

Fayetteville Observer, The (NC): Page 25

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Henderson County farmers hit hard - 'This is one of those things where you don't even know where to start'

October 8, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC)
Author: Douglas Soule; Asheville Citizen Times | USA TODAY NETWORK Section: News | 869 Words
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Nine acres of Jeff Nix's orchard look like a dried-out riverbed, layered with sand and strewn with stone.

Before Tropical Storm Helene, that part of his Henderson County farm had been lined with thousands of Granny Smith and Gala apple trees, which had only just matured enough to produce a commercially viable amount of fruit.

Nix watched from his son's house on a hill as Helene's flooding turned them into weapons of destruction.

"We witnessed two trees that got into the river. ... They just lined up like two big Caterpillar dozers, and we watched them just take this whole farm out," he said Saturday afternoon, the sun beating down hard, as if determined to dry up the remaining puddles. Nearby, a John Deere backhoe was just another chunk of junk, slumped next to another flipped-over farm vehicle too mud-covered to identify.

Nix guessed the damages and revenue loss would cost him millions of dollars. And he's just one of many farmers living in Henderson County whose livelihoods have been washed away by the historic flooding.

While Nix is confident his operations will recover, he said that's not true for everyone.

"Down the road, we just need help," Nix told U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards after driving him around his property Saturday in a side-by-side. "I'm out here today. I need to be working. I want to get help for everybody."

State, federal relief

bills could be coming

Edwards, a North Carolina Republican, said he'd made an appeal to other lawmakers and even House Speaker Mike Johnson for a supplemental bill in the coming months to get more funding for recovery.

"We've been sitting here for years funding (recovery from) fires in California and tornadoes in the Midwest, floods in the Midwest and hurricanes on our southern shores," he told Nix and other local farms who had joined the tour. "It's time this country comes together now and that Western North Carolina be recognized."

At a damaged high school football field in Canton on Friday, Gov. Ron Cooper said he wants to work with state lawmakers on a relief package. The Legislature is set to begin meeting on the issue Oct. 9.

In the meantime, Edwards, a Republican who represents the area, advised the farmers on Saturday to apply for Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance.

"I wouldn't have lunch until you get your claims in," he said, before offering to have FEMA and Small Business Administration officials join them in Henderson County soon to see the situation firsthand.

Nix accepted that offer.

One farmer says he'll have

to bulldoze to bare dirt

It's not just apple farmers who got the short end of the stick. In fact, Dalton Rhodes got the big ends of numerous logs.

A mound of debris had settled just past his family farm's raspberries. It contains parts of trees and houses — and likely the carcasses of calves that had gone missing, based on the stench.

The rubble and the water that had borne it flattened the raspberries, all of their now-brown leaves combed over in the same direction. A boot scuff revealed they weren't dead — not yet — but coated in dry grime.

"The only thing we can figure to do to fix it is come in with a bulldozer and push all this stuff down to bare dirt," Rhodes said.

While most of the blackberries on the Rhodes Berry Farm survived the flooding, the raspberries were ruined. With all the damage and lost revenue, he estimates it'll cost more than \$1 million to recover from Helene.

When asked if his business is going to be OK, Rhodes, after a pause, responded, "I hope so."

He stood next to a slimy, mangled doll. It was missing a shoe.

"We have some crop insurance that'll help, and I would imagine they'll be some agricultural disaster money," said Don Rhodes, his Dad.

Not that the family has much time to fully analyze the damages and address them. They've been volunteering with their church, giving out food and supplies to those in need.

"We'll get to this later," Dalton Rhodes said.

"This is one of those things where you don't even know where to start," his father added.

Later, his son noted, "Everywhere around here people are looking out for people before they're looking out for their property."

This reporting content is supported by a partnership with Freedom Forum and Journalism Funding Partners. USA Today Network-Florida First Amendment reporter Douglas Soule is based in Tallahassee, Fla. He can be reached at DSoule@gannett.com. On X: @DouglasSoule.

MORE COVERAGE

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WHERE TO FIND HELP

See 7A for the latest on emergency resources.

TEXT UPDATES

We are staffing a text message service to bring you the latest on Hurricane Helene, connect you with resources and answer any questions you might have. To sign up, text "Hello" to (239) 241-6343.

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Scams are common amid storm cleanup

October 8, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Lucas Aulbach; USA TODAY NETWORK Section: News | 637 Words Page: A4 OpenURL Link

As work continues to help Western North Carolina and the surrounding region move forward in the aftermath of the Hurricane Helene storms, steps are being taken to ensure those affected by the flooding do not fall victim to scams.

