

McDowell High football returns to the field; falls to Asheville in first game since Helene

October 20, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: From staff reports | Section: Football | 362 Words OpenURL Link

The McDowell High School football team's return to the field after a month off due to Hurricane Helene didn't produce a win, but playing a little prep pigskin did make things seem a bit more like business as usual.

The Titans fell at home in Marion, 56-14, to visiting Asheville, one of the league's annual favorites that secured wins in the return to action on Friday night.

"After all the devastating weather we have experienced, it was a blessing to be able to return to the field," said MHS coach Darrell Brewer. "I'm glad the community could have a few hours of normalcy."

A.C. Reynolds and Erwin, which have joined the Cougars near the top of the MAC standings in each of the previous three seasons of the current alignment, also won on Friday night as the Rockets topped Enka 48-0 and Erwin defeated T.C. Roberson 26-21 in a pair of games played on the Rams' Asheville campus.

That leaves the evening's three squads as the only ones still undefeated in the MAC as North Buncombe took an 0-1 MAC mark into its bye week.

In Marion, Asheville jumped ahead 14-0 after a quarter, 35-6 by halftime and 49-6 after three periods before the Titans (1-5, 0-2 MAC) held an 8-7 advantage across the final 12 minutes of competition.

MHS got on the board with Hunter Pittman's 1-yard run with 2:42 left in the second quarter. McDowell's other touchdown was an 11-yard pass from Danny Brown to Oakley Keaton with 5:32 left in the ballgame.

Next week's MAC slate includes a pair of games at McDowell High School, including Asheville versus North Buncombe at 5 p.m. and Erwin versus the Titans at 7 p.m., and A.C. Reynolds at T.C. Roberson at 7 p.m. while Enka is on a bye.

H.S. FOOTBALL

Conference standings

MAC 3A/4A

Conf. All

Team W L W L PF PA

Erwin 2 0 5 1 247 130

A.C. Reynolds 2 0 3 3 203 143

Asheville 1 0 3 1 134 66

T.C. Roberson 1 1 3 2 170 105

North Buncombe 0 1 2 3 116 166

Enka 0 2 2 3 127 160

McDowell 0 2 1 5 157 240

Friday's results

A.C. Reynolds 48, Enka 0

Asheville 56, McDowell 14

Erwin 26, T.C. Roberson 21

Bye: North Buncombe

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• Citation (aglc Style)

From staff reports, 'McDowell High football returns to the field; falls to Asheville in first game since Helene', *McDowell News, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C555F5145D41C0>



Favorites take care of business as Mountain 3A/4A Conference returns to action

October 20, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: From staff reports | Section: Football | 291 Words OpenURL Link

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Despite Helene, fall color season is upon us

October 20, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Bill Studenc | Section: Life | 781 Words OpenURL Link

Until Hurricane Helene hit Western North Carolina, Haywood County residents were on the verge of uttering the sing-songy catchphrase made famous in the 1982 horror classic "Poltergeist" by character Carol Anne: "They're hee-e-re."

Or maybe her line from the 1986 sequel "Poltergeist II: The Other Side" would have been more appropriate: "They're ba-a-a-ck."

Either way, our mountains were on the verge of being possessed by visitors from another dimension in relentless pursuit of their obsession — viewing beautiful fall foliage.

They may not be back yet — and given circumstances post-Helene, they may not be able to get to many locations in WNC — but the autumnal onslaught of leaf-peepers typically would be just around the corner.

While some residents would be moan out-of-state visitors clogging our roadways, there's no mistaking the positive impact they have on the local economy.

An Appalachian State University study estimated fall visitors inject \$1 billion into North Carolina's economy annually — the bulk of it in these mountains. With many roads still inaccessible, the hurricane will have a major economic impact during a typically busy time in the WNC tourism industry.

That's a lot of green, but green is not the color on the minds of leaf-lookers. They want to see bright reds, yellows and oranges creeping down the mountainsides. Darby Harris, Western Carolina University associate professor of biology, believes folks will be pleased with the overall quality of this year's spectacle.

"A good recipe for beautiful fall colors includes a variety of broadleaf tree species, adequate rain during the spring and summer followed by cool, sunny days in autumn. The mountains of Western North Carolina certainly have plenty of wonderful tree species, and 2024 has had sufficient rain in the spring and early summer. This means that two of the three factors for good fall colors are already in place," Harris said recently.

"We now have to wait and see if the temperature begins to drop sufficiently in October to help further spark a good color change. Therefore, my prediction, as of mid-September, is that we are on track to have a good fall color show this year," he said.

Normally, tourism officials across the region would be sighing a collective sigh of relief, which brings up an interesting point. I've been writing about the fall foliage forecast for more than 30 years, turning to a succession of experts for opinions on Mother Nature's autumn wardrobe change.

Until now, the question I've never asked is: How much pressure do you feel making your prediction? I mean, travel and tourism authorities and chambers of commerce probably hate it when forecasters say the color season will be "below average."

It seems an especially pertinent query for Harris, who assumed the mantel of WCU's fall color expert just this year.

"That is a good question," he said. "I feel fortunate that my first year making this prediction has not been a very stressful year for the trees. If we had been in a severe drought at this point in the year, I would be much more concerned about overall forest health and a vivid color change."

In addition to the quality of fall colors, the other thing leaf-lookers want to know is when will we see peak color. Well, it's complicated, Harris said. There are two factors at play – the slow reduction in sunlight as summer gives way to fall, leading to a loss of chlorophyll that gives leaves their green color; and cooling temperatures.

"The timing of peak color each year is the hardest thing to predict," Harris said. "Since the reduction in daylight is a very steady and reliable phenomenon each year, gradual color change for most trees is predictable. Temperature can be more variable than daylight, and changes in temperature can potentially influence the timing and intensity of peak color."

Locations at higher altitudes such as Mount Pisgah, Graveyard Fields, Black Balsam, Devil's Courthouse, Richland Balsam and Max Patch should begin to peak by mid-October. Lower elevations in the valleys including most of Pisgah National Forest, the Asheville area, Dupont State Forest and areas around Waynesville should peak by late October.

While the final impact of Helene on fall tourism in WNC remains to be seen, there's no doubt it will deliver a financial blow on top of the immense physical devastation, tragic loss of life and emotional trauma that has the region reeling.

Here's hoping local folks still dealing with the aftermath of Mother Nature's ugly side may find solace in the beauty of our mountains in the fall.

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Bill Studenc, who began his career in journalism and communications at The Mountaineer in 1983, retired in January 2021 as chief communications officer at Western Carolina University. He now writes about life in the mountains of Western North Carolina.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Bill Studenc, 'Despite Helene, fall color season is upon us', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C58F8712F973D0



Hurricane Helene: Helpers and heroes

October 20, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Chris Brown, RN| Section: Columns | 382 Words OpenURL Link

In the days since Hurricane Helene left behind a path of unprecedented destruction across our region, we are reminded of how fortunate we are to be part of such a special community that bands together during difficult times.

It is often in times of tragedy that we see the best of humanity. It is in these toughest of times that Fred Rogers instructed us to "look for the helpers."

Haywood Regional Medical Center has been surrounded by no shortage of heroes and helpers over the past two weeks, and we are eternally grateful for this support.

Our team members — providers, clinical staff, plant operations and environmental services teams, and countless others — stepped up and tirelessly served our patients and community while facing many personal challenges of their own. This spirit of compassion and teamwork exemplifies our core values, and we cannot thank them enough.

Our community members — emergency management and first responders to nonprofit organizations, churches and individual volunteers — have been instrumental to our crisis response.

Experiencing the collective generosity of our community partners has been humbling and reminds us of how strong we are when we come together to serve one another. We are especially thankful for the collaborative relationships demonstrated by our county throughout the disaster, prioritizing the health and safety of community members above all else. Despite the challenges, we maintained continuous operations, and for that, we are truly grateful.

This crisis has also reinforced the importance of being part of a large organization with extensive resources and a commitment to always doing the right thing. In the wake of the disaster, Lifepoint Health and our sister facilities across North Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee immediately dispatched water, food, fuel, oxygen and medications, staff and other critical resources and donations.

This support helped ensure our doors remained open to accept patients and alleviate an even worse disaster.

There are likely to be many unknowns in the days ahead, but it is reassuring to know that we are surrounded by many helpers and heroes, and our community stands united. We are confident that together, we will emerge stronger and even more united in our mission of making communities healthier.

For more information on our hospital's response, please visit our website and follow our Facebook page.

Chris Brown, RN, is the CEO at Haywood Regional Medical Center.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Chris Brown, RN, 'Hurricane Helene: Helpers and heroes', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C53A9EC0C893A8



Rallying to help farmers feed hungry livestock

October 20, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Kathy Ross| Section: News| 1266 Words OpenURL Link

Nine days after Helene's flood waters drilled through the Ferguson dairy on Riverside, a caravan of five trucks pulling gooseneck trailers headed up Panther Creek, carrying round bales covered with Bible-verse references spray-painted in red on their white wrappings.

It was a convoluted way to get to the farm, over the mountain via some hairpin turns, but the simple route, a normally easy ride down Riverside Road, had been flooded, muddied, dusted and, in places, shredded by Helene. So they came in the hard way, with gifts of haylage for the dairy farmers who lost much to the flood.

This pilgrimage began with Hunter Pressley and his father, Darren, who live in Jackson County but have deer hunted for years on a farm near Athens, Ga. When they heard of the farms ravaged by Helene, they called the Georgia landowner, who had sold more than 90 percent of his cattle herd. That landowner had 120 rolls of haylage, and he told the Pressleys to take it to the N.C. farmers who had lost winter feed.

A tractor-trailer transported those rolls to Jackson County, where the Pressleys and others gathered with their trailers to unload and re-load for distribution. Some of the haylage arrived at the Western North Carolina Regional Livestock Center near Canton, while five trailer loads were sent straight to the Ferguson farm.

Joining the project were Matthew Brautigam from Sylva and his father, Chris, who drove in from Tennessee to be part of the project. A number of the volunteers came from New Hope Baptist Church in Sylva, including Bill Davis, now public information officer for Jackson County, who had told fellows church members, I've got to do something."

"God gave us the opportunity to serve, and we're here," he said.

