campbell.edu/storm-relief/ for more information.

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Glimpses of grace

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Have you ever been so angry with or hurt by someone and God gives you a glimpse of the grace he has given you? Have you ever been critical of something and God convicted your heart by showing you the grace that has covered you? Did that glimpse cause you to pause and thank God for all he has done?

There have been times in my life when the enemy tried to turn conviction from God into condemnation. There is a huge difference! God will convict you for growth but the devil will try to tell you that you are of no use and you have fallen too far from grace. We must combat this lie with the truth of the grace God has lavished upon us! (Ephesians 1:7-8 and 2 Corinthians 9:8)

I have had so many moments that God reminded me of the times I was covered. We must not take grace for granted or use it as an excuse to continue in sin. We so often fail.

The feeling of being covered with grace when I have made a mistake is such a humbling feeling. The humility causes me to respond by sharing the grace I've been given with someone else.

If we look around, there are glimpses of grace in everything. We have so many good things that we do not deserve. Our sins are covered by a sinless man who was also a fully merciful God.

What would our lives look like here on this earth if each of us remembered the grace we had received and extended it to those around us before lashing out or staying in a place that we allowed hurt to drive us? I have to ask the Lord everyday to help me with this. I tend to hold on to hurt and allow it to pull me away as a mode of protection. I struggle hard some days. But the grace of God reminds me to give grace.

Romans 11:6 says, "And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace."

In this world of selfishness and greed it is so refreshing to catch glimpses of God's grace.

It's hard sometimes to see another persons point of view until we are reminded of our own shortcomings.

Grace is a gift that we have received and we should give as well. We did nothing to earn the gift. (Ephesians 2:4-9)

By grace we have been saved!

We have so much to be thankful for! Joy and hope are ours in Christ. Life seems so chaotic these days and grace feels like a foreign concept, but we can start by making changes in our lives that reflect the grace we have received.

Today let's be in prayer for our neighbors who are suffering such tragic loss due to Hurricane Helene and lend them a helping hand in whatever way we are able. It is my prayer that even in the midst of devastation they will be able to catch glimpses of God's grace.

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Lithium-ion batteries, electrical systems pose fire, hazmat risks during Hurricane Helene cleanups

October 4, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Mike Sunnucks APG Newspapers | Section: News | 425 Words OpenURL Link

The dangers of lithium-ion batteries and electrical systems fires continue days after Hurricane Helene's ruinous path — and now another tropical system (Tropical Storm Milton) is potentially threatening Florida on Sunday and into next week.

In Florida's Treasure Island, which saw historic storm surges from Helene, hazmat crews responded to a beach resort Thursday after an e-bike and 20 to 30 lithium batteries were found in a still flooded basement at the Bilmar Beach Resort on the Gulf of Mexico.

Lithium-ion batteries can catch fire or explode if they are exposed to water.

Treasure Island Fire Rescue said the e-bike, which contained a battery, was reported to be submerged in water. When firefighters responded, they found the other batteries in the flooded basement along with containers of paint thinners and chlorine.

The items posed a dangerous fire and hazardous material situation and were removed, officials said.

The batteries could combust days or even weeks after being exposed to or submerged in water, according to TIFR.

During the hazmat response, firefighters responded to a debris fire in a nearby driveway.

A number of fires during and after Hurricane Helene have been attributed to lithium-ion batteries in electric cars, golf cars, scooters, e-bikes and electronics catching fire.

Other fires have been blamed on downed power lines, flooded electrical systems and surges after post-storm power restorations.

Rinea Blanchard, owner of Lafayette, Louisiana-based Superior Contract Cleaning, has experience helping with home restorations after other hurricanes.

She said homeowners also have to be wary of the continued fire hazards presented by downed power lines and water-damaged electrical systems.

Blanchard said while lithium batteries pose a threat, she is worried about more traditional electrical issues.

"Water getting into electrical panels, short circuits from flooding, and downed lines making contact with structures or debris," she said.

In addition to proper battery storage, Blanchard says people with water damage should consider installing new circuit breakers and surge protectors and have an electrician inspect systems.

Florida State Fire Marshall Jimmy Patronis said Oct. 1 there had been 16 confirmed lithium battery-caused fires in Florida during and after the Category 4 hurricane with more investigations ongoing. He urged proper disposal of electric vehicles and electronics that was exposed to water during the storm.

"If a vehicle needs to be towed, contact a reputable tow company in your area to safely remove it from your

property. EVs and lithium-battery powered devices cannot be disposed of in a typical car lot or trash bin, so you will also want to contact your local government on the best locations for safe disposal," said Patronis, who also serves as Florida's chief financial officer.

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Top tips for cleaning up and rebuilding after Hurricane Helene

October 4, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: MIKE SUNNUCKS APG Newspapers | Section: News | 862 Words OpenURL Link

Bud Summers has more than three decades of experience in the construction, mitigation and restoration sectors. That includes plenty of work after big storms and extreme weather events.

We asked Summers some top tips for homeowners and small businesses as they clean up and rebuild after Hurricane Helene and how much storms have changed. He said there could be higher prices and limited supplies for construction and other material and noted a number of other challenges and best practices.

What are some of the major challenges and frustration points homeowners and business owners might expect to face after Helene?

Home and business owners face significant challenges during the cleanup and rebuilding process after natural disasters like the damage caused by Hurricane Helene. Some of these challenges are:

Emotional toll: The stress of dealing with property damage, financial losses, and the fear of potential future disasters is an immense burden.

Mold and structural issues: If clean-up isn't started immediately, problems like mold growth or foundational damage may worsen over time.

Access to contractors and materials: High demand after large-scale events often means long waits for skilled professionals and essential supplies.

Delays in insurance processing: Waiting for claims to be reviewed and approved can halt progress. Proper documentation is vital for your insurance to be able to process your claim.

What are the common mistakes people make during clean-up and rebuilding?

Waiting too long to begin clean-up: Water damage needs immediate attention. Delaying remediation efforts can lead to further deterioration, including mold growth and structural damage. Removing excess water and wet items as soon as possible can make a major difference in the amount of damage.

Not documenting damage thoroughly: Failing to take pictures and note damage for insurance claims can result in delays, reduced, or even denial of payouts.

Choosing unverified contractors: In a rush to rebuild, people might hire contractors without properly checking references or credentials, leading to substandard repairs, as they may not understand the science of drying. Improper drying can later lead to mold and structural damage that oftentimes is not covered by insurance.

Skipping professional help: Some attempt to handle clean-up without consulting professionals, which may lead to missed issues and safety risks.

Where should we act fast and where should we take our time after storms and natural disasters?

Act fast: Water and mold remediation should be the top priority. Water damage gets worse with time, leading to secondary issues like mold, mildew, and structural degradation. Board up windows or cover exposed areas to prevent additional weather from entering the exposed structure.

Contact a licensed property remediation company such as PuroClean, to make sure that your property is dried quickly and according to industry standards, and they can help you navigate your insurance claims.

Take your time: Planning long-term rebuilding efforts and navigating insurance claims are steps to approach with patience. A rushed decision could lead to hiring an unreliable contractor or receiving less from insurance than you're owed.

What kind of scams should homeowners be on the watch out for after Helene?

After disasters, scammers often take advantage of homeowners who are desperate to get their lives back to normal:

"Storm chasers": These are fraudulent contractors who go door-to-door offering quick fixes. They are often unlicensed, and they don't have the proper understanding of the drying science. They often demand cash upfront and then do substandard work or disappear without completing the work.

Fake charities: Scammers may set up fake charities to collect donations for disaster relief. Always verify that you're donating to a legitimate organization.