More than 220 people across the Southeast have died since the storm made landfall on Sept. 26, and hundreds of thousands are still without power. Efforts to take advantage of people seeking help through fraud are not uncommon in the aftermath of major national disasters, despite efforts taken by authorities to help — earlier this week, North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein said his office had already fielded more than 200 complaints about price gouging.

Nearly 200,000 people in North Carolina were still without power as of Sunday morning, and ongoing cleanup efforts won't conclude any time soon. In the meantime, here's a quick look at potential scams to avoid and how to spot them.

Common scams

FEMA fraud — If you're in contact with a representative from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, ensure the person you're talking to is who they claim to be. FEMA employees are not authorized to collect personal financial information, according to the agency, but scammers posing as FEMA agents have in the past tried to collect money or personal information from people impacted by natural disasters.

False fundraisers — Some online fundraisers seeking to raise money for victims may not be what they seem. The North Carolina Department of Justice said crowdfunding platforms like GoFundMe are often used in money-raising schemes. Try to research them before you contribute and verify the identity of the organizer if possible.

Repair rackets — The attorney general's office in hard-hit Georgia noted fraud following storms often comes in the form of scam artists posing as home repair workers who charge for services and then disappear before doing the work. Avoid door-to-door offers and contractors who ask for money up-front or only accept cash, the office recommended, and do not allow potential contractors to convince you to file fake reports to insurance companies.

Theft by text — Officials in Buncombe County said they've received reports of landowners and survivors being contacted via text messages or social media offering to buy land quickly for cash. Don't respond. Delete and block phone numbers that contact you with such offers, the officials recommended, and consult with verified sources.

How to avoid scams

Potential scams often appear sophisticated and can be tough to avoid. But disaster relief organizations have tips on how you can help yourself.

The Better Business Bureau documents legitimate companies and charities, with ratings and history available on its website. Stein also recommended checking business licenses with the Secretary of State's office or calling the Attorney General's Office at 1-877-5-NO-SCAM for guidance on whether a company is legitimate, while the Georgia attorney general said give.org and charitynavigator.org are good resources for researching charities.

FEMA does not ask for money in order to qualify for relief funds, and legitimate agents carry photo identification badges. Alerts and additional information about services are accessed more easily through its mobile app. The

FEMA Helpline is also open at 800-621-3362.

How to get help

If you live in North Carolina and believe you've been a victim of a scam, contact local police or the North Carolina Attorney General's Office via 877-566-7226 or ncdoj.gov/protecting-consumers. If you're aware of efforts at fraud or scams, report them to FEMA's Disaster Fraud Hotline via 866-720-5721 or StopFEMAFraud@fema.dhs.gov.

Additional resources for people who have been impacted by the storms are available on the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' website.

Reach Lucas Aulbach at laulbach@gannett.com.

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Salvage Station future unclear as flooding leaves venue destroyed

October 8, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Will Hofmann; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 775 Words Page: A3 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE – In the middle of September, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz took the stage for a rally in the River Arts District. With the French Broad River just behind him, he declared it the "best rally crowd" he'd seen, and that despite the rain. Just 10 days later, hosting a similar event would seem unimaginable after Western North Carolina was devastated by historic floods and the venue, Salvage Station, is in a state of ruin.

Salvage Station was already facing an uncertain future. Its owners announced in May that they would lose the property to eminent domain to make way for a more than \$1.3 billion Interstate 26 Connector project. It had intended to rebuild and relocate after losing the property.

But, in one of the many blows to the RAD, the iconic music venue along the French Broad was entirely washed out by the floods caused by Tropical Storm Helene. The venue has been a beacon of WNC's intense passion for music since it was founded in 2016, drawing national artists like Billy Strings, Mavis Staples, Sierra Ferrell, Goose, Wilco and many others.

Katie Hild, one of the owners of Salvage Station, said the last few months of work at the venue, which would've included the Blue Ridge Jam and the Carolina Daze Music and Arts Festival, were going to include transitioning staff and equipment to a new location. Now, with shuttle vans and their audio equipment being destroyed by the flood, and without the remaining shows, the venue is taking it day-by-day. She said she's grateful that staff has come together to help one another.

"They all kind of hunkered down. Everybody's been taking care of each other and checking on each other," Hild said.

After the flood, the venue looks like a tangled mess. Debris from upriver has flooded most of the primary building where beer and beverages were sold. Windows are blown out and most of the building's interior has been jostled and tossed around. The main stage remains, but metal is snarled where performers used to play. The main office was found miles down the road, Hild said. All tickets purchased at the venue are to be automatically refunded, the venue announced on social media.

Hild said their current goal is to keep their staff supported right now. To that end, the business has launched a GoFundMe to pay staff members while they figure out their next steps.

"We're going to try to keep them in Asheville," Hild said. "I think that that's a very huge concern for every business owner, especially in the music and food industry."