A lot of people have taken up that opportunity to serve farmers in Haywood County and other WNC counties stricken by flooding and landslides from Helene. Hay has arrived from South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Tennessee, along with donations of fencing supplies, feed for goats, rabbits, chickens, cats and dogs.

But were it not for the coordinators at the Western North Carolina Regional Livestock Center (usually referred to as the "Canton stockyard" by locals), many of donations might have stalled.

Dan Messer, operations manager for the center, began those relief efforts two days before Helene's arrival over the mountains, with this Facebook post: "Don't lose your animals to flooding! ... If you have animals in danger of being swept away and have no other options, contact us, and we will try our best to accommodate you."

As soon as they realized that farmers had lost feed, barns and fencing, Messer and his wife, Kendra started recruiting volunteers and donations and working with Yvonne Coburn, coordinator for Civilian Disaster Response, a nonprofit whose focus is on assisting farmers, homesteaders and civilians following natural disasters. Donations were piling up even before the N.C. Department of Agriculture asked Messer to make the livestock market the farm relief center for the stricken western counties.

The result has been a marathon of challenges: how do you store truckloads of hay, organize contributions of fencing, shovels, cleaning supplies and feed for all kinds of livestock, coordinate civilian donations from diapers to food, make sure trucks unloading supplies have room to maneuver even as pickup trucks and farm trailers line up to take hay and feed home to livestock?

Kendra Messer has become the primary face of the relief effort on Facebook, posting almost daily videos updating needs and recruiting help. Dan Messer and Coburn have become the choreographers of an ever-changing cast of donors and recipients.

Those recipients range from folks who need horse hay for a single animal, people in need of chicken feed or wiring for new coops, even beekeepers seeking sugar water, to farmers who have lost an entire winter's feed and need to figure out how to get 50 or 100 cattle through the winter.

Somehow, they're making it all work.

"Honestly, I don't even know how this happened," Messer said a week after the flood, between phone calls and a never-ending barrage of questions. "God just keeps meeting needs. We've emptied that room half a dozen times and it keeps filling back up. We just ran out of water and did you see, the next truck had water on it."

Since that time, the sales arena, used to store non-farm items from pet food to people food, has had every seat filled to tipping-point with supplies. The livestock pens behind the sale room have been filled with pallets of water, bags of feed, fencing and cleaning supplies, and square and round bales of hay. It is an organized effort, as those who drive through with farm needs are directed around the building in a slow route where feed is stored by animal type, including stacks of pet food.

Messer is the third generation of his family to manage livestock markets in these mountains. Those inherited relationships and knowledge of communities has been well utilized in these times, when he and Coburn have coordinated hay convoys to remote communities from Avery to Polk and Buncombe counties, even taking advantage of horse and mule pack teams or all-terrain vehicles to get hay into area where roads have been demolished.

Hay is coming in not only by truck; some of the most popular posts on the livestock center's Facebook page has been those showing Chinook helicopters delivering loads of hay a feed.

The center has become a 24-hour operation, recruiting volunteers to unload trucks at night. To the delight of the Messers and Coburn, the most recent call for help resulted in 50 troops from the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne.

As word has spread about the farm relief work, the hay, feed and fencing supplies have dwindled, so that the center is now requesting that those in need make appointments for pickup. Those numbers are posted on the center's Facebook page. The center is also working to distribute items for personal needs to other relief center and scale down that portion of its work, to free up parking and space for farm relief.

The overworked and near-exhausted coordinators – Dan and Kendra have both picked up respiratory ailments — have also found moments of joy and even fun in the grueling efforts that is entering its fourth week. Volunteers are now wearing buttons that declare: "No, I don't know where Dan is," or "I'll find Dan for a \$10 donation." And the Messers have celebrated the generosity of donors and the blessings of faith.

"It's been amazing to see how the Lord has been able to take all of this and bless so many," Kendra said in one of the Facebook posts. Another joyful moment came this week with the arrival of 140 donated generators. "This is one of the most beautiful sights I have seen in a long time," Kendra said.

The volunteers have been another source of joy. Hope Calvert lives in Leicester and showed up to help. Her hometown was hit by tornadoes several years ago, she said. In the rural area where she grew up, "it took people over a year to get back on their feet, because they were the last to get help," she added. "We're not going to let that happen here."

The livestock center is also now coordinating with the Smoky Mountain Farmers Cooperative. The Jonathan Creek branch of the co-op has established a relief fund for farmers and is also providing some assistance.

And this week, three experts from the Nelson Tractor Company out of Blairsville, Ga. traveled throughout Western North Carolina, including Haywood County, offering to help evaluate and repair farm equipment damaged by the flood, particularly tractors.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Kathy Ross, 'Rallying to help farmers feed hungry livestock', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C58F86C644DBC0



How to prepare for telehealth appointments

October 20, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Health | 283 Words OpenURL Link

When traveling to in-person doctor visits becomes risky, many doctors increase telemedicine offerings, allowing patients to call in and discuss issues or symptoms over the phone. And in the wake of the flooding from Helene, a number of medical offices, particularly those in neighboring Buncombe County, are offering this service.

In many instances, doctors can prescribe medications or recommend treatments without seeing patients in their offices, and patients may appreciate that convenience even after the pandemic has ended.

Telehealth appointments can be valuable for anyone, and patients can take steps to ensure their telemedicine sessions with their physicians are as productive as possible.

Here are some tips to get the most out of a telehealth appointment.

Write down questions: Prior to an appointment, patients can write down any questions they have for their physicians. This helps ensure nothing is forgotten during the appointment. Writing down questions is especially important for telehealth appointments, as it can be easy to be distracted when calling in from home.

Keep a health diary: A health diary can help patients point to symptoms or other persistent issues they've faced in the weeks or months leading up to their telehealth appointments. Jot down everything from the severity and frequency of symptoms to fluctuations in weight to any reactions to medications. No detail is too minor, as the more informed patients are, the more fruitful their discussions with physicians can be.

Photograph any extraordinary symptoms: If any unusual symptoms or issues like rashes arise, document them by taking photos and measure the size of any lumps. Any symptoms should be reported to a physician immediately, but documentation like photographs can ensure nothing is lost in translation during telehealth appointments.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Writer, 'How to prepare for telehealth appointments', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C58F86ED3FA610



MG listening with heart audrey snyder add photo of audrey and bio

October 20, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Health | 334 Words OpenURL Link

Presently, many of those who have experienced and are still wading through the disasters and tragedies caused by Hurricane Helene are just barely able to access the most basic of needs (food, water, shelter, physical safety).

And although mental health professionals are and will continue to be a big part of perpetuating healing from these traumas, those that don't have their basic needs met might not yet be in an emotionally or physically stable enough position to devote limited internal resources to therapy sessions.

This doesn't mean that mental and emotional healing isn't taking place in the daily acts of living. It does mean that these mental health moments occur organically and unexpectedly.

It might happen as they're receiving provisions for their family and are brought to tears; or going through the checkout line at the grocery store and a friendly face innocently asks how they are doing and unintentionally ends up in a conversation about a flooded home; or when physically working side-by-side during clean up and rebuilding naturally leads to camaraderie.

In those interactions, you might feel compelled to suggest a therapist or another professional listening ear. Before you do so, I implore you to first listen to the person presenting their heart to you.

Don't worry about saying the right thing (or potentially anything at all). Try not to rush through this moment of human connection. Commiserate, but don't try to "one up"—there is no winning in making comparisons of loss. Try to show your interest and caring by maintaining an open and relaxed face and body position. And then, if the timing feels right, share what mental health resource information that you have.

Good listening skills are simple but take practice. There is no better time to practice fully listening than in those moments when you are helpless to do anything except bear witness to another's grief and humanity. Helping them hold this burden, even momentarily, is how we help heal ourselves and others. If you can do this, you've actually done guite a lot.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Writer, 'MG listening with heart audrey snyder add photo of audrey and bio', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C58F86DB038318



How everyone can pitch in to protect water supplies

October 20, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Health | 409 Words OpenURL Link

The flooding of Hurricane Helene has provided a vivid and bitter reminder to Western North Carolina of the value of a clean, safe water supply. It was a cruel irony for many, in the days immediately following the flood, to be surrounded by water without a safe drop to drink.

As relief has poured into the WNC region and towns struggle to reconnect to safe water supplies, the recent challenges remind us of the need to ensure our own well being by doing what we can to keep our water supplies safe. Here are a few suggestions:

Be careful how you clean

Consumers' choice of cleaning products have an effect on water supplies. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, some household cleaners contain hazardous or toxic substances that can contaminate ground or surface waters.

Common sense suggests all-natural cleaning products would not contain toxic substances, but packaging can be misleading. For example, various products are purported to be "eco-friendly" or "green," but that doesn't mean they are. "Greenwashing" is a practice employed by manufacturers that's designed to give consumers the impression a product is nontoxic and eco-friendly, even though that's not necessarily the case.

So what can consumers do? Look for products with third party certifications from organizations like the Environmental Protection Agency and Green Seal. Products with these third-party certification labels indicate they've been vetted and approved by independent organizations.

Avoid flushing your meds: Few people give a second thought to flushing unused medications down the toilet. However, various organizations urge individuals to contact their local governments about drug take-back events.

The EPA notes that one of the risks associated with flushing old medicines is that they can ultimately end up in streams and rivers when disposed of in this fashion. That contaminates local water supplies and poses a threat to local wildlife.

The Waynesville Police Department has a drug-disposal program, and unused medications can be placed in a secure drop box behind the department on Main Street.

Plant native species: Water scarcity may not affect developed nations on a daily basis, but it's not as foreign an issue as people may think. During periods of drought, which have increased significantly in many areas over the last 20 years, water restrictions can affect the health of plants around a property.

Native species are adapted to withstand local weather, including periods of drought if that's common to a given area. That means they won't need as much water when conditions become dry.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Writer, 'How everyone can pitch in to protect water supplies', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C58F86E4953048



All under one roof: Clyde church housing firefighters, volunteers and flood victims

October 20, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Brionna Dallara | Section: News | 884 Words OpenURL Link

Central United Methodist Clyde has embraced a new role in its response to Hurricane Helene. As well as opening its doors as a community kitchen, the church has converted its facilities into a temporary dorm for the Clyde Fire Department and strike teams from outside the county.

Some of those teams have been bunked in the nursery, one with a coincidental Noah's Ark motif.