Insurance fraud: Be cautious of anyone who offers to negotiate with your insurance company on your behalf in exchange for a portion of your payout. These could be fraudsters trying to steal personal information. Make sure that you always have proper documentation, including photos and videos of damage, discarded items, and any work performed on your property.

It's essential to vet contractors, check licenses, and confirm that charities are legitimate through resources like the Better Business Bureau or Charity Navigator.

Are you seeing storms and major events and their impacts changing?

Yes, storms and weather events are evolving, with many experts noting an

increase in both the frequency and intensity of these disasters. Larger, more intense hurricanes, severe flooding, and prolonged droughts are becoming more common due to climate change.

This shift places additional pressure on recovery efforts, as communities need to build stronger, more resilient infrastructure to withstand future storms.

At PuroClean, we've noticed that response times, preparedness, and the scale of services required are becoming more critical in our operations.

What is your top piece of advice for homeowners recovering from Helene in North Carolina, Florida and other states?

My top piece of advice for those cleaning up and rebuilding after a disaster is to focus on both immediate action and long-term planning.

Begin mitigation efforts quickly—removing water, securing property, and preventing mold—but don't rush into major decisions. Take the time to properly vet contractors, understand your insurance policies, and plan to rebuild with resilience in mind, considering the increased intensity of storms. Always ensure that you're working with professionals, whether it's for cleanup or reconstruction, to avoid common pitfalls and scams.

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Ag commissioner calls for Helene donations

October 4, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: David Beasley The Center Square | Section: News | 397 Words OpenURL Link

Among the massive damage to western North Carolina from Hurricane Helene has been the loss of farm livestock fences, Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler said.

He called for donations to help farmers. Damage estimates are unclear to the state's No. 1 industry, a \$111.1 billion economic engine.

"We have seen time and time again our agriculture community support one another in times of need, and this is no different," Troxler said. "We are seeing an outpouring of support with hay, animal feed, fencing and other supplies that are going out to those needing these resources. In the days ahead, we know we are going to need even more fencing supplies, especially solar fence chargers to help livestock producers. If you have resources to donate, please go to our website to let us know."

A portal for donations has been set up by the Agriculture Department at tinyurl.com/ag-portal.

"The form asks if you need help or want to help," Troxler's office said. "To donate, click on the 'Want to Help' button; then you will be asked for contact information and items you have to donate."

The portal can also be used by farmers to request help such as someone temporarily caring for animals or providing food and supplies for them.

"We are working with local authorities to determine routes for moving livestock within and from the area," the portal states. "PLEASE DO NOT ACT ON YOUR OWN! Many roads are not safe or passable and unauthorized access will slow down rescue and restoration efforts."

Troxler toured the damaged areas on Thursday.

"Around anything that flows water, there is mass destruction," he told the Southern Farm Network. "And, you know, we've been familiar with hurricanes in eastern North Carolina, but this is different, to kind of put it in perspective. It's the damage. It looks more like tornadoes. I mean, it's utter water flow, utter devastation. Buildings are gone. We've lost a lot of lives so far. So it is totally devastating for ag up here."

Some of the area's best farmland was in river bottoms, the low-lying areas around rivers, Troxler said.

"So that's what forged away," he said. "It's pitiful, and apple trees that have been there for a long time blown out of the ground. So we got a lot of pieces to pick up to get these people back on their feet, and it's not going to be an overnight thing. This is a marathon."

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John Hood: Political leaders must rise to Helene's challenge

October 4, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Bobby Burns | Section: News | 645 Words OpenURL Link

I got it wrong. Deeply wrong. Embarrassingly wrong.

It was a few days after Hurricane Floyd struck the coast on Sept. 16, 1999. I'd been covering North Carolina politics for more than a dozen years by then, penning my syndicated column and appearing regularly on radio and television. Our discussion program "N.C. Spin" had debuted the previous fall on the Triangle's Fox affiliate and was in the process of expanding to some two dozen TV and radio stations across the state.

During a segment of the show devoted to the destruction wrought by Floyd, I said something to the effect that North Carolina's emergency personnel, government agencies, utilities, private contractors, and relief organizations knew what to do and how to do it. They didn't need politicians holding press conferences and yapping incessantly about matters beyond their ken.

I thought I was praising the skill and determination of those at the forefront of the response to Hurricane Floyd, which devastated much of eastern North Carolina and killed an estimated 85 people, including 51 North Carolinians. I thought I was championing policy expertise over political exploitation.

What I was really doing was exhibiting my ignorance.

One "N.C. Spin" viewer was particularly incensed: then-Gov. Jim Hunt. One of the targets of my criticism, he let it be known through a mutual acquaintance that he considered my argument poorly reasoned. I don't remember the specifics of what got passed on to me, but it was something to the effect that in times of crisis, political leadership is crucial.

Emergency responders aren't necessarily sure what to do when. Agencies butt heads. Harried public and private actors misinterpret, miscommunicate, and inadvertently misinform. Sometimes they move too slowly, making people wait too long for rescue and relief. At other times they react recklessly, misspending scarce resources on lower priorities rather than waiting to make wiser decisions with a firmer grasp of the facts on the ground.

It is the task of leaders, elected and appointed, to make such judgment calls, to focus minds and referee disputes, to comfort the suffering, and to offer hope and reassurance to a panicky public.

Now, as North Carolinians grapple with the tragic aftermath of another monstrous storm, Gov. Roy Cooper and other political and civic leaders must rise to the challenge Hunt helped me grasp a quarter of a century ago.

Helene has ravaged western North Carolina. Her path of destruction is broad, deep, and jaw-dropping. Homes, businesses, entire towns crushed or swept away. At this writing, hundreds of thousands of people remain without power, some trapped in place by gaping holes or raging rivers. The death count, already heart-rending, will grow as more of the missing are found.

North Carolina will recover. We will rebuild. We've done it before. But there's nothing automatic about the process. And we all have parts to play in it, whatever our roles, wherever we live.

If you have family or friends in the affected areas, keep trying to reach them. Once you do, offer help and comfort. If you'd like to contribute money, supplies, or volunteer time to relief and recovery efforts, there are many organizations well-situated to deploy your gifts effectively, including Samaritan's Purse, Baptists on Mission, Catholic Charities USA, and Operation Airdrop.

At the state level, lawmakers have prudently accumulated \$4.75 billion in our rainy-day fund plus billions more in unreserved credit balance. That rainy day is here. Localities will spend additional dollars from their own reserves, as will utility companies, cooperatives, and municipal agencies.

There are many tough decisions to be made, some now, some weeks or months from now as the full extent of the needs and priorities come more clearly into view. That's something else I learned from past disasters. Some funds originally earmarked for reconstruction after Hurricane Matthew in 2016 have still not been expended.

Through it all, North Carolinians will look to our leaders for guidance and reassurance. Pray for them, and for us all. Copyright © 2024 The Daily Reflector. All rights reserved.

• Citation (aglc Style)

Bobby Burns, 'John Hood: Political leaders must rise to Helene's challenge', *Daily Reflector, The* (online), 4 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFF9F3C2E43818



Top tips for cleaning up and rebuilding after hurricanes

October 4, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: MIKE SUNNUCKS APG Newspapers | Section: News | 876 Words OpenURL Link

Rob Drexler has years of experience in the construction, mitigation and restoration sectors. That includes plenty of work after big storms and extreme weather events.

Drexler serves vice president of operations for commercial storms for Fort Lauderdale, Florida-based PuroClean. The national company specializes in water, fire and other restoration work. Drexler is based in Tennessee and has been in the restoration business for almost two decades.

We asked Drexler some top tips for homeowners and small businesses as they clean up and rebuild after Hurricane Helene, face potential impacts from Hurricane Milton in Florida and how much storms have changed. He said there could be higher prices and limited supplies for construction and other material and noted a number of other challenges and best practices.