For many businesses, the devastation caused by flooding has put community jobs in jeopardy as floods have made it hard to access area resources, leaving homes, businesses and communities across the region remain in a state of limbo. At least 72 died in the storm in Buncombe County, according to county officials. For some businesses, the devastation is too extensive. Some businesses along the river have turned to fundraisers and have encouraged employees to file for unemployment. Water is not expected to return to the city of Asheville for weeks.

Local businesses are typically strongest at this time of year due increased fall foliage tourism. After Helene, North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper told the Citizen Times that he is encouraging tourists not come to the region over the next few months as it recovers, citing that current recovery efforts and limited resources could be further strained by an increased number of tourists.

Hild contends that businesses will likely have to make "tough decisions" in the coming days about their future in Asheville. She also owns Barley's Taproom and Pizzeria in downtown.

"That makes it very difficult for restaurants to even consider reopening if there's not going to be any people here to to buy the food," Hild said of tourists not coming to Asheville during the fall.

For Salvage Station, there is a silver lining. Three feral cats that were known and fed by the venue's staff, miraculously survived the floods, Hild said.

"We're just all really grateful that everyone on our team — everyone's doing okay. We're all helping each other. The cats survived," Hild said.

The venue's future, however, is unclear.

"I feel like we're not even close to being able to conceptualize what that is quite yet," she said

Will Hofmann is the Growth and Development Reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA Today Network. Got a tip? Email him at WHofmann@citizentimes.com. Consider supporting this type of journalism with a subscription to the Citizen Times.

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Singer Eric Church releases benefit song to help Helene victims

October 8, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Marcus K. Dowling; Nashville Tennessean| Section: News| 303 Words Page: A3 OpenURL Link

With the release of "Darkest Hour," an orchestral and soulful ballad, Western North Carolina native Eric Church has again put his art where his heart is.

To provide relief for his home region following last month's devastating Hurricane Helene, the performer will sign over all publishing royalties from his first new song in three years to the people of North Carolina.

In a press statement, Church said "Darkest Hour" was dedicated to "unsung heroes" who "show up when the world's falling apart."

'Darkest Hour' highlights community concerns

"This is for the folks who show up in the hardest times, offering a hand when it's most needed and standing tall when others can't," Church said. "Even in your darkest hour, they come running. When the night's at its blackest, this is for those holding the light, guiding the lost and pulling us through."

The song highlights Church and his team's concerns about their family members, friends and neighbors in need of assistance, and he released it months earlier than planned.

"It just didn't feel right to wait with this song," Church said. "Sometimes you give songs their moment and sometimes they find their own moment."

On Sept. 29, Church posted on Instagram, "Anyone who knows anything about me knows what North Carolina and specifically this area in the mountains means to me personally as well as creatively." He wrote the destruction in the region led him to postpone a Sept. 30 SiriusXM Outsiders Radio show live event at his six-story Lower Broadway venue Chief's to Nov. 19.

"To all the families and first responders, you are in our prayers and we are doing everything we can to get you the help you need now," Church said.

Church also announced his Chief Cares organization will assist North Carolina and all states and communities affected, from Appalachia to the Gulf.

For more information, visit EricChurch.com.

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Helene's aftermath - Worshippers told God is at work after storm

October 8, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC)
Author: Deirdre Funcheon; Hendersonville Times-News | USA TODAY NETWORK | Section: News | 639 Words Page: A1
OpenURL Link

"The theme for this week is 'Come on.' That's what we've been telling anyone who asks if we can use help. We just say, 'Come on.'"

Penny Williams

Chief financial officer for First Baptist Church of Hendersonville

HENDERSONVILLE – Speaking to a crowd of thousands from the downtown high school football field, Justin Alexander, senior pastor at First Baptist Church of Hendersonville, described how a fallen oak tree had narrowly missed his house. He expressed admiration for how the community had come together in the wake of the storm, then he pointed to Bible verse John 13:34, which instructs, "love one another."

"God is moving in Henderson County," Alexander said.

People of all ages stood in the bleachers with their hands raised in praise to God. Volunteers passed out water bottles and bags of food. Little kids and groups of teenagers sat on the track that rings the Hendersonville High School football field. The sun beat down and women fanned themselves with folded-up papers. Musicians played in between speakers. When prompted, the crowd cited The Lord's Prayer in unison.

Alexander, who has been the church's lead pastor since July, said during his sermon that as the storm hit and its magnitude became evident, he texted fellow church leaders, "We have to do something." By Sunday, they had set up a makeshift distribution center at the church. By Monday, there was a line wrapped around the church building.

Penny Williams, the church's chief financial officer, told the Citizen Times, "The theme for this week is 'Come on.'
That's what we've been telling anyone who asks if we can use help. We just say, 'Come on.'"