For this time, church rooms like the Bell Choir room and the Sunday flower room take on new identities — becoming temporary spaces for overflowing canned goods or paper supplies.

"I describe it as stone soup, if people are familiar with the story Stone Soup, where everybody in the community just brings what they have," said Pastor Linda-Arlene Hoxit, referencing an old folk tale where each person from a village brings a portion of their food to make a full meal.

"All the churches are working together. It is our shared baptism all the way," the pastor added. "We're coordinating with each other to try and work out the duplication and make sure that all the needs are covered, and we're going to be here with the community all the way through."

Pre-planning

Ahead of the flood, the Canton Missional Network, a network of Christian churches and the community kitchen, held a meeting for its members.

"This comes out of previous floods (when) the different churches in the Canton area all got together," Hoxit said.
"We're now meeting once a week so we can coordinate, so it's not all the churches doing a little bit of everything.
Now we're starting to specialize."

When The Mountaineer spoke with Hoxit she had been working operations at the church for the past 15 days following the storm, including 30 hours straight when it opened up as a shelter immediately following the flood.

"I have, in fact, taken a nap under my desk at one point," Hoxit said.

Watching the waters

The pastor was at the church when the waters came lapping into their parking lot after covering up Old Clyde Road.

"We watched as it came up to the fire department, and kind of our back area," Hoxit said. "After the storm finished, you had the runoff coming and that's what spiked the flood waters up, and then down, the next day. The sun was absolutely shining, but that's when we really got the worst of the flood."

Many people arrived at the church lot after the storm and watched as the floodwaters rose. In that moment, it began to sink in for those watching, the possibility that some of their homes would be washed away once the water receded.

"Everybody was trying to start to process it, because you could see the river was here in the bottom of the parking lot, all the way, and the Pigeon River is not supposed to be in my parking lot," Hoxit said.

The moment stood out in Hoxit's mind as one of profound community, the sunny disposition in stark contrast to the surrounding events.

After the initial sirens rang throughout the town, Hoxit quipped it started raining cats and dogs as people and their animals poured into the church.

Moving in the VFD

"When we started, there was no power. We were boiling water — the first meal was gourmet peanut butter and jelly sandwiches," Hoxit said.

Over a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, Hoxit said, the decision was made that the Clyde Fire Department could move its trucks into the church's lot, which sits adjacent to the flooded station, and set up a makeshift command center inside.

Within a day, air mattresses had been set up in the Noah's Ark nursery. Another site was set up to allow the fire department to get its communications operation up and running.

"It's just a temporary home, but it is a situation where they can keep all the equipment together, coms together, and function reasonably well," Hoxit said.

Colt Frie, an out-of-town firefighter from North Chatham, bunked in the nursery.

"I Facetimed with my daughter yesterday and she was very entertained by the Noah's Ark on the wall, so we've been very comfortable. They've been feeding us well, so it's been a very good deployment," Frie said.

Feeding the masses

The church has a kitchen specially built for dishing out meals to large groups — a structure they adopted following the floods of 2004.

"In 2004 with the massive number of people, they figured out exactly where every single thing in the kitchen needed to be. New commercial dishwashers, the forks go here, all of it to just process that much food, to feed that many people," Hoxit said. "So this fellowship hall and kitchen was specially designed, as they say, for such a time as this."

Denise Teague and her daughter, Amanda, have been in the kitchen preparing and cooking meals. In addition, Teague oversees eight Girl Scout troops that have also assisted.

"It's really important for people to be able to give back, for people to feel like they're doing their part. Not everybody can go out and muck yards and clean up garbage and run a chainsaw and that kind of stuff. But there's lots of people who can bake, and that can make stews and cook and bring casseroles," Teague said. "And we're just appreciative to Clyde Central that they are letting us do all that, because it's a way for us all to give back and work together."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Brionna Dallara, 'All under one roof: Clyde church housing firefighters, volunteers and flood victims', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C58F871F268C60



Letters to the Editor: ode to dementia advocate who passed during the flood

October 20, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Letters To Editor | 763 Words OpenURL Link

Thank you for the excellent coverage you have provided regarding the impact of Helene.

Your articles have covered a wide range of topics, giving evidence of the thoughtful commitment of The Mountaineer to the pursuit of truth for the good of the readers you serve.

In the Oct. 9, 2024, edition there was coverage of the events surrounding the death of Marian Badgley. Reference was made to the multitude of ways that Marian Bagley sought to be an advocate for those making the journey through a life that is shaped by Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders.

Thank you for including this in the story. For more than a decade, Marian lived with dementia/Alzheimer's Disease as she provided care for her husband Bud.

During the later stages of his journey Marian sought the assistance of a Dementia Caregivers Support Group, facilitated by the late Dr. Wright Spears in the latter part of the 1990s.

She became a co-facilitator of that group after the death of her husband. She continued in that role until just a few months ago.

During those years she helped so many as she gave them permission to share the heartaches and challenges of life impacted by cognitive loss and resulting disabilities.

As a part of her efforts, she coordinated "Memory Walks" in cooperation with the Alzheimer's Association for Haywood County and, also, the "Project Lifesaver" (a tracking device used to help locate people with dementia who wander and become lost) in partnership with law enforcement agencies in Haywood County.

For the past 15-plus years, I, along with a couple of others, have worked with Marian Bagley in continuing the Dementia Caregivers Support Group. It was/is an honor to share her vision of supporting those making the journey impacted by dementia. The work goes on.

The Dementia Caregivers Support Group meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month from 4:30 to 6 p.m. at the Haywood Senior Resource Center.

If one is interested, or has the need of support provided by this group, they are welcome to attend. It is a "safe place" where listening, encouragement, and practical suggestions and help are offered. No reservations are needed.

Editor's note: Marian was not a flood victim, but passed away during the flood, at a time when there was no power or communications. Friends wrapped her body in a quilt and drove her to the hospital to be placed in the morgue there until she could be taken to a funeral home.

Larry Reeves

Clyde

Trump divided America?

So you don't like President Trump, think he's divisive.....Let's talk about that.

How about when none of the Democrats showed up for his inauguration? He hadn't even been president yet, and except for Clinton and Obama, not one Democrat showed up....Is that when Trump divided America?

How about when 19 minutes after Trump was inaugurated, the Washington Post declared the impeachment campaign has started? Was that when Trump divided America?

How about when Nancy Pelosi ripped up Trump's State of the Union right in front of the world, showing complete disrespect for the President of the United States? Did that bring the country together and is that when Trump divided America?

How about when America had to endure, 3 years and over \$30 million spent on trying to prove that Trump only won because of Russian collusion and not because America voted him in, and 17 Democrats did everything in their power to prove that there was Russian Collusion...and came up with zero...? Was that when Trump divided America?

Do you know that it was the Democrats that:

Were the KKK? That the grand leader of the KKK was Robert Byrd, who was elected to Congress and served for decades, and that it was Hillary, Bill, and Obama that gave his eulogy praising him?

That the Democrats fought the Civil war to keep slavery?

That the inner-city ghettos were created by Democrats to keep control of slaves after they were freed?

That planned parenthood was founded in inner cities to control the black population?

Is any of this in our history books?

Do you know that the "cages" the left claimed that Trump built to put illegal children in, were built by Obama for the very purpose of putting illegal children in?

Have you ever wondered why it's cities that have been run for decades that have the most homeless, the most crime, the most murders, the worst inner city schools, are all run by Democrats?

A final thought.

Why do you think only a few Democrats voted for the Safeguard American Voter Act, requiring proof of citizenship to vote in federal elections? Perhaps they know that the illegal vote might sway election results with all the freebies handed out to them.

Lynn Gregory

Waynesville

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Writer, 'Letters to the Editor: ode to dementia advocate who passed during the flood', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C58F870B84CE88>



Movie sites in Western NC affected by Helene

October 20, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon; Staff Writer | Section: Living | 636 Words Page: 1C OpenURL Link

Weeks after Hurricane Helene swept through the state as a tropical storm, several landmarks and attractions in Western North Carolina have been temporarily shut down, including some that were in the spotlight of big blockbuster movies.

For decades, the Tar Heel state has been the backdrop for many action, comedy and drama television shows and movies. Of the many popular movies captured around North Carolina, here's which film sites around the mountain areas were impacted by the storm:

Biltmore Estate

Featured in: "The Swan" (1956), "Being There" (1979), "Last of the Mohicans" (1992), "Forrest Gump" (1994), "Richie Rich" (1994), "Hannibal" (2001), "A Biltmore Christmas" (2023)

Biltmore Estate, which stood as the home of the billionaire mogul in the 1979 Oscar-winning movie "Being There" and the world's richest comic book family in "Richie Rich," as well as as the primary set for one of Hallmark's newest holiday movies, is temporarily closed after Helene. The entrance to the home and other low-lying areas of the property did have some flooding, but Biltmore House, conservatory, winery, gardens, and hotels had little to no damage.

Chimney Rock State Park

Featured in: "Last of the Mohicans" (1992)

Chimney Rock State Park is one of the 13 state parks in western North Carolina temporarily closed while officials work on post-storm recovery. Located in Rutherford county outside of south Asheville, the park was featured in the ending of "Last of the Mohicans" during the waterfall, fight and bathing scenes, according to the Rutherford County tourism site.

Dupont State Recreational Forest

Featured in: "The Hunger Games" (2012)

Dupont State Recreational Forest, location of Katniss' pond and the place where Peeta camouflaged himself in the movie based on the bestselling "Hunger Games" book series, has been closed since Sept. 30. According to the DSRF website, the park will be closed "for an extended period while public safety and emergency response are prioritized."

Grandfather Mountain

Featured in: "Forrest Gump" (1994)

Grandfather Mountain is one of many spots featured in Forrest Gump's 3+ year run across America in the iconic 1994 film - with a marker for what's now known as "Forrest Gump Curve" between the Wilson Center for Nature Discovery and the Mile High Swinging Bridge. Both the private park and state park at Grandfather Mountain are closed at this time.

Lake James

Featured in: "The Hunt for Red October" (1990)

Lake James, which was portrayed as Penobscot River in Maine in the film based on the thriller novel, is closed at this time. Along with Lake James State Park, all state parks west of I-77 are closed through at least the end of Oct.