What are some of the major challenges and frustration points homeowners and business owners might expect to face after Helene?

Home and business owners face significant challenges during the cleanup and rebuilding process after natural disasters like the damage caused by Hurricane Helene. Some of these challenges are:Emotional toll: The stress of dealing with property damage, financial losses and the fear of potential future disasters is an immense burden. Mold and structural issues: If cleanup isn't started immediately, problems like mold growth or foundational damage may worsen over time. Access to contractors and materials: High demand after large-scale events often means long waits for skilled professionals and essential supplies. Delays in insurance processing: Waiting for claims to be reviewed and approved can halt progress. Proper documentation is vital for your insurance to process claims.

What are the common mistakes people make during cleanup and rebuilding?

Waiting too long to begin cleanup: Water damage needs immediate attention. Delaying remediation efforts can lead to further deterioration, including mold growth and structural damage. Removing excess water and wet items as soon as possible can make a major difference in the amount of damage.Not documenting damage thoroughly: Failing to take pictures and note damage for insurance claims can result in delays, reduced, or even denial of payouts. Choosing unverified contractors: In a rush to rebuild, people might hire contractors without properly checking references or credentials, leading to substandard repairs, as they may not understand the science of drying. Improper drying can later lead to mold and structural damage that oftentimes is not covered by insurance. Skipping professional help: Some attempt to handle cleanup without consulting professionals, which may lead to missed issues and safety risks.

Where should we act fast and where should we take our time after storms and natural disasters?

Act fast: Water and mold remediation should be the top priority. Water damage worsens with time, leading to secondary issues like mold, mildew, and structural degradation. Board up windows or cover exposed areas to prevent additional weather from entering the exposed structure. Contact a licensed property remediation company such as PuroClean, to make sure that your property is dried quickly and according to industry standards, and they can help you navigate your insurance claims. Take your time: Planning long-term rebuilding efforts and navigating insurance claims are steps to approach with patience. A rushed decision could lead to hiring an unreliable contractor or receiving less from insurance than you're owed.

What kind of scams should homeowners watch out for after Helene?

After disasters, scammers often take advantage of homeowners who are desperate to get their lives back to normal:

"Storm chasers": These are fraudulent contractors who go door to door offering quick fixes. They are often unlicensed, and they don't have the proper understanding of the drying science. They often demand cash upfront and then do substandard work or disappear without completing the work. Fake charities: Scammers may set up fake charities to collect donations for disaster relief. Always verify that you're donating to a legitimate organization. Insurance fraud: Be cautious of anyone who offers to negotiate with your insurance company on your behalf in exchange for a portion of your payout. These could be fraudsters trying to steal personal information. Make sure that you always have proper documentation, including photos and videos of damage, discarded items, and any work performed on your property.

It's essential to vet contractors, check licenses, and confirm that charities are legitimate through resources like the Better Business Bureau or Charity Navigator.

Are you seeing storms and major events and their impacts changing?

Yes, storms and weather events are evolving, with many experts noting an increase in both the frequency and intensity of these disasters.

Larger, more intense hurricanes, severe flooding, and prolonged droughts are becoming more common due to climate change.

This shift places additional pressure on recovery efforts, as communities need to build stronger, more resilient infrastructure to withstand future storms.

At PuroClean, we've noticed that response times, preparedness, and the scale of services required are becoming more critical in our operations.

What is your top piece of advice for homeowners recovering from Helene in North Carolina, Florida and other states?

My top piece of advice for those cleaning up and rebuilding after a disaster is to focus on both immediate action and long-term planning.

Begin mitigation efforts quickly—removing water, securing property, and preventing mold—but don't rush into major decisions. Take the time to properly vet contractors, understand your insurance policies, and plan to rebuild with resilience in mind, considering the increased intensity of storms. Always ensure that you're working with professionals, whether it's for cleanup or reconstruction, to avoid common pitfalls and scams.

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Community Calendar 10-5-24

October 4, 2024 | Enquirer-Journal, The (Monroe, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Enquirer Journal | 472 Words OpenURL Link

Community Calendar

Community Calendar

Fairview Fall Festival: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Oct. 5 at Fairview Park, 7402 Concord Highway, Monroe. The Town of Fairview will put together their sixth annual Fall Festival. Music, vendors, food, and activities will be available to people of all ages.

Patch of Pink Pumpkins: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Oct. 5 at 200 E South Main Street, Waxhaw. The Waxhaw Woman's Club will host their third annual Patch of Pink Pumpkins. The club partnered with DeAngelo Williams' foundations to donate 100% of the proceeds to The DeAngelo Williams Foundation. There will be unique pink pumpkins, pumpkin bread, pumpkin pies, and bracelets.

Holiday Craft Show: 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Oct. 5 at 2325 Hanover Drive, Monroe. The Monroe Aquatic and Fitness Center will host its 23rd annual holiday craft show. Various items on display will be jewelry, pottery, baked goods, hand-poured candles, and holiday decore.

Music in the Park: Noon-5 p.m. Oct. 5 at Marshville Municipal Park, 118 E Union Street, Marshville. The Union County Community Choir, Latin Heritage Dance Company, Sticks and Stone, and Robsol are featured in the performance lineup. Food vendors will be on site.

Hearts with hands disaster relief: 2-9 p.m. Oct. 6 at Home Brew Taproom and Tunes, 215 S Main Street, Monroe. Local singers will provide tunes and accept donations for Hurricane Helene relief. The restaurant will donate \$1 per draft beer to Hearts with Hands.

Monroe Car Cruise-In: 6 p.m. Oct. 11 on Main Street, Monroe.

Angelic Riders' Walk-a-Thon: 10 a.m. Oct. 12 at 820 Forest Hills School Road, Marshville. The Angelic Riders will host their 19th annual Walk-a-Thon, which is the non-profit's biggest fundraiser of the year. The riders will walk around the scenic farm through pastures and trails.

Autumn Treasures: Noon-6 p.m. Oct. 12-13 at the Waxhaw Downtown Park at Givens Street, and the Downtown Waxhaw Association, at 115 McDonald St., Waxhaw.

Monroe Fall Fest: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Oct. 12 on Main Street at Downtown Monroe.

Museum of the Waxhaws Haunted Trail: 7-10 p.m. Oct 12 and Oct. 19 at 8215 Waxhaw Highway, Waxhaw. \$10 per person.

Unionville Veterans Coffee House: 8:30 a.m. Oct. 15 at Sam F. Keziah American Legion Post, 6112 Concord Highway, Monroe.

Senior Appreciation Day and Luncheon: 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Oct. 15 at 3230 Presson Road, Monroe. The Union County Sheriff's Office will host their 27th annual senior appreciation day luncheon.

Fox's Alley Bowling Boo-ling for Candy: 2-4:30 p.m. Oct. 26 at 1901 Skyway Drive, Monroe. The business will hold a

indoor trunk or treat. Local businesses will pass out loads of candy on the lanes.

Unionville Elementary BBQ: Nov. 1 at Unionville Elementary School, 4511 Unionville Road, Monroe. The Town of Unionville will celebrate 75 years of its annual barbecue tradition.

Union County Farmers Market: 8 a.m.-noon Saturdays April through December at 805 Skyway Drive, Monroe. The Donation Station table is open every third Saturday each month; the next one is Oct. 19.

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Hurricane Helene aftermath - Fort Liberty soldiers to assist with relief efforts

October 4, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The (NC) Author: Rachael Riley; Fayetteville Observer | Section: News | 444 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

President Joe Biden has directed the Department of Defense to deploy 1,000 regular Army soldiers as part of a Fort Liberty-based infantry battalion task force to deploy in support of Hurricane Helene relief efforts, the White House announced Wednesday.