Lake Lure

Featured in: "Dirty Dancing" (1987)

Lake Lure, located in Rutherford County, was the backdrop for the famous lift scene in the classic '80s film, "Dirty Dancing." According to the town of Lake Lure website, a curfew is in place at the lake from 7:30 p.m.- 7:30 a.m. and officials and crews have been working to remove debris from the lake.

Moses H. Cone Memorial Park

Featured in: "The Green Mile" (1999)

If you've seen the 1999 drama starring Tom Hanks you might recognize Moses H. Cone Memorial Park as Paul Edgecomb's nursing home. As of Oct. 11, The Blue Ridge Parkway is closed between mileposts 198.4 and 469, including Flat Top Manor at Milepost 294.

South Mountain State Park

Featured in: "Please Don't Destroy: The Treasure of Foggy Mountain" (2023)

"Saturday Night Live" comedy trio Please Don't Destroy filmed the comedy film in various spots across North Carolina to depict the fictitious "Foggy Mountain," including South Mountains State Park, Crowders Mountain State Park and Mount Mitchell State Park. All three state parks are among the parks with closures in effect until at least Oct. 31 due to Helene.

Chyna Blackmon: @chynablackmon

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Chyna Blackmon, Staff Writer, 'Movie sites in Western NC affected by Helene', *News & Observer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 1C https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C56D53F8C5B4E8



Buttigieg visits Pigeon River Gorge to see I-40 damage

October 20, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling; Staff Writer | Section: News | 857 Words

Page: 15A OpenURL Link

PIGEON RIVER GORGE Like many Americans, U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttiglieg saw pictures of what the remnants of Hurricane Helene did to Interstate 40 in Western North Carolina's Pigeon River Gorge.

On Thursday, he came to the gorge to see first hand. With Gov. Roy Cooper, U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis and state officials, he looked over the concrete highway median into the abyss where the river had washed the eastbound lanes away.

"It's one thing to see a photo," Buttigieg said. "It's another to stand here and look at just the shocking, destructive power of this storm. It's almost impossible to believe that water and wind alone could have torn apart rock and asphalt and the literal ground near where we're standing."

Of all the rebuilding challenges ahead, the reconstruction of the eastbound lanes of I-40 through the gorge will be among the most complex and expensive. The N.C. Department of Transportation's preliminary estimate puts the cost at \$1 billion.

On his first tour of Western North Carolina since the storm, Buttigieg pledged federal support to "make sure that funding is not a barrier."

State officials don't yet know how long it will take to rebuild I-40 through the gorge and restore the main highway connection between North Carolina and Tennessee. But standing next to Buttigieg on Thursday, N.C. Transportation Secretary Joey Hopkins pledged that it would happen.

"Not rebuilding is not an option," Hopkins said. "We will rebuild. The question is how."

The eastbound lanes of I-40 began to disappear just before noon on Sept. 27, as the remnants of Helene moved out of Western North Carolina. The swollen Pigeon River carved into the earth along the highway, swallowing trees, then the guardrail and the paved shoulder. In several places, one or both of the travel lanes are also gone.

The westbound lanes are intact, though cracks have developed in the pavement in spots. The NCDOT and its contractors are keeping an eye on those, looking for any signs of movement, says Wanda Payne, NCDOT's top engineer in the region.

"We're actively monitoring the cracks to make sure we don't lose anything else," Payne told Buttigieg.

Stabilizing the westbound lanes is the first step in restoring the highway. Contractors are using a technique called "soil nailing," essentially driving reinforced steel bars up to 20 feet long into the side of the gorge under the road to keep it from eroding further.

The \$8 million contract with Wright Brothers Construction of Charleston, Tennessee, and Colorado-based GeoStabilization International requires that work to be done by Jan. 4, with incentives if they can finish sooner, said Daniel Ross, NCDOT's engineer overseeing the project. Once they're done, work on the eastbound side can begin in earnest.

It's not clear yet how the road will be rebuilt. Hopkins said NCDOT has identified teams of designers and construction contractors and asked them to come up with proposals, along with estimated costs and timelines.

"I'm sure we'll see some different ideas," he said.

The basic challenge, Payne said, is to reconnect the highway from the Tennessee line to the tunnels near mile marker 4. There may be different solutions at different points along the way, including walls, viaducts and shifting lanes back from the river's edge.

"I think we have a lot of options," she said.

Hopkins said he hopes NCDOT will choose a design and construction team in the next few weeks.

Could the westbound lanes reopen to traffic?

The Pigeon River also tore away parts of eastbound I-40 in Tennessee, though the damage was not as extensive. The state transportation department has converted the two westbound lanes to two-way traffic between the North Carolina line and Exit 447, a distance of about 4 miles.

But it's too soon to tell whether NCDOT can put traffic on the westbound lanes on the North Carolina side once they're stabilized.

In several places, all that separates those lanes from the river is the median barrier, like the spot Buttigieg visited Thursday. Ross, the project engineer, said it's likely contractors will need at least one of the westbound lanes for trucks and construction equipment to rebuild the highway.

Meanwhile, an alternate route between the two states, Interstate 26, remains closed after floodwaters knocked down twin spans that carried the highway over the Nolichucky River in Erwin, Tennessee, about 40 miles from the state line.

There's no timeline set for rebuilding the bridges and fully reopening the highway, said Mark Nagi, spokesman for the Tennessee Department of Transportation.

But TDOT hopes to get one lane open in each direction to through traffic by the end of November, Nagi said. The bridge spans that fell are close to the river bank, and TDOT plans to create a temporary roadway by filling the area on the westbound side with stone and paving over it.

When the eastbound span is rebuilt, traffic will shift and the temporary road will be replaced with a new westbound bridge.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Richard Stradling, Staff Writer, 'Buttigieg visits Pigeon River Gorge to see I-40 damage', *News & Observer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 15A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C56D5414184598



When you are both a journalist and a firefighter, which comes first when a hurricane hits?

October 20, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Scott Fowler; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1003 Words

Page: 13A OpenURL Link

Many journalists have covered the damage that Hurricane Helene wrought in Western North Carolina when it devastated much of the area in late September.

Very few of them, though, have had to make the same sorts of choices that 25-year-old Moss Brennan has.

Brennan is the editor of the Watauga Democrat in Boone, where he supervises three other staff writers and several freelance photographers and also helps oversee the publication of four other neighboring community newspapers.

Meanwhile, Brennan also serves as a volunteer firefighter for two local rescue units in the Boone area - the Deep Gap Fire Department and the Watauga County Rescue Squad.

"I have my rescue hat and my journalism hat," Brennan, a 2021 graduate of Appalachian State, said in a phone interview. "And I try to keep them as separate as possible."

That has proved challenging over the past couple of weeks. Hurricane Helene caused mayhem all over Western North Carolina. Brennan found himself wanting to help in two disparate ways - getting important information to the public through the newspaper and its various social media platforms and literally helping to save lives as a first responder.

In the first few hours and days of the storm, as Helene downed trees, flooded rivers, provoked landslides, knocked out power and caused dozens of deaths in Western North Carolina, Brennan stuck mostly with his volunteer work on the rescue units. He participated in several swift-water rescues, helping get people and animals out of cars that were stuck in floodwaters or out of houses where the water had risen too high for a safe exit.

"On those swift-water calls," Brennan said, "I was part of rescuing 11 people and three dogs."

Then it came time to put out the newspaper - or actually multiple newspapers, since Brennan is also the executive editor of Mountain Times Publications. The company owns community newspapers in neighboring counties like Ashe and Avery, too. All of the publications combined - there are five of them altogether - have a staff of nine full-time journalists. Most of those reporters are in their 20s, Brennan said.

Brennan is most closely associated with the Watauga Democrat, which he reports for and edits each week and which prints once a week on Wednesdays. For the Oct. 2 edition, the first after Helene, Brennan wrote the top story on the front page and also took the 1A centerpiece photo.

The headline was stark: "DEVASTATION."

The newspaper decided to print close to a thousand extra copies of that edition, since so many places were without power and Wi-Fi. Brennan and the staff dropped off free copies of the newspapers at central distribution areas like community centers and fire departments.

"I went to one fire department and they said, 'This is the first news we've had since Friday (five days before),'"
Brennan said. "It just goes to show you that local journalism - and the printed paper - can still be very important."

Brennan grew up in Durham and attended high school at the Durham School of the Arts. He traveled 200 miles west

across North Carolina to go to college at Appalachian State, where he majored in journalism and at one point was editor-in-chief of The Appalachian, the student newspaper.

Before he had even finished college, the Watauga Democrat had offered him a full-time job as a reporter. Brennan jumped at it - this was during the COVID era and almost all of his classes were online. When the editor job at the newspaper came open, Brennan was first appointed as interim editor and then got the job permanently - at age 22 and only three months after his college graduation.

Shortly after that, Brennan had to report on a spate of fires in Deep Gap, which is an unincorporated area in Watauga County. He grew somewhat interested in the process of fighting fires during this reporting, as well as the people who do it.

"I had always been interested in helping people anyway," Brennan said. "That's kind of why I got into journalism, too - to tell people's stories and hopefully help them. And then the Deep Gap fire chief was like, 'Hey, if you want to come to one of our trainings, we have one on Tuesday night.'"

Curious, Brennan stopped by and was enthralled by the work. He lived only 10 minutes from the station. So he joined Deep Gap as a volunteer firefighter in January 2022. A few months later, he got trained as an emergency medical technician (EMT). By February 2023, he had also joined the Watauga County Rescue Squad, also as a volunteer. Since he was volunteering, Brennan could mostly pick and choose what calls he assisted on and make sure he had time for his reporting and editing.

"My journalism job is flexible enough that if I'm not in the middle of an interview or a deadline, I can typically leave work if it's a serious enough call," Brennan said. "I probably go on a couple of calls a week. The majority of calls are medical, but there is the occasional car crash or fire."

With input from his bosses, Brennan said he decided early on that he shouldn't and couldn't report on calls that he was working on as a first responder. Compartmentalization would be key.

As for Brennan himself, he was fortunate. He lost power for only three hours during Hurricane Helene. Wi-Fi has been a thornier issue. Brennan has filed some stories from McDonald's (this is an age-old reporting trick, since McDonald's are often open late and generally have reliable Wi-Fi).

As the rescue calls have slowed and Western North Carolina concentrates on recovery, Brennan has been more focused on the reporting side of his life lately. As for his long-term plans, he said: "I really don't know what the future holds. I just know that I love what I do right now - both the rescue side and the journalism side."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Scott Fowler, Staff Writer, 'When you are both a journalist and a firefighter, which comes first when a hurricane hits?', *News & Observer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 13A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C56D5437A34940>



Editorial/Opinion

October 20, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Section: Editorial/Opinion | 629 Words

Page: 20A OpenURL Link

The western part of this state has endured a devastating weather event that has affected every segment of people's lives. There has been an outpouring of support from public and governmental sources and it will take months if not years to fully recover.

Almost as devastating is the mass amount of misinformation and disinformation that these folks have been bombarded with, especially from Donald Trump and his minions, for their own political purposes. As in the lies that were told about Springfield, Ohio (think cats and dogs), they seem to have no shame or compassion.

Republican governors and other local officials have disputed these outright lies. The folks who are hurt the most are the ones who need help the most. As usual with Trump, it is all about him and not the affected citizens.

Danny Squires, Raleigh

Robinson choice

I agree wholeheartedly with the take of the Sept. 29 letter that said Mark Robinson should stay in the race. It's not ideal to have someone in a position of power who could do damage, but it can teach a lesson to those who put them in that level of power.

The tension parties have and the arrogance to stick by their parties' side, despite the moral compass of the person running, is going to catch up to them. Bad choices unfortunately have bad outcomes.

Alana Vance, Clayton

It's personal

Hurricane Helene's devastation hit close to home for me. As a kid, I spent summers vacationing in the Carolinas, especially in Chimney Rock, a beautiful village in Rutherford County. I still have family in that region, and it's heartbreaking to see their community shattered by the storm.

Recovery will be long and difficult. While FEMA's response has been quick, the scope of destruction demands greater attention.

Helene is a reminder that we need stronger infrastructure and better preparedness for future storms. Strengthening infrastructure, creating emergency plans and staying informed are critical steps that could save lives. Climate change is progressing, and so are the frequency and intensity of these disasters. We can't afford to wait to act until the next catastrophe hits vulnerable communities.

For me, this is personal. The places and people I love are suffering. We must take extra precautions and prepare these communities for the inevitable effects of climate change before it's too late.

Fallon Lawson, Old Town, Maine

Vote against amendment

The ballot in North Carolina will contain a proposed amendment to the state constitution. It reads "Constitutional amendment to provide that only a citizen of the United States who is 18 years of age and otherwise possessing the qualifications for voting shall be entitled to vote at any election in this state." The existing wording from the constitution is not on the ballot for comparison.

If passed, the clear phrasing in the current constitution "every person born in the United States and every person who has been naturalized" would be replaced by the unclear phrase "citizen of the United States." Preserve our constitutional rights. Vote against the constitutional amendment referendum.

Marvin Fineman, Wilmington

Voucher moms

In response to "A male Wake teacher wore a tutu for Spirit Week last year. Why critics are now upset" (Oct. 15):

These right-wing Moms for Liberty harassing a teacher over a costume? I can't believe this is part of our daily news conversation. These are exactly the moms who need to put their kids in voucher schools and leave the rest of us alone.

Ellen Canavan, Cary

Education threats

The group Moms for Liberty is going after a male Wake County teacher for wearing a skirt during spirit week, yet is silent about reports of candidate for Governor Mark Robinson calling himself a "Black NAZI" and "perv."

Robinson continues to sit on the NC Board of Education and make decisions that affect our schools. Perhaps Moms for Liberty and others should get serious about the real threats to education.

Mark Slattery, Raleigh

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• Citation (aglc Style)

'Editorial/Opinion', *News & Observer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 20A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C56D5422EA0CA0>



In NC, Tim Walz and Bill Clinton praise Kamala Harris, contrast her with Trump

October 20, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan; Staff Writer | Section: News | 730 Words

Page: 17A OpenURL Link

RALEIGH Vice presidential candidate Tim Walz and former President Bill Clinton traveled to Durham Thursday on the first day of early voting in North Carolina. And Clinton will be back in the Triangle on Sunday for what the campaign calls a block party in Raleigh.

Clinton said at a rally at the Community Family Life & Recreation Center at Lyon Park that former Republican President Donald Trump has "become kind of a crazy conspiracy theorist."

He contrasted vice president and Democratic nominee Kamala Harris with Trump, saying that another Trump administration is "four more years of chaos."

"Which candidate will take us forward, and which will take us back?" Clinton asked the crowd.

Walz touted his middle-class background, talked about himself and Harris both being gun owners, and said Trump "can't pass a background check."

Walz said Republicans in Congress won't stand up to Trump, urging supporters to go vote. "Who would have ever thought we'd see Bernie Sanders, Dick Cheney and Taylor Swift" all endorsing Harris, he asked, to laughter from the crowd.

He told the crowd that "the economy works best when it's fair and focuses on the middle class."

Walz, Clinton and N.C. Central University student Devin Freeman took the stage together shortly after 4 p.m. Freeman rallied the crowd, saying that Harris and Walz have a "vision for the future, one where we're all able to achieve our version of the American dream."

Clinton praised Harris for choosing Walz as her running mate as her first major action as a candidate. Clinton also made light of his own advanced age, noting that he's only two months younger than Trump.

Clinton and Trump are both 78.

Walz visits Durham

Earlier in the day, Walz recorded interviews with radio stations in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Walz' plane landed shortly after 2:30 p.m. Thursday at Raleigh-Durham International Airport, where he was greeted by a group that included state Sen. Mike Woodard of Durham and two county Democratic Party chairs, Steve Rawson of Durham County and Cassie Rice of Orange County.

Walz then stopped at a campaign field office downtown on East Chapel Hill Street, where he thanked volunteers packing supplies for Hurricane Helene relief. The Minnesota governor told the group that a disaster like Helene brings out the best in people.

The Lyon Park center is in Durham's West End. The rally was being held in the gym, with a crowd of hundreds of supporters, including local officials like Durham County Commissioner Wendy Jacobs, state Rep. Julie von Haefen and Durham City Council member Javiera Caballero. On the street outside the center, a protester held a handmade

sign that said "Ceasefire Now."

At a Winston-Salem stop later Thursday, Walz was to be joined by musical artist and activist Common, according to the campaign. Walz' airplane departed RDU around 6:30 p.m.

This marks Walz' third campaign visit to North Carolina as Harris' running mate, with the first two in Asheville and Raleigh.

The latest Quinnipiac University Poll, released Wednesday, shows Harris with just a 2-point lead over Republican nominee and Trump among likely North Carolina voters. The slim margin makes the race "too close to call," according to pollsters.

Upcoming Clinton events

Also set to be in Durham on Thursday, but not part of the campaign event, was Hillary Clinton for a long-scheduled event at the Durham Performing Arts Center. Author John Grisham was scheduled to talk with Clinton on stage about a wide range of topics. Clinton was the Democratic nominee for president in 2016 and former secretary of state and U.S. senator from New York.

In Bill Clinton's rally speech, he defended his wife over Trump's focus on her emails during the 2016 presidential campaign. At one point during his speech, someone in the crowd yelled out, "We love Hillary!"

Bill Clinton will move on to a Harris-Walz campaign bus tour of Eastern North Carolina, with stops on Friday and Saturday in Wilmington, Fayetteville, Wilson and Greenville. On Sunday, he'll be at a get-out-the-vote event in Rocky Mount with Nash County Democrats, then come to Raleigh.

The Raleigh event on Sunday, with no location or time announced yet, will be a block party with local Democratic leaders.

On Monday, Trump will hold a campaign event in Greenville.

Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan: 919-829-4877, @dawnbvaughan

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan, Staff Writer, 'In NC, Tim Walz and Bill Clinton praise Kamala Harris, contrast her with Trump', *News & Observer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 17A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C56D544642F378>



App State band went from playing dorms to NC arenas

October 20, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Théoden Janes; Staff Writer | Section: Living | 2613 Words Page: 1C

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It's been 10 years since Rachael McKinney looked the members of Rainbow Kitten Surprise in the eyes and - as the Boone-based indie folk-rock band's brand-new booking agent at the time - gave them the bad news:

"We have to change this name," McKinney, then an Appalachian State University senior, told the group consisting of five musical artists who'd joined forces after meeting as freshmen living on campus in Bowie Hall. "It's not happening. We cannot do this. No one's gonna take us seriously.

"We have to change it."

Then they gave her some bad news right back: "It's too late," one of them replied, matter-of-factly. "People already know us too well for us to change the name."

A decade later, it is happening. They can do this. Save for the people who just haven't been paying attention, the vast majority of the music industry - and the thoughtful music fans who appreciate their emotionally raw lyrics - are taking RKS plenty seriously.

And on Oct. 25 and 26, the Mountaineers-turned-Nashvillians-turned darlings of major festivals like Bonnaroo and Lollapalooza will perform energetic back-to-back concerts at Spectrum Center in Charlotte and Lenovo Center in Raleigh, the largest indoor venues they've ever headlined in their former home state.

McKinney, who has been with the band ever since and is now its tour manager, can't help but laugh at memories of that debate, given how everything panned out for lead singer Ela Melo, guitarists Darrick "Bozzy" Keller and Ethan Goodpaster, and drummer Jess Haney.

"I appreciated that confidence in it, but I also just thought it was silly," she says of their original discussion about the name. "And looking back, I was wrong.

"But then you have bands like, what, Diarrhea Planet, and it's like, At least we didn't have that name. I love them, don't get me wrong. But at least we didn't pick that name."

Over the summer, we spoke to McKinney, Melo, Keller, Goodpaster; people who booked them in Boone; and multiple members of their inner circle back at App State, including - in his first mainstream-media interview ever - the man who came up with the name while high on morphine.

Those conversations (lightly edited for clarity and brevity) make up our exclusive oral history of Rainbow Kitten Surprise.

Note: All interviews for this story were completed prior to Hurricane Helene's arrival in Western North Carolina in late September. After the storm, Rainbow Kitten Surprise posted the following message on its Facebook page: "We're heartbroken to see the devastation left behind by Hurricane Helene. Our beloved home of North Carolina needs our help right now." The band listed a variety of ways its fans could help victims. And this month, RKS pledged to donate \$50,000 raised through its fall concert-ticket sales to recovery efforts related to Helene.