These soldiers are under the 18th Airborne Corps and include members of the 82nd Airborne Division and other Fort Liberty units, Pentagon spokesman Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said in a statement Wednesday.

The task force includes a forward support company with support structures like fuel, water and mechanics, a White House news release stated.

The Department of Defense announced Monday that a team for command and control for high water vehicles and air operations support for rotary wing aircraft has been established at Fort Liberty.

Eight Army helicopters and 10 Navy helicopters were at Fort Liberty, while 30 high-water vehicles were staged at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, Ryder said Monday.

The White House news release stated that the infantry battalion task force is deploying in addition to DOD service members already supporting FEMA in response to Hurricane Helene, which includes:

Army and Navy helicopters, soldiers and sailors helping move people and supplies.

Army soldiers and high-wheeled vehicles to move people and supplies over damaged roads

Air Force aircraft and airmen helping with search-and-rescue efforts.

The Army Corps of Engineers supporting temporary power, water and wastewater management, bridge inspections and debris removal.

The North Carolina National Guard also has 700 of its guardsmen supporting with debris removal, airlifts and search and rescue, while more than 6,000 National Guard personnel from 12 states are providing support to those affected by the natural disaster, the White House said.

FEMA and other agencies have more than 1,200 personnel in North Carolina, with more resources and staff arriving daily.

A team of 18 first responders from the Fayetteville Fire Department, Fayetteville Police Department and Cape Fear Valley EMS and deployed to Brevard to assist with rescue missions, the city announced Friday.

During a press briefing Tuesday, Ryder said U.S. Northern Command is providing active duty support efforts to FEMA, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is providing emergency power planning and response teams.

In his statement Wednesday, Ryder said NORTHCOM commander Gen. Gregory Guillot appointed Brig. Gen. Charles Morrison of the North Carolina Army National Guard as the dual-status commander for North Carolina.

A dual-status commander is an officer who is allowed by law to command active duty and National Guard troops

and serve in federal and state roles simultaneously, he said.

Staff writer Rachael Riley can be reached at rriley@fayobserver.com or 910-486-3528.

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Dad walks 17 miles to make wedding - Hurricane couldn't keep Tenn. man from being there for his daughter

October 4, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The (NC) Author: Jonathan Limehouse; USA TODAY | Section: News | 1019 Words Page: A7 OpenURL Link

The catastrophic damage caused by Hurricane Helene's forceful winds and heavy rainfall was not enough to deter a father from traveling hours, including on foot, from South Carolina to Tennessee to walk his daughter down the aisle for her wedding.

David Jones did the impossible when he managed to make it to his daughter's wedding on time Saturday morning. What would have been a two-hour drive from Boiling Springs, South Carolina, to Johnson City, Tennessee, turned into an almost 27-mile overnight journey, the 64-year-old father told USA TODAY on Monday.

"I think every dad would do everything they could to get to their daughter's wedding," Jones said. "Like the scripture says, 'With God, anything is possible.' I think this was a prime example of that."

The Southeast is still reeling from the effects of Hurricane Helene, including the millions without power, thousands whose homes are flooded, and families of the more than 100 people who have been confirmed dead.

At one point during Jones' travels, he said the conditions looked like a "Hollywood disaster movie times 10."

Jones did not know 'extent of the devastation' before setting out

Before Hurricane Helene made landfall, Jones was in the process of moving from Johnson City to Boiling Springs with his wife and her mother. The original plan was for them to drive to Johnson City on Friday so he could walk his daughter down the aisle by 11 a.m. Saturday.

Out of caution, Jones decided to get a generator up and running in his Boiling Springs home and head out on his own.

"I had no cellphone service, no internet or anything like that so I had no idea the extent of the devastation that laid ahead," Jones said, adding that he has lived in Tennessee for 42 years and did not expect the degree of destruction caused by the storm.

Once Jones began driving out of South Carolina, he kept getting diverted by hours of traffic and detours.

"At one point, it took me three hours to go 10 miles," he said.

Bridge to Johnson City 'completely washed out'

Thanks to road crews clearing Interstate 26 quickly, Jones was able to continue on the highway until he got to the state line and into Tennessee. Once there, state authorities had the exit he needed to get off on blocked because the bridge up ahead was "completely washed out," Jones recalled a trooper telling him at 2 a.m. Saturday.

The only other way into Johnson City was a bridge in Erwin, Tennessee, which troopers were not letting anyone cross because they were not certain of its stability, Jones said.

Jones decided to get as close to Johnson City as he could so if worst came to worst, he could be "FaceTimed" into the wedding and walk his daughter down the aisle virtually. To do this, he left behind his Ford Explorer at the exit on

Interstate 26 and began traveling on foot toward the bridge that troopers said was washed out.

"I grabbed my backpack, threw in my shaving kit and a couple days of socks and underwear, grabbed my windbreaker and off I went," Jones said.

Jones made it thanks to a reflector, an old co-worker

About 3 to 4 miles into his walk, Jones began encountering washed-out roads with debris everywhere, including from farms, fences and huge trees, he said.

Jones would eventually come across a bulldozer that was clearing a debris field, and when he told the operator about his plan, he recalled the man looking at him like he was "nuts."

Despite the debris and "quicksand-like" mud ahead of Jones, he got through the wreckage and back on the interstate. The only issue is that about half a mile down the highway, the bridge he needed to cross was "completely wiped out," just as the troopers had said back at the exit.

Jones' only other option was in Erwin, so he headed to that bridge and managed to cross because the troopers in charge of blocking it weren't there at the time, he said. Once over the bridge, Jones said, a trooper gave him a ride to Erwin's town hall, and from there he began traveling on foot again.

While walking along the dark back country roads in east Tennessee, Jones said a car almost hit him. This prompted him to grab a red reflector so drivers could see him. With the reflector in hand, he went 8 miles farther down the road until a former co-worker from 20 years ago stopped and gave him a ride the rest of the way.

In total, Jones traveled 26.82 miles, which included 10 by car and about 17 by foot.

'A full circle moment'

When Jones made it to his home in Johnson City, he was welcomed to darkness and cold water because his heat and lights were not working. Nonetheless, he was able to take a cold shower, get a backup suit and make it to Elizabeth's wedding on time.

Jones said he decided not to tell his daughter about his adventure until after the wedding so she would not have thoughts about "her dad being lost in the wilderness" on "her" day.

It was not until Jones' reception speech, in which he brought out the red reflector he had grabbed during his journey, that his daughter truly understood what he did to make it that day.

"I presented (the reflector) to them and said, 'I want this to be a remembrance for you, and whenever you see it, to remember that you need to protect each other in life, especially in your darkest moments, as this reflector did for me. That's when you need it the most,'" Jones recalled.

The entire experience was a "full circle moment" that ended with Jones, his daughter and their family hugging and shedding tears, he said.

Jones recalled his daughter telling him, "If my father could love me this much, imagine how much our Father in Heaven loves us."

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Port strike stokes some panic buying - Many likely getting items they don't need to get

October 4, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The (NC) Author: Betty Lin-Fisher; USA TODAY | Section: News | 1010 Words Page: A3 OpenURL Link

During her lunch break Tuesday – the day 45,000 East Coast port workers went on strike – Shayna Turbovsky went to the grocery store to stock up on meat, rice, beans, bananas and toilet paper. She also filled up her gas tank and plans to keep it topped off.

Turbovsky, who lives in Fort Worth, Texas, had not been planning to go to the store, but when a co-worker told her she should stock up since there could be shortages and price increases due to the strike, she decided to go.