'Hanging out, smoking cigarettes, playing songs'

As App State freshmen, Melo, Keller, Goodpaster, Haney, and Charlie Holt (the band's original bassist, who parted ways with RKS last winter) all were assigned to the old Bowie Hall dorm. The only ones who knew each other prior to college were Goodpaster and Haney, fellow Robbinsville, N.C. natives who throughout high school were in multiple bands together that mostly just played in Haney's basement.

Ela Melo: I had a lot of things on the list of what I wanted to do with my life, but I wasn't quite sure about any of it. One thing that I did know is I did want to make music that people could get down to, people enjoyed. I had been doing that for years already, in my hometown of Albemarle, just chilling, had a band with some friends there. That didn't pan out. So I came onto the campus with a mantra, almost.

Darrick "Bozzy" Keller: I was definitely a shy kid growing up. But I remember going in for the first week of college and being like, Man, this feels like summer camp. This is never gonna end. I really stepped out of my comfort zone and would try to take my guitar and go jam with people and make friends. ...

Ethan Goodpaster: When I wasn't going to class, I was playing guitar, finding someone to play something with. There was a lot of jamming happening in our dorm.

Melo: College was a magical time, at least for me. It was like Bonnaroo or something - it's just, like, serendipity everywhere. You end up running into people and stuff, and forming relationships really quickly.

Keller: I knew Ela was a musician, but she was so humble about everything. ... She had seen me at an open-mic night play a couple original songs. Later that night, I bumped into her, and she was like, "Can I show you a song I wrote?" She showed me "All That and More (Sailboat)." And I was just like, "Dude, you have to get this out into the world. This is the best song I've ever heard in my life."

Melo: I played it one time, and he went and got his guitar. He was like, "Show me what you're playing. I want to play it with you." But Bozz was writing, too. So after, he was like, "Well, check my stuff out."

Matthew Clonch, who lived in the dorm and became part of their inner circle: Then they started playing together just for fun.

Ethan Goodpaster: Ela and Bozz were always sitting out there in front of Bowie or in the lobby playing, singing Modest Mouse songs, or Bon Iver songs, things like that.

Clonch: And the first show they ever did was an open-mic night at the college. They were just like, "Hey, this could be fun. We should do it."

Keller: That was the birth of RKS.

'What do you think it should be called?'

It was October of the fall semester of their freshman year when Melo and Keller decided to sign up as an acoustic-guitar duo for the open-mic night hosted at Crossroads Coffee House at the Student Union on campus. But they needed to register with the name of their act - and they didn't have one.

Keller: Maybe a week or so before, our friend Noah Toomey got meningitis right after coming back from fall break. And he was really, really sick.

Noah Toomey: It progressed to a point that Matt - my roommate freshman year - literally had to carry me down the stairs of our dorm to get into a friend's car to get me to the hospital. I'm completely out of it. Then 72 hours later I remember people coming in and out, but nothing too specific until the meds started actually working for me. That's when they came to me with the question about their open-mic night. It was Bozzy, Matt and Ela.

Keller: To see him like that, it was tough. And Ela was just like, "You can name the band. What do you think it should

be called?"

Toomey: I remember doing hand gestures, maybe? And, well, I mean, I love the internet. And there's that cat that has, like, the Pop-Tart body. It's called Nyan Cat. That's kinda what was going through my head. I'm sure I did repeat it quite a bit.

Clonch: I said, "'Rainbow Kitten Surprise?' That's ridiculous." And it was - then they did it anyway.

Keller: My initial reaction was: pretty cool. But we kept telling ourselves, "Ohhh, maybe we should change it."

Toomey, who says the only other time that he's talked about naming the band was when a friend interviewed him for a journalism class: If I could go back, it's always like, Would I have wished the name on them? Because it's a blessing and a curse. I was so morphined up at the time that it sounded like a great idea.

The open-mic night at Crossroads was a success, but after that performance, Melo and Keller focused exclusively on writing and recording music. They wanted, they say, to figure out what they were doing before getting back onto a real stage in front of real crowds. So they returned to using the dorm as their workshop.

Melo: I remember working on stuff over Thanksgiving and working on stuff for Christmas break. And then we were playing some of these songs for people in the lobby. I would write one and come down to play it for everybody, then figure out what the other parts were between me and Bozz. I was working on the mixes of stuff for months - until it was ready to release. The second I was done mixing, we just uploaded it onto Bandcamp. We put out (the three-song EP) "Mary" on May 5th of 2013. And we got a thousand streams the first night.

We knew then; it was like, "Dude, we released this at 10 o'clock at night, and we have a thousand streams overnight." We thought that was success at that point.

Toomey: But there's no way that even someone not in that state could have known the heights that they were gonna go to.

'Oh my God, this is actually incredible'

Melo and Keller continued writing and recording at Bowie Hall through the spring and into the summer of 2013.

Melo: Ethan would hang out sometimes, and we would play sometimes. He would bring his amp down. I played acoustic, and Bozz played acoustic, but Ethan would play electric - more, like, metal stuff. Something a little different. But Ethan can rock whatever the style is.

So we came back over summer break, going into sophomore year, and we're like, "OK, we gotta play some shows or something. But we need more people, 'cause we don't have enough hands for all these parts." We tracked Ethan down, and had him do kind of an audition. He learned all the songs the night before, but he knew 'em. It was just like, "All right, you're in the band, dude."

Keller: And we were working on the album "Seven" - which, musically, was just a bigger sound.

Goodpaster: So eventually they asked to borrow my roommate's cajón to record some drums on it. My roommate was actually Jess (who would become the band's drummer). Then, when we were looking for a drummer, we actually auditioned one guy before Jess. But he wasn't the fit. So I was like, "Hey, my roommate plays drums a little bit, played drums in band in high school. We should see if he wants to."

Keller: We added them during the process of Ela recording and writing that album. So by the time that album released, we were a full-band kind of thing.

Goodpaster: But Jess had only agreed to play one show with us.

That one show was at the old Galileo's bar and cafe in Boone, on Oct. 26, 2013.

Keller: When we first started, I booked all the shows. I was our agent, and Ethan did a lot of the social media and business management. It was very DIY and self-sufficient. We did everything ourselves.

Mark Dixon, former owner of now-closed Galileo's in Boone: I think, at first, everybody was like, "Rainbow Kitten Surprise? What is this? Are they serious?" But they took their music more seriously than their name, I guess. ...

When you're booking local groups like that, you want bands that are willing to put themselves out there and promote, and call everybody they know, and get everybody to come in. And it was clear very early on that they were good at promoting themselves. And then it became apparent real quick - 'cause we were a very small room - that they were gonna have to move on to a bigger room.

Goodpaster: And Jess - even though he said, "I'll just do one show" - kept playing with us.

Rachael McKinney, who would become their booking agent and eventually their tour manager: So they did that, then they played Espresso News, another coffee shop, in December 2013. Then they did a Beech Mountain show, a Montreat College thing, Appalachian Mountain Brewery. In June 2014, they did VH1's (reality-competition show) "Make A Band Famous," then Galileo's again .

The first time I ever even heard of them was when I was on the APPS (Appalachian Popular Programming Society) Council. We were looking for openers for a show with Hunter Hunted back in 2014. And I was such a judgmental little hipster college kid. I was like, Rainbow Kitten Surprise, what a terrible name. This is gonna be some dumb punk band. Then I heard the music - and I was like, Oh my God, this is actually incredible.

'They had the audience in their hip pocket'

From there - with bassist Charlie Holt having been added to the mix by Melo, Keller, Goodpaster and Haney - Rainbow Kitten Surprise continued turning heads on campus. After the fivesome opened for Hunter Hunted in November 2014 at App State's storied Legends nightclub, that winter the band signed with the university's student-run record label, Split Rail Records. In March 2015 it played for 300-plus concertgoers on "the small stage" at Legends; then in August, RKS booked "the big stage" - and drew a sellout crowd of 950.

Goodpaster: We started getting added to these big official playlists on Spotify, and our streaming started getting more popular and more popular. But I'd say - for me, at least - when I was like, Okay, this is cool, this could be a thing was when we sold out Legends.

Keller: That was definitely a milestone for us, 'cause in the beginning, Ela and I would walk to the little gas station beside Legends to get cigarettes. And we would just look up at the sign and be like, "Dude, wouldn't it be sick if we played there?"

Randy Kelly, the now-retired longtime manager of Legends: I was so surprised - and happily so - that at their shows, everybody in the audience knew the lyrics to their songs.

Matthew Clonch, their former dorm-mate, who would become their stage manager and to this day is one of Melo's best friends: I remember that at that time, they played an encore. Then they were called for another encore - and they didn't have any more songs to play. So they just played one they'd already played, 'cause they didn't know what else to do. It was a cover of "Float On" by Modest Mouse.

McKinney: It's that whole "when luck meets skill meets opportunity." And truly - I do believe this in my heart - I think Boone is a very, very special place. It's a different feeling when it comes to music than any other place that I've been. And the fans - literally, you have one person that's listening to RKS. They're telling everyone about it. They're not keeping that to themselves. It was word-of-mouth.

And after selling out Legends and showing those videos on social media, the band kind of just, like, exploded.

Théoden Janes: 704-358-5897, @theodenjanes

Rainbow Kitten Surprise's 'Love Hate Music Box Tour'

When: 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 25, at Spectrum Center, 333 E. Trade St. in Charlotte; and 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 26, at Lenovo Center, 1400 Edwards Mill Road in Raleigh.

Tickets: \$45 and up in Charlotte and \$40 and up in Raleigh, at ticketmaster.com. (\$1 per ticket goes towards supporting organizations delivering mental health treatment and access to care.)

Also: Rainbow Kitten Surprise and opening act The Brook & The Bluff are broadcasting their shows in Charlotte and Raleigh on Nugs.net as a pay-per-view event, with net proceeds going to the PLUS1 Rapid Relief Fund. Details at bit.ly/3Nmyj2F.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Théoden Janes, Staff Writer, 'App State band went from playing dorms to NC arenas', *News & Observer, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 1C https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C56D54098C84E0



Are Russia and China behind Helene misinformation in WNC? 3 in Congress want answers

October 20, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Virginia Bridges, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 1988 Words OpenURL Link

Three United States representatives from North Carolina requested a national intelligence briefing on the spread of online misinformation hindering efforts to support and rebuild parts of Western North Carolina washed away by Hurricane Helene.

"This information is dangerous to saving life and property right now, and we need to get to the bottom of whoever might be disseminating it, manipulating it and manipulating our citizens," U.S. Rep. Deborah Ross, a Wake Democrat, told The News & Observer Saturday.

In the Friday, Oct. 18, letter, Democratic U.S. Reps. Ross, Wiley Nickel and Kathy Manning, wrote to Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines they are concerned about foreign governments involvement in spreading and promoting misinformation to undermine the public trust in government and hamper response efforts.

"Given the significant impact that such disinformation can have on public safety, morale, and the overall effectiveness of recovery initiatives, it is critical to address these threats in a timely and transparent manner," the letter states.

The letter is the latest sign of frustration among federal officials, elected leaders and some members of the public about what is turning into a troubling trend of misinformation spreading online after natural and other disasters. They are particularly concerned about the amount of false and misleading information following recent hurricanes Helene and Milton.

President Joe Biden, Gov. Roy Cooper, American Red Cross officials and leaders from federal, state, county and local governments have criticized and debunked the circulating misinformation, emphasizing people should only rely on trusted sources.

"It's absolutely the worst that I have seen," FEMA administrator Deanne Criswell told reporters Oct. 8, The New York Times reported.

Biden Cooper.JPGPresident Joe Biden speaks with Mayor Esther Manheimer of Asheville, N.C., FEMA Director Deanne Criswell and Gov. Roy Cooper (D-N.C.) during an aerial tour aboard Marine One to assess areas impacted by Hurricane Helene, Wednesday, October 2, 2024, in western North Carolina.

But the rumors continue to spread and recently forced federal officials to temporarily suspend canvassing door-to-door in North Carolina after reports of a militia targeting workers, The Washington Post and Associated Press reported.

The militia never materialized, but a Polk County man was linked to the threat and charged with going armed to the terror of the public after he was found armed with a handgun and a rifle. News & Observer and Charlotte Observer journalists have been reporting on misinformation related to Helene's devastation in Western North Carolina.

Helene made landfall in Florida Sept. 26 as a Category 4 hurricane before drenching Western North Carolina in the days that followed. The storm claimed the lives of at least 95 people, ages 4 to 89, in North Carolina.

RAL_HELENE-NE-100624-RTW_21.JPGFEMA employee Jirau Alvaro inspects Danny Mancini's collapsed Black Mountain home in early October. The Broad River swept it off its foundation.

Many died from drowning and landslides, and it took rescuers more than a week to recover some of their bodies.

In Helene's aftermath, rescue turns to grim recovery in the mountains of Western North CarolinaMore than 1,200 FEMA search-and-rescue personnel from across the country have converged on Western North Carolina in the wake of devastating flooding from Helene. Their work is transitioning into the grim task of recovery more than a week after the storm hit the mountains.

Are foreign adversaries sowing distrust?

Ross said there could be a mix of motivations for the steady deluge of misinformation, from politicians and influencers seeking support to foreign adversaries using this opportunity to be disruptive.

Ross pointed to a recent article in the Tampa Bay Times quoting research from social research media analytics company Graphika and misinformation tracking company NewsGuard. They said there is evidence that China and Russia amplified misinformation, just as foreign countries did after wildfires consumed Maui, Hawaii, in 2023 and a container ship destroyed a Baltimore bridge in March.

Foreign adversaries succeed when they sow discontent, but they also collect personal information when individuals click on their links, Ross said.

"Since it's happened in the past, we need to find out if it's happening now. We need to protect the public," said Ross, who is running for re-election to represent Congressional District 2. Lawmakers hope the intelligence office will respond next week and plan to follow up if there isn't one.

111232_CCBIPresserTourFreeman_JMW_01.jpgRep. Deborah Ross speaks during a press conference at the Wake County Justice Center in Raleigh, N.C. on Friday, Nov. 12, 2021 about the construction of a new local government DNA lab, the second of its kind in the state.

Nickel wants answers before the election

Nickel, of Cary, said he's concerned foreign influence from countries like China, Russia and Iran are trying to sow chaos with an ultimate goal to interfere with the upcoming elections in favor of Republican candidate Donald Trump.

"That's a big part of the goals," said Nickel, who isn't seeking re-election in his recently redrawn congressional district, but plans to run for a U.S. Senate seat in 2026.

Nickel said he hopes the national intelligence director will share a "candid assessment" about any work Russia, Iran and China are doing to undermine the election.

"This is information that the American people should know before election day," Nickel said, adding that such reports have been historically shared after the election.

RAL_NICKEL04-110822-EDH.JPGWiley Nickel greets supporters at a campaign party at Sitti in Raleigh, N.C., Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2022.

Misinformation: A new consequence of disasters

Misinformation seems to be finding its way into key American events, Ross said, but the ongoing effort targeting recovery after hurricanes is the most pressing and dangerous at the moment.

The spread of misinformation during contentious or vulnerable events are becoming constants in U.S. culture. But evolving technology, shifting algorithms and the sharpening of artificial intelligence tools have fueled the spread, Ross said.

Western North Carolina residents, many of whom turned to local and hurricane-centered social media groups for information and advice before, during and after the hurricanes, pay the price, elected officials said.

"We are seeing the dark side of social media, and I wish that people were more discerning in how they consume not just social media, but all media," Ross said.

Republican U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards also spoke out about the misinformation, while debunking rumors such as Helene was geo-engineered to seize lithium deposits in Chimney Rock and that FEMA might run out of money or diverted disaster response to the border or foreign aid.

"I encourage you to remember that everything you see on Facebook, X, or any other social media platform is not always fact," wrote Edwards, who represents far Western North Carolina.

EDWARDS02a-051822-EDH.jpgState Sen. Chuck Edwards talks with Denise Engle outside Edwards' office in Hendersonville, N.C., Wednesday, May 18, 2022.

Letter to Facebook, X, TikTok, YouTube and more

A week ago, Ross, Nickel, U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor of Florida and Rep. Nikema Williams of Georgia sent a letter to executives at Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, X, Discord and Snap.

"In the aftermath of Helene, we have witnessed a troubling surge in misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and scams that are hindering recovery efforts and exploiting vulnerable individuals and families," states the letter.

Misinformation also followed Hurricane Milton, which made landfall on Oct. 9 on Florida's central west coast, elected leaders said. The misinformation trend is becoming "a troubling fixture," of social media after natural disasters, states the Oct. 11 letter to social media sites.

"Misinformation about Hurricane Helene recovery efforts is making it harder for those impacted by the storm to get the help they need," U.S. House Rep. Kathy Manning of Florida posted on X Friday.

The information, which sometimes includes Al-generated images or recirculated images, covers a range of topics, putting experts and assistance organizations at risk and scamming storm victims of their time, money and effort to find shelter and resources, North Carolina and other leaders have warned.

RAL_100124-HELENE-KLM-02.JPGA person walks next to a demolished building in Frank, N.C. on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024, days after Hurricane Helene brought heavy rain and flooding to the western part of the state.

Meteorologists threatened

The lies, scams and conspiracy theories circulating on social media compromise climate scientists and rescue organizations work, and put Americans at risk, the U.S. representatives said.

Some of the posts encouraged hurricane victims to seek fake Federal Emergency Management Administration relief programs and shared misleading information about where to find shelter and resources, the letter states.

A series of posts on Facebook and X took advantage of families in distress by falsely claiming FEMA offered a new grant for immediate cash assistance, sowing more mistrust and delaying efforts to seek help from legitimate programs, the letter said.

Posts on Instagram, TikTok and Discord spread conspiracy theories that government actions created Helene and Milton.

"It was particularly disturbing to see that, prior to Hurricane Milton's landfall, meteorologists experienced harassment and even received death threats from users on X," the letter states.

Nickel said he was particularly worried about X as the company is now owned by Elon Musk, who has given \$75 million to support Trump, NPR reported.

Trump and his allies have also made and amplified misinformation. Trump said Cooper and Washington Democrats blocked help and aid for those impacted by Helene.

Cooper called the claim "a flat-out lie," The News & Observer reported.

NC Gov. Cooper: Candidates are using 'disinformation filled with lies' to 'sow chaos' Disinformation and misinformation about Helene recovery efforts are harming the abilities of communities in Western North Carolina to receive federal aid at the time they need it most, Gov. Roy Cooper and FEMA Administrator Deanna Criswell said Tuesday.

CLYDEHELENE-NE-101624-RTW_18.jpgDavid Matteson and his wife lost all of their household belongings after historic flooding of the Pigeon River in the wake of Hurricane Helene almost three weeks ago. Matteson poses for a portrait on the curb of his Broad Street home in Clyde, N.C., on Wednesday, October 16, 2024. Volunteers have helped him remove the mud and rip out the drywall to begin the rebuilding process.

Social media companies respond

The News & Observer reached out to the social media companies on Friday evening and Saturday morning.

An X spokesperson wrote in an email that they are looking forward to responding to the letter. The company, which has been the target of some of the misinformation criticism, contends the site's system does not promote the spread of misinformation.

On Oct. 9, X's profile for Community Notes, which allows users to write and rate notes on posts, shared that Community Notes "related to recent weather events are showing on hundreds of posts and have already been seen well over 44 million times."

Posts with notes are reshared less and more likely to be deleted, another X update states. Poynter, a nonprofit media institute, recently reported on a rise of misinformation since Musk purchased the platform nearly two years ago.

YouTube's approach to Hurricane Milton included "focusing on helping people access timely and credible news and information," according to the company owned by Google.

"As with many breaking news events, we are prominently surfacing content about Hurricane Milton from authoritative sources, like local and national news outlets, at the top of search results with our Top News panels," according to the social media company.

To address climate information, generally, the company also raises up content from "authoritative sources," in search results and recommendations, and includes information panels under relevant videos to provide viewers with more information.

YouTube prohibits scams and deceptive practices and "rigorously enforce" policies through human review and technology.

CLYDEHELENE-NE-101624-RTW_8.jpgA vehicle flooded by the Pigeon River in the wake of Hurricane Helene is covered with a thick layer of mud at 3610 Broad Street in Clyde, N.C., photographed on Wednesday, Oct. 16, 2024.