"I don't know how bad it's going to get, but the south east just got smacked by a hurricane and now the supply chain is going to be impacted through this strike," Turbovsky posted on X. "I would rather be overprepared than scared."

During lunch hour Wednesday at a Costco in Arlington, Virginia, shelves that are normally stocked to the ceiling with paper towels and toilet paper still had supply, but the amount appeared lower than usual. Meanwhile, at a Los Angeles-area Costco, a worker said there had been an uptick in toilet paper sales, though it was nothing close to the pandemonium that occurred during the COVID-19 lockdown.

But consumers may be stocking up on the wrong things - and panic buying when they don't need to.

Economic effects of strike

On Tuesday, 45,000 union workers went on strike when negotiations for a new contract broke down, shutting down 36 East and Gulf Coast ports. It was the first International Longshoremen's Association strike since 1977.

Half of all U.S. ocean imports flow through the East Coast and Gulf ports, which means consumers may face higher prices and shortages, experts have previously told USA TODAY. But those shortages would be for items like bananas, alcohol, seafood, electronics, pharmaceuticals, cars, auto parts and machinery parts.

Officials for President Joe Biden said in a previously reported USA TODAY story that the strike's impact on consumers would be "limited," including "in the important areas of fuel, food and medicine."

But some economists have told USA TODAY that the strike could cost the economy up to \$5billion each day as imports and exports are blocked.

'PTSD of the pandemic'

Turbovsky said she knows that most of the things she stocked up on may not be affected by the port strike.

"But what I thought in my mind was the pandemic. ... Once people are scared, once this country feels the fear of anything, we will all feel the PTSD of the pandemic, so immediately people think of toilet paper, paper towels, food supply," she told USA TODAY.

"People feel the fear and want to overconsume and buy everything they can," she added.

Turbovsky spent \$280 buying more than 30 pounds of meat to stash in her freezer, along with bananas, which she also froze, and other essentials. Turbovsky said she had a hard time finding meat during the pandemic when there

were supply chain issues.

She felt guilty buying so much meat, "but at the end of the day, I slept better at night knowing that I was prepared for the days to come," Turbovsky said.

Different supply chain issues

The reasons the port strike might cause product shortages differ from those that sparked the shortfalls during the pandemic when there were production shutdowns, said Josh Stillwagon, an associate professor and chair of the economics department at Babson College in Massachusetts.

"If all of the ports in the U.S. closed and we didn't have the West Coast (ports), I think you'd see something more like that (COVID-19 supply chain issues), where you'd have to worry about stockpiling," Stillwagon told USA TODAY.

Instead, Stillwagon thinks any strike-related shortages will mirror what occurred in 2021, when ports became congested as supplies started coming back online, delaying deliveries. Depending on how long the strike lasts, consumers should expect backlogs in goods arriving as shipments will have to be rerouted to the West Coast, he said.

Consumers will also pay more as extra transportation costs to get the goods from the West Coast to the East Coast will have to be built into prices, he said.

Stillwagon said he understands how consumers could feel uncertainty, leading them to stockpile goods.

"People have that ambiguity about what the outcome will be, and so they sort of flock to the necessities that were very inconvenient last time when we didn't have them," he said. Concern may also be exacerbated by the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, which has left many of the people impacted struggling for necessities, "so people are stockpiling, given both of these major news events."

Whether there will be shortages of goods from the strike depends on how long it lasts, said Stillwagon. Inventories are back to pre-pandemic levels, and suppliers are "a little more attuned to disruption in the supply chain after COVID, so you may not notice it if it lasts a week or two," he said.

Not everyone is stocking up

Not all consumers were panic buying.

Shoppers crowded the aisles at Grosvenor Market in Rockville, Maryland, at lunchtime Wednesday. But that was less about hoarding and more about Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, which began Wednesday evening, said Scot Shuck, the store's owner.

By midday on day two of the port strike, Grosvenor customers had barely made a dent in the store's inventory of milk, toilet paper, bread and other staples.

Shuck said he hasn't witnessed any of the panic buying that gripped supermarkets back in 2020, at the height of the pandemic. Nor does he expect many supply-chain shortages to come.

If the strike does drag on, Shuck said, the store may have trouble procuring some of his customers' favorite imports: "Wines, cheeses and, I think, more fruits than vegetables," he said.

And so, Shuck said, "let's hope that it blows over very guickly."

Contributing: Josh Rivera, Medora Lee and Daniel de Visel, USA TODAY

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

October 4, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Casey Blake | Section: Opinion | 1248 Words OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — I started this column in my driveway, typing in my notes app as my iPhone charged in my car. It was five days after our county declared our sweet, weird, gorgeous little city was in a state of emergency due to the impacts of Hurricane Helene.

For the first few days, most of us still didn't have the cell service to find out whether all of our loved ones were dead or alive, to find out where to get drinking water or ice to cool insulin, or oxygen tanks or first aid, or whether we could flee if we wanted to or were trapped by downed trees and washed out roads.

It was terrifying to leave, and terrifying to stay.

Uncertainty and fear after Hurricane Helene struck Asheville

Those first few days were almost easier for those of us lucky enough to be on higher ground. We knew that we didn't have power or water and that the cell towers must be down. But it would just be for a day or so, right?

It was once we started getting glimpses of the horror around us – swapping stories and iPhone photos with strangers in line waiting for hours to buy water and canned goods – that we started to understand what had happened.

We started scanning our minds for which friends and family we hadn't heard from, whether they lived on first or second floors and how far they were from the rivers. How sturdy and high were the bridges on the way to them? We called and texted and waited and hoped. And finally realized our city wasn't going to look the same ever again.

I am so, so lucky. My home was damaged in fixable ways and my loved ones are all safe and sound. Our power and water and cell service will come back. So many lives, livelihoods and homes never will.

OPINION Pitts: The Western North Carolina floods hurt all of us. Here's where I find hope.

This isn't supposed to happen in the mountains of North Carolina

What folks outside of our mountains might not know is, to put it scientifically, this is not a thing here. Sure, some areas flood – some even flood badly. But these waters came fast and quick and in places where the high water marks that would come had only been seen in nightmares.

The people who were hurt and killed by Helene – the many, many people – were not stubborn fools who deserved what they got. They are people who weren't prepared because none of us were.

That includes our systems. It took six days for the county to announce a plan to distribute food or water. It took seven before state or federal supplies arrived.

But before the 26-foot waters had even crested, our neighbors were out in the streets checking every door. The queer, feminist, anti-capitalist bookstore up the street had mobilized their mutual aid efforts and had gotten the word out about what relief was coming.

The ramen place a few blocks up was cooking everything in their kitchen and handing it out for free for hours. The dive bar down the road had become a medic tent, run by folks in the neighborhood who offered everything,

including the last Band-Aids in their pantries.

Folks left signs in closed business windows to spread the word about routes that were clear and how to change your iPhone settings to give you the best shot at a signal. The kindnesses have been so many.

How to help: Ways to support Hurricane Helene victims, how to donate

From Swannanoa Valley to Marshall, stories of fighting for survival

Over the past seven days, we've heard of couples climbing over balconies in the early morning hours after being woken to sounds of water lapping at their downstairs neighbors' doors. People watched a home float away, like a dollhouse dropped in a river while the water spared others just a dozen feet up the road.

Entire towns have been demolished. Whole neighborhoods are swallowed up. We've heard of people swept away in the currents running through their quiet subdivisions in the Swannanoa Valley.

A man held on to a tree in Marshall for hours as he cried while onlookers could do nothing but wait. A friend's daughter who was rescued from a rooftop by boat, because she confirmed with her landlord the day before she wasn't in a floodplain and she figured she could stay the night.

As a journalist, I find it particularly unfathomable to be deprived of news coverage when we need it most. But I also know this is how most people experience natural disasters – not glued to the news and distracted by the rhetorical flourishes of leaders trying to make sure history sees them as the heroes – but as people trying to survive their way through a tunnel with very little light and a lot of excuses from the systems they fund to guide them.

Opinion: Helene's destruction left NC election officials scrambling. Trump isn't helping.

We must remember the heroes - and learn from the systems that failed us

I hope every government official who was spared from this disaster will rethink their plans – all of them. We're only beginning to understand the plans and systems that may have failed us here. But we know the people who will be hurt most as the waters recede are those who were already being left behind when the ground was dry.

I hope that on the other side of this we remember the heroes who risked their lives to rescue people who had no way of knowing they'd wake to a nightmare:

- * The people who set out in boats through dangerous waters, or left behind their own shattered homes to help their neighbors rebuild.
- * The people who drove for hours to pick up animals from a local shelter that would eventually be filled to the roofline with water.
- * The local Sam's Club workers who gave away every case of water in the place for free.
- * The restaurant workers who didn't take a moment to mourn the losses of their livelihoods but got straight into other kitchens to feed anyone and everyone.
- * The guys who drove through the night from another state, rode around neighborhoods hollering "Y'all got water?" and unloading a case for anyone who even hesitated.
- * The guys who spotted a groundhog clinging to a submerged barbwire fence and swam out to save him.
- * The woman a block over who rode around on her motorized wheelchair collecting all the Little Free Library books to save them before the rains came.

* And, of course, the community journalists who have suffered through a week in absolute hell while trying to get out the lifesaving news folks needed – even before many of them could see it – and who will be holding power to account long after the national news media moves on.

I don't have the right words – I never will – to capture the full spectrum of catastrophic tragedy and tiny griefs over all the little things lost that make up a city's soul.

I hope what we lost here might save others from the same fate, or at least the hubris of believing we can wait to do something about a warming climate until the waters are already at our doors.

Donate if you can. Take care of your neighbors. And vote like it could be your town next. If you don't, eventually it will.

Casey Blake is the senior Voices editor at USA TODAY Opinion. Follow her on X, formerly Twitter: @CaseyBlakeAVL Copyright 2024 The Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C015106182F6D8>



Donald Trump town hall in Fayetteville: Highlights from our live coverage

October 4, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Joseph Pierre, Myron B. Pitts and Rachael Riley, Fayetteville Observer | Section: News | 1563 Words OpenURL Link

(This story was updated to add new information, photos and a video.)

Chants of "USA!" broke out as former President Donald Trump took the stage Friday at Fayetteville's Crown Arena to Lee Greenwood's "I'm Proud to be an American."

Trump, the Republican nominee for president, was in Fayetteville for a town hall. He came on stage at 6:45 p.m. and stayed approximately an hour, taking questions from people on stage and in the audience about immigration, the economy and the military.

Read on for more highlights from The Fayetteville Observer's live coverage. Click here to watch the live video of the town hall.

See photos of Trump: PHOTOS: Donald Trump holds town hall at Crown Arena in Fayetteville

Attendees pleased with Trump's appearance | 8:15 p.m.

A few supporters offered their thoughts on Trump's speech as they left the Crown Arena.

Michael Pearson of Wilson said his opinion remains unchanged after hearing Trump speak during the rally and says he is confident Trump will be the next president.

"He's the best we've ever had," Pearson said. "I feel like if they do (the election) fair, it should be by a landslide."

Donna Gray of Hope Mills shared Pearson's enthusiasm.

Gray said she was a Democrat until she was 57 years old, but she now recruits people to vote for Trump. "Everything he said we need done and I'm excited," Gray said. "After tonight, definitely the American people will be behind him and they should anyway."

Donald Trump arrives | 6:45 p.m.

Chants of "USA!" break out as Trump walks out to Lee Greenwood's "I'm Proud to be an American." Click here to watch the live video of the town hall.

Moderator introduced | 6:44 p.m.

U.S. Rep. Anna Paulina Luna, a Republican who represents Florida's 13th Congressional District, has taken the stage. She will serve as the moderator of tonight's town hall.

"I'm here today because this happens to be one of the most important elections in U.S. history," Luna said. "I look forward to bringing patriotism back into the White House."

Controversial GOP candidate at the Crown | 6:28 p.m.

Michele Morrow, who is a Republican running for North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction, said she has been coming to Trump rallies for eight years and believes he is the man to move North Carolina and the rest of the country forward.

"I'm here to support him and also to meet like-minded people," Morrow said.

Morrow said Trump's views on education for the country, such as pushing back against critical race theory and diversity, equity and inclusion in classrooms, align with her vision for North Carolina.

She also spoke on the violence and dangers inside schools across the country.

"We're losing teachers, we're losing students and it's time for us to make sure our students are safe so they can learn," she said. "We need to make sure that our money is actually going into the classroom, rather than ... all of these special interest groups and pet projects."

Morrow is a controversial figure after she suggested in 2020 tweets that prominent Democratic leaders like President Joe Biden and former President Barack Obama should be assassinated.

Packed house at the Arena | 6 p.m.

It appears it will be a full house Friday night at the Crown Arena. Just before 6 p.m., an hour before Trump was set to speak, people in line were being turned away for lack of space. The Crown Arena, which according to the Crown Complex website has 5,000 seats, was about 80% full just before 6 p.m. A worker on site said the arena seats 4.600.

A Vietnam War veteran from Fayetteville who preferred to go by his pseudonym "Rex Havoc" was one of the Trump supporters who made it inside before the cutoff. He said this Trump rally will be his third."I wanted to put another notch on my boot," Havoc said. Havoc said issues with the economy have affected him and his family since the pandemic and he hopes Trump can turn things around. "I'm a perfect example that has a son and a daughter who were caught up in this mess with this inflation," he said. "They're a perfect example of what they should be concerned about in Washington."

Elected official, social media personality in the crowd | 5:42 p.m.

Right-wing social media personality "Silk," whose real name is Herneitha Rochelle Hardaway, was taking photos with fans in the audience.

Trump spoke at the funeral of Hardaway's sister, Ineitha Lynette "Diamond" Hardaway, during his last visit to Fayetteville in January 2023. The sisters, who were from Raeford, were known for their pro-Trump videos on YouTube.

Also in attendance was Nathan Warfel, a Fayetteville lawyer who serves on the Cumberland County Board of Education.

The Crown Arena, which according to the Crown Complex website has 5,000 seats, was about 80% full just before 6 p.m.

Economy is a concern | 5:32 p.m.

Ron and Linda Gurnik, a married couple from Pinehurst, said that Trump's policies regarding the border and economy are the main reasons for their support."We were better off a year prior when he was in office," Linda Gurnik said from inside the Crown Arena.Ron Gurnik said he expects a better outlook for America with Trump as president."Hopefully the economy comes back," Ron Gurnik said. "There's a lot of people who can't afford anything and hopefully we get this border taken care of."

Voter commends Trump on Helena response | 5:20 p.m.

Todd Harris arrived from Maxton to hear Trump, who he believes has a great chance of defeating Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris. He commended Trump for his recent visit to mountain communities in western North Carolina that were struck by Tropical Storm Helene.

Trump has not visited Western North Carolina since Helene hit, although he visited a hurricane response center in Evans, Georgia, earlier Friday and criticized the Biden administration's response to Helene during a visit to Valdosta, Georgia, on Monday.

He said he thanks Trump for "supporting us in North Carolina through our storms. We're not getting support from (Kamala Harris)." Kamala Harris announced earlier Friday that she would visit Western North Carolina on Saturday. President Joe Biden was in the state on Wednesday.