The river crested at 27.6 feet, damaging almost every home on Broad Street

Recommended changes for social media companies

The representatives' letter urged the companies to:

Increase monitoring and rapid removal of misinformation related to discovery efforts. Enhance fact-checking partnerships with local and disaster relief organizations. Strengthen algorithms to prevent the spread of conspiracy theories. Increase safeguards against scams that prey on natural disaster victims.

Ross said Saturday they haven't heard from the social media companies yet.

The letter urged quick and decisive action. "You have the power and the responsibility to improve the digital spaces where millions of Americans both seek and promote information during crises, including natural disasters," the letter states.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Virginia Bridges, News & Observer, 'Are Russia and China behind Helene misinformation in WNC? 3 in Congress want answers', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027D8EC330A8>



How could any compassionate person condone the lying about help in western NC? - Opinion

October 20, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: From our readers, News & Observer | Section: letters to the editor | 611 Words OpenURL Link

The western part of this state has endured a devastating weather event that has affected every segment of people's lives. There has been an outpouring of support from public and governmental sources and it will take months if not years to fully recover.

Almost as devastating is the mass amount of misinformation and disinformation that these folks have been bombarded with, especially from Donald Trump and his minions, for their own political purposes. As in the lies that were told about Springfield, Ohio (think cats and dogs), they seem to have no shame or compassion.

Republican governors and other local officials have disputed these outright lies. The folks who are hurt the most are the ones who need help the most. As usual with Trump, it is all about him and not the affected citizens.

Danny Squires, Raleigh

Robinson choice

I agree wholeheartedly with the take of the Sept. 29 letter that said Mark Robinson should stay in the race. It's not ideal to have someone in a position of power who could do damage, but it can teach a lesson to those who put them in that level of power. The tension parties have and the arrogance to stick by their parties' side, despite the moral compass of the person running, is going to catch up to them. Bad choices unfortunately have bad outcomes.

Alana Vance, Clayton

It's personal

Hurricane Helene's devastation hit close to home for me. As a kid, I spent summers vacationing in the Carolinas, especially in Chimney Rock, a beautiful village in Rutherford County. I still have family in that region, and it's heartbreaking to see their community shattered by the storm.

Recovery will be long and difficult. While FEMA's response has been quick, the scope of destruction demands greater attention.

Helene is a reminder that we need stronger infrastructure and better preparedness for future storms. Strengthening infrastructure, creating emergency plans and staying informed are critical steps that could save lives. Climate change is progressing, and so are the frequency and intensity of these disasters. We can't afford to wait to act until the next catastrophe hits vulnerable communities.

For me, this is personal. The places and people I love are suffering. We must take extra precautions and prepare these communities for the inevitable effects of climate change before it's too late.

Fallon Lawson, Old Town, Maine

Vote against amendment

The ballot in North Carolina will contain a proposed amendment to the state constitution. It reads "Constitutional amendment to provide that only a citizen of the United States who is 18 years of age and otherwise possessing the qualifications for voting shall be entitled to vote at any election in this state." The existing wording from the

constitution is not on the ballot for comparison.

If passed, the clear phrasing in the current constitution "every person born in the United States and every person who has been naturalized" would be replaced by the unclear phrase "citizen of the United States." Preserve our constitutional rights. Vote against the constitutional amendment referendum.

Marvin Fineman, Wilmington

Voucher moms

These right-wing Moms for Liberty harassing a teacher over a costume? I can't believe this is part of our daily news conversation. These are exactly the moms who need to put their kids in voucher schools and leave the rest of us alone.

Ellen Canavan, Cary

Education threats

The group Moms for Liberty is going after a male Wake County teacher for wearing a skirt during spirit week, yet is silent about reports of candidate for Governor Mark Robinson calling himself a "Black NAZI" and "perv." Robinson continues to sit on the NC Board of Education and make decisions that affect our schools. Perhaps Moms for Liberty and others should get serious about the real threats to education.

Mark Slattery, Raleigh

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• Citation (aglc Style)

From our readers, News & Observer, 'How could any compassionate person condone the lying about help in western NC? Opinion', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C90662314C48F8



In Raleigh on Sunday, Bill Clinton boosts Harris and issues warning about Trump

October 20, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Virginia Bridges, News & Observer | Section: election | 540 Words OpenURL Link

As the big, bright blue Harris-Waltz bus carrying former President Bill Clinton pulled into a parking lot near downtown Raleigh, the DJ played Isaac Hayes' and David Porter's "Soul Man" to mark Clinton's arrival.

A crowd of hundreds, many wearing Harris-Waltz shirts, cheered and raised their phones up high, excited to video the 42nd president take the stage in a parking lot next to Smith Temple Baptist Church on South East Street. Clinton, who later walked out wearing jeans, a plaid button-down shirt and a blue blazer, said he's studied many presidential elections.

'I think you got to win Wake County big, and get the registered Democrats in Mecklenburg voting at higher rates than they normally do and win the east," Clinton said, in his signature raspy voice.

Clinton, 78, is one of many high-profile officials visiting North Carolina, one of seven swing states, in the walk-up to the Nov. 5 presidential election.

Clinton hit North Carolina's campaign trail Thursday with a bus tour across Eastern North Carolina, campaigning for Vice President Kamala Harris and targeting rural voters across the region.

Before heading east, Clinton and vice presidential candidate Tim Walz spoke in Durham Thursday, the first day of early voting.

Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff also plans to travel to the Research Triangle Park area Tuesday. Former President Barrack Obama plans to stump for Harris in Charlotte on Friday.

And former President Donald Trump will hold a 3 p.m. rally Monday in Greenville and another one in Greensboro at 7 p.m. Tuesday.

Bill Clinton visits Raleigh

In Raleigh, Clinton's 25 minutes of comments at an event billed as a get-out-the-vote block party, started out by poking fun at avid Trump supporter U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene. Clinton focused on Greene's contention that Trump critics control the weather, resulting in Hurricane Helene harming Western North Carolina.

"Well, I agree with Bill Maher," Clinton joked. "Anybody who can control the weather, we want them to be president."

Clinton went on to say that a second Trump presidency would threaten democracy, and Harris' supporters safety, before praising Harris.

20241020_153350.jpgFormer President Bill Clinton visited Raleigh on Sunday, Oct. 20, 2024, one of a number of high-profile surtrogate stops for Kamala Harris in the state.

"She has the intelligence, the knowledge, the experience, the guts and the common sense to be a first-rate president," he said.

Clinton also discussed the divided country and tainted news and information systems, but said Harris is offering a new way forward. And that's why everyone needs not only to vote, but drag everyone they know to vote, Clinton

said.

'Drive them to the polls'

Before Clinton took the stage, local and state leaders, and candidates, spoke, including Raleigh Mayor Mary-Ann Baldwin, City Councilman Cory Branch, and Rep. Wesley Harris, who is running for state treasurer.

Their messages included that the path to the White House is through North Carolina, and that everyone needs to make a plan to vote and check on their neighbors' and their friends' plans.

"Drive them to the polls if you have to," said N.C. House Rep. Ya Liu, a Wake democrat.

Make sure you don't just don't vote for president, others said, but for Democrats up and down the ballot.

"The eyes of the whole country are on North Carolina right now to see if we can deliver for Harris," Liu said.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Virginia Bridges, News & Observer, 'In Raleigh on Sunday, Bill Clinton boosts Harris and issues warning about Trump', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C90662233C08E8>



WHC title chase gains focus as league returns after monthlong hiatus

October 20, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: JUSTIN EPLEY Sports editor | Section: Football | 455 Words OpenURL Link

VALDESE — Not so long ago, it was uncertain if the Western Highlands 1A/2A Conference would return to action in football this fall.

After all, many of the league's mountain communities were devastated by damage from Hurricane Helene, and playing football was far from the top focus.

But the WHC's schools and squads rallied and finally returned to the field this weekend, with one game played as normal on Friday night before a pair of contests were held on Saturday afternoon as schools in Avery County, Buncombe County, Mitchell County and Yancey County are faced with nighttime travel restrictions.

Madison won the first game back on the schedule, 9-0 at Rosman on Friday night, before Mountain Heritage earned a 44-7 home win over Avery County on Saturday, shortly before Draughn fell to Mitchell 33-14 at home in Valdese in the Wildcats' homecoming game.

With the Wildcats (3-3, 1-1 WHC), Patriots, Vikings and idle Owen already sporting one league loss and the Tigers sitting with a pair of WHC defeats, the conference championship chase already seems to be boiling down to the Mountaineers and Cougars, who have finished in the top three in the league standings in each of the previous three seasons in the current NCHSAA alignment, winning the conference once apiece.

Mountain Heritage took its turn atop the WHC by toppling Mitchell 28-14 and Draughn 52-15, both in Burnsville, a season ago.

The Mountaineers last won the conference in the fall of 2021 after beating the Wildcats 62-14 at home and the Cougars 33-0 on the road in consecutive games.

DHS won the league in 2022 after scoring home wins over Mitchell 56-21 and Mountain Heritage 49-21.

Barring any unexpected losses for either team, the Cougars and Mountaineers are scheduled to play for first place in the WHC at 1 p.m. on Nov. 2 in Bakersville. The Wildcats will have their crack at Mountain Heritage at 2 p.m. on Nov. 9 in Valdese, a game that could give them a chance to force a tie atop the league standings.

On Saturday, Draughn battled Mitchell to a scoreless tie through one quarter before trailing 14-0 at halftime and 27-0 following three quarters of play before Sterling Radabaugh's 31-yard touchdown run on fourth down made it 27-7. After the Mountaineers made it 33-7, DHS tacked on another late TD on Radabaugh's 7-yard pass to tight end Jacob Mull.

Quarterback Caleb Cook and utility man Owen Riddle scored two short rushing touchdowns apiece for Mitchell and running back Cole Young had a 29-yard score.

Marshall Brinkley (10-66) and Radabaugh (10-44-1) led the Draughn rushing attack. Radabaugh completed 9 of 21 passes for 90 yards, a TD and two interceptions, connecting with Brinkley (4-39), Kayden Lytle (2-26) and Mull (3-25-1).

Jamal Calloway tallied an interception for the Wildcats' defense.

• Citation (aglc Style)

JUSTIN EPLEY Sports editor, 'WHC title chase gains focus as league returns after monthlong hiatus', *News Herald, The* (online), 20 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C53F8A75186070