Todd Harris said if Trump wins another four years, he expects him to build a strong economy and continue to show respect for law enforcement.

"He's gonna do what he's done for us before," Harris said.

Medical personnel assist a woman | 4:50 p.m.

A woman in line was given a seat and some water as medical personnel spoke with her. She was not taken from the scene.

Others waiting to get inside the arena included Channing Perdue a farmer with land on Cedar Creek Road in Fayetteville.

She said she had been standing in line for two hours.

"I'm interested in what Trump has to say about what he's going to do for the economy to help farmers," she said.

She said she liked several things about Trump.

"I like that he's honest, that he's a businessman, that he understands the economy and how to get it better," she said. "I honestly think he's very genuine."

Trump team hands out Newsweek editorial | 4:35 p.m.

A media handler inside the Crown Arena was giving out copies to journalists of a Newsweek editorial written by a former British Special Forces soldier that claimed Trump would prevent World War III. "I'm Ex-Special Forces," the headline reads. "We Veterans Back Trump — He'll stop World War III."

Attendees in good spirits | 4:25 p.m.

Despite the long lines, attendees were in good spirits. Some were using paper fans promoting "Michele Morrow: NC Superintendent of Public Instruction" and "Protect Women's Sports." In addition to merchandise vendors, there were food and drink trucks offering things like hibachi, hot dogs, snow cones and lemonade.

Trump has young voter's support | 4:15 p.m.

Attendees started to file inside the arena about 4 p.m. As they entered, Dolly Parton's "9-to-5" played, followed by Rihanna's "Don't Stop the Music." In 2018, according to Rolling Stone, Rihanna sent the Trump campaign a cease-and-desist letter after the song was used at a Tennessee Trump rally.

Sebastian Young, 19, of Fayetteville, was with four friends at the rally. He said of all the candidates running, Trump

is the one who has his support.

"He gets respect from a lot of people and I think that's one of the huge things you need as a leader," Young said. "If no one respects you then you can't lead."

Line at the Crown Arena | 3:40 p.m.

Tents with merchandise supporting Trump filled the completely packed parking lot outside of the Crown Arena. Individuals waited in a line that ran through the parking lot for the opportunity to see the former president speak in a few hours.

A staff member said about 4,500 people will be permitted into the event.

A new Trump supporter | 3:32 p.m.

Kenneth Yost, of Fayetteville, said he recently became a Trump supporter."I was a libertarian all the way," Yost said. "With way things have gone the past four years, I can't... between the two choices that we have, I can't go the other way."

Democrats respond: Local Democratic leaders slam Trump agenda ahead of Fayetteville campaign stop

Attendee brings pro-life message to Fayetteville | 3:15 p.m.

One Trump supporter showed up to the town hall in an RV covered in pro-life messages, such as "choose adoption" and "vote pro life."

Michelle Daniels, of Pilot Mountain, said she's always had pro-life views and has been traveling the country in the RV for two years."When you take God out of anything, you see what's happening in our country," Daniels said. "God said that it's a baby from the time of conception."

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NC State football vs Wake Forest: Scouting report, prediction for Wolfpack-Demon Deacons

October 4, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Rodd Baxley, Fayetteville Observer | Section: Sports | 420 Words OpenURL Link

N.C. State football and Wake Forest have met every season since 1910, making it the longest continuous rivalry in the ACC.

The Wolfpack (3-2, 0-1 ACC), which has a 69-42-6 series record, and the Demon Deacons (1-3, 0-1) play for the 118th time on Saturday (Noon, CW Network) in Raleigh.

In the last 20 years, N.C. State is 8-2 against Wake Forest at Carter-Finley Stadium. The Wolfpack has won two of the last three meetings, including a 26-6 victory last season in Winston-Salem.

But none of the players who scored for N.C. State in that game are on the current roster. Coming off a 24-17 win against Northern Illinois, the Wolfpack faces a Demon Deacon squad riding a three-game losing streak.

NC State collecting donations for those affected by Hurricane Helene

Here's a look at things to watch and a score prediction for N.C. State vs. Wake Forest.

DK Kaufman, NC State football defense turning takeaways into touchdowns

The Wolfpack has scored a defensive touchdown in three of its five games, including two TDs from defensive back DK Kaufman. Wake Forest quarterback Hank Bachmeier has five touchdowns and an interception, but he's averaging nearly 39 passing attempts in the last three games. N.C. State's secondary will have the opportunity to create some takeaways.

Good chance for NC State QB CJ Bailey, wide receivers to build confidence

Wake Forest has one of the worst defenses in the ACC, ranking toward the bottom in every major category. During their three-game losing streak, the Demon Deacons allowed an average of 37.3 points. If N.C. State quarterback CJ Bailey and the Wolfpack's wide receivers can't find a groove in this game, it might not be in the cards this season. NC State wide receiver KC Concepcion accounted for 105 yards against Wake Forest last season.

NC State punter Caden Noonkester is an All-ACC player

If not for punter Caden Noonkester, N.C. State might've lost to Northern Illinois. The graduate student was that good and that vital to the Wolfpack's success in Week 6. Currently eighth among FBS punters with a 46.5-yard average, Noonkester has seen half of his 22 punts downed inside the 20-yard line. He's putting together an All-ACC resume.

NC State vs Wake Forest score prediction

N.C. State 27, Wake Forest 20: The Demon Deacons don't look like a program ready to rise from the depths of the ACC standings. Rivalry games are weird and these matchups have been close over the years, but N.C. State won't have a letdown in Raleigh.

Staff writer Rodd Baxley can be reached at rbaxley@fayobserver.com or @RoddBaxley on X/Twitter.

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Hurricane Helene aftermath - Fort Liberty soldiers to assist with relief efforts

October 4, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Rachael Riley; Fayetteville Observer | Section: News | 480 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

FEMA and other agencies have more than 1,200 personnel in North Carolina, with more resources and staff arriving daily.

President Joe Biden has directed the Department of Defense to deploy 1,000 regular Army soldiers as part of a Fort Liberty-based infantry battalion task force to deploy in support of Hurricane Helene relief efforts, the White House announced Wednesday.

These soldiers are under the 18th Airborne Corps and include members of the 82nd Airborne Division and other Fort Liberty units, Pentagon spokesman Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said in a statement Wednesday.

The task force includes a forward support company with support structures like fuel, water and mechanics, a White House news release stated.

The Department of Defense announced Monday that a team for command and control for high water vehicles and air operations support for rotary wing aircraft has been established at Fort Liberty.

Eight Army helicopters and 10 Navy helicopters were at Fort Liberty, while 30 high-water vehicles were staged at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, Ryder said Monday.

The White House news release stated that the infantry battalion task force is deploying in addition to DOD service members already supporting FEMA in response to Hurricane Helene, which includes:

Army and Navy helicopters, soldiers and sailors helping move people and supplies.

Army soldiers and high-wheeled vehicles to move people and supplies over damaged roads

Air Force aircraft and airmen helping with search-and-rescue efforts.

The Army Corps of Engineers supporting temporary power, water and wastewater management, bridge inspections and debris removal.

The North Carolina National Guard also has 700 of its guardsmen supporting with debris removal, airlifts and search and rescue, while more than 6,000 National Guard personnel from 12 states are providing support to those affected by the natural disaster, the White House said.

FEMA and other agencies have more than 1,200 personnel in North Carolina, with more resources and staff arriving daily.

A team of 18 first responders from the Fayetteville Fire Department, Fayetteville Police Department and Cape Fear Valley EMS and deployed to Brevard to assist with rescue missions, the city announced Friday.

During a press briefing Tuesday, Ryder said U.S. Northern Command is providing active duty support efforts to FEMA, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is providing emergency power planning and response teams.

In his statement Wednesday, Ryder said NORTHCOM commander Gen. Gregory Guillot appointed Brig. Gen. Charles

Morrison of the North Carolina Army National Guard as the dual-status commander for North Carolina.

A dual-status commander is an officer who is allowed by law to command active duty and National Guard troops and serve in federal and state roles simultaneously, he said.

Staff writer Rachael Riley can be reached at rriley@fayobserver.com or 910-486-3528.

FEMA and other agencies have more than 1,200 personnel in North Carolina, with more resources and staff arriving daily.

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Need legal help after Helene?

October 4, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: The Star | Section: News | 409 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

A toll-free legal aid hotline is now available for survivors of Tropical Storm Helene in North Carolina. Disaster Legal Services, which allows callers to request the assistance of a lawyer, is a partnership between the North Carolina Bar Association and Foundation, Legal Aid of North Carolina, the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Low-income survivors with disaster-related legal questions may call the disaster legal assistance hotline at 866-219-5262.

Callers should identify that they are seeking storm-related legal assistance, ask for Disaster Legal Services assistance, and identify the county in which they are located. Survivors who qualify for assistance will be matched with North Carolina lawyers who have volunteered to provide free legal help.

Legal assistance is available for the following issue areas:

FEMA appeals

Disaster Unemployment Assistance and other disaster benefits

Insurance claims

Home repair contracts and contractor disputes

Contractor fraud and consumer protection matters

Replacement of wills and other important legal documents destroyed in the disaster

Mortgage-foreclosure

Landlord/tenant problems

Individuals who qualify for assistance will be matched with North Carolina lawyers who have volunteered to provide free, limited legal help. Survivors should be aware that there are some limitations on disaster legal services. For example, assistance is not available for cases that will produce a fee (i.e., those cases where fees are paid part of the settlement by the court).

Major Disaster Declaration

A total of 26 North Carolina counties and tribes have been approved to receive federal assistance in the wake of Tropical Storm Helene. The counties are: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (additional counties may be added later).

People who sustained property damage, need immediate emergency assistance for essential items (like food, baby formula, or water), or need immediate housing assistance as a result of Tropical Storm Helene are urged to apply

for FEMA assistance, as they may be eligible for federal and state disaster assistance. People can apply online at DisasterAssistance.gov. Applicants may also call the FEMA Helpline (800-621-3362). Tropical Storm Helene survivors are also encouraged to review Legal Aid of NC's resource website at legalaidnc.org/disaster.

For more information, individuals may contact SBA's Disaster Assistance Customer Service Center by calling 800-659-2955, emailing disastercustomerservice@sba.gov, or visiting SBA's website at https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/disaster-assistance/hurricane-helene. Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals may call 800-877-8339.

For more information on North Carolina's recovery, visit fema.gov/disaster/4827 and the North Carolina Department of Public Safety website at ncdps.gov/our-organization/emergency-management/hurricane-helene.

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Dad walks 17 miles to make wedding - Hurricane couldn't keep Tenn. man from being there for his daughter

October 4, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Jonathan Limehouse; USA TODAY | Section: News | 1019 Words Page: A9 OpenURL Link

The catastrophic damage caused by Hurricane Helene's forceful winds and heavy rainfall was not enough to deter a father from traveling hours, including on foot, from South Carolina to Tennessee to walk his daughter down the aisle for her wedding.

David Jones did the impossible when he managed to make it to his daughter's wedding on time Saturday morning. What would have been a two-hour drive from Boiling Springs, South Carolina, to Johnson City, Tennessee, turned into an almost 27-mile overnight journey, the 64-year-old father told USA TODAY on Monday.

"I think every dad would do everything they could to get to their daughter's wedding," Jones said. "Like the scripture says, 'With God, anything is possible.' I think this was a prime example of that."

The Southeast is still reeling from the effects of Hurricane Helene, including the millions without power, thousands whose homes are flooded, and families of the more than 100 people who have been confirmed dead.

At one point during Jones' travels, he said the conditions looked like a "Hollywood disaster movie times 10."

Jones did not know 'extent of the devastation' before setting out

Before Hurricane Helene made landfall, Jones was in the process of moving from Johnson City to Boiling Springs with his wife and her mother. The original plan was for them to drive to Johnson City on Friday so he could walk his daughter down the aisle by 11 a.m. Saturday.

Out of caution, Jones decided to get a generator up and running in his Boiling Springs home and head out on his own.

"I had no cellphone service, no internet or anything like that so I had no idea the extent of the devastation that laid ahead," Jones said, adding that he has lived in Tennessee for 42 years and did not expect the degree of destruction caused by the storm.

Once Jones began driving out of South Carolina, he kept getting diverted by hours of traffic and detours.

"At one point, it took me three hours to go 10 miles," he said.

Bridge to Johnson City 'completely washed out'

Thanks to road crews clearing Interstate 26 quickly, Jones was able to continue on the highway until he got to the state line and into Tennessee. Once there, state authorities had the exit he needed to get off on blocked because the bridge up ahead was "completely washed out," Jones recalled a trooper telling him at 2 a.m. Saturday.

The only other way into Johnson City was a bridge in Erwin, Tennessee, which troopers were not letting anyone cross because they were not certain of its stability, Jones said.

Jones decided to get as close to Johnson City as he could so if worst came to worst, he could be "FaceTimed" into the wedding and walk his daughter down the aisle virtually. To do this, he left behind his Ford Explorer at the exit on

Interstate 26 and began traveling on foot toward the bridge that troopers said was washed out.

"I grabbed my backpack, threw in my shaving kit and a couple days of socks and underwear, grabbed my windbreaker and off I went," Jones said.

Jones made it thanks to a reflector, an old co-worker

About 3 to 4 miles into his walk, Jones began encountering washed-out roads with debris everywhere, including from farms, fences and huge trees, he said.

Jones would eventually come across a bulldozer that was clearing a debris field, and when he told the operator about his plan, he recalled the man looking at him like he was "nuts."

Despite the debris and "quicksand-like" mud ahead of Jones, he got through the wreckage and back on the interstate. The only issue is that about half a mile down the highway, the bridge he needed to cross was "completely wiped out," just as the troopers had said back at the exit.

Jones' only other option was in Erwin, so he headed to that bridge and managed to cross because the troopers in charge of blocking it weren't there at the time, he said. Once over the bridge, Jones said, a trooper gave him a ride to Erwin's town hall, and from there he began traveling on foot again.

While walking along the dark back country roads in east Tennessee, Jones said a car almost hit him. This prompted him to grab a red reflector so drivers could see him. With the reflector in hand, he went 8 miles farther down the road until a former co-worker from 20 years ago stopped and gave him a ride the rest of the way.

In total, Jones traveled 26.82 miles, which included 10 by car and about 17 by foot.

'A full circle moment'

When Jones made it to his home in Johnson City, he was welcomed to darkness and cold water because his heat and lights were not working. Nonetheless, he was able to take a cold shower, get a backup suit and make it to Elizabeth's wedding on time.

Jones said he decided not to tell his daughter about his adventure until after the wedding so she would not have thoughts about "her dad being lost in the wilderness" on "her" day.

It was not until Jones' reception speech, in which he brought out the red reflector he had grabbed during his journey, that his daughter truly understood what he did to make it that day.

"I presented (the reflector) to them and said, 'I want this to be a remembrance for you, and whenever you see it, to remember that you need to protect each other in life, especially in your darkest moments, as this reflector did for me. That's when you need it the most,'" Jones recalled.

The entire experience was a "full circle moment" that ended with Jones, his daughter and their family hugging and shedding tears, he said.

Jones recalled his daughter telling him, "If my father could love me this much, imagine how much our Father in Heaven loves us."

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