Church leaders posted videos on Facebook asking for resources, and got a huge response. They didn't know exactly how they'd handle collections and distribution of supplies, but figured it out as they went along. Every time it seemed they were almost out of supplies, more would arrive. Deliveries poured in—from people in pickup trucks and people with multiple semi trucks.

"At this point our church is basically a warehouse," Alexander said.

They were so inundated with donations that they began diverting truckloads to smaller harder-to-reach communities. "We've sent stuff to Hot Springs, Marshall, Swannanoa, Tryon," Williams said. They partnered with El Centro of Henderson County to bring supplies to migrant workers.

Williams said that the church has about 4,000 members, with about 1,700 typically attending Sunday morning services.

Alexander told the Citizen Times that as the weekend approached, but the church building remained without power, he asked church members with ties to the school board whether they might be able to use the high school campus for services — something he'd envisioned for years, as he used to be a minister to students. "The Lord started bringing things together," he said. The church secured permission from school officials and a production company donated audio services.

During the service, executive pastor Dave Marshall told crowd members to give seven hugs to people they'd never met and emphasized helping one another. He said that volunteers were available to help remove fallen trees from properties or get mud out of basements.

Other speakers included Aaron and Larissa Smith, a couple from Bat Cave whose children had contracted head lice right before the storm — which seemed like an annoyance but turned out to be a blessing, as it prevented them from using a bedroom through which a giant boulder crashed during the storm. The family ultimately had to be rescued by helicopter.

Alexander said the distribution center would be closed Monday for organizational purposes but would be open again Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

"The theme for this week is 'Come on.' That's what we've been telling anyone who asks if we can use help. We just say, 'Come on.'"

Penny Williams

Chief financial officer for First Baptist Church of Hendersonville

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WHERE TO FIND HELP - Resources available in Henderson County Free water, food and supplies

October 8, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Hendersonville Times-News | Section: News | 437 Words Page: A7 OpenURL Link

Food, toiletries, baby items and other essential are available at these six Resource Hubs, which open at 9 a.m. daily:

Etowah Elementary School, 320 Etowah School Road, Etowah.

Rugby Middle School, 3345 Haywood Road, Hendersonville.

East Henderson High School, 150 Eagle Pride Drive, East Flat Rock.

North Henderson High School, 35 Fruitland Road, Hendersonville.

Mills River Town Hall, 124 Town Center Drive, Mills River.

Fletcher Town Hall, 300 Old Cane Creek Road, Fletcher

Showers and phone charging

Mills River Town Hall, 124 Town Center Drive, Mills River. Bring your own toiletries and towels.

Curbside storm debris removal

Free to Henderson County residents. Push waste to the right of way of a property for pickup. Storm debris includes tree branches, leaves, logs, building materials, furniture, paint, etc. It should be separated from household garbage, construction debris, vegetative debris, large appliances, electronics and hazardous waste.

Shelter

WNC Agricultural Center, 1301 Fanning Bridge Road, Fletcher. Phone (828) 687-1414. Has phone charging and wifi.

Edneyville Elementary School, 2875 Pace Road, Hendersonville. Has bathroom facilities, hot meals and shelter for pets.

Hot meals

Salvation Army of Hendersonville is serving breakfast at 9 a.m. and dinner at 4 p.m. 239 Third Ave. E., Hendersonville.

East Henderson High School, 150 Eagle Pride Drive, East Flat Rock. Hot meals available at noon and 5 p.m. daily.

North Henderson High School, 35 Fruitland Road, Hendersonville. Hot meals available at noon and 5 p.m. daily.

Etowah Elementary School, 320 Etowah School Road, Etowah. Hot meals available at noon and 5 p.m. daily.

Mills River Town Hall, 124 Town Center Drive, Mills River. Free hot meals also available at noon and 5 p.m.

Pharmacies

CVS/pharmacy, 2001 Spartanburg Highway, Hendersonville. 828-693-7244.

Etowah Pharmacy, 6527 Brevard Road., Etowah. 828-890-0022, or 828-577-9508.

Harris Teeter Pharmacy, 636 Spartanburg Highway, Hendersonville. 828-696-9713.

Ingles Pharmacy, 1980 Asheville Highway, Hendersonville. 828-698-1116.

Ingles Pharmacy, 2901 Hendersonville Road, Fletcher. 828-684-2838.

Ingles Pharmacy, 625 Spartanburg Highway, Hendersonville. 828-694-3746.

Ingles Pharmacy, 3643 Howard Gap Road, Hendersonville. 828-698-2592.

Ingles Pharmacy, 220 Highland Lake Road, Flat Rock. 828-692-0546.

Pardee Rx — Fleming, 1027 Fleming St., Suite A, Hendersonville. 828-435-8140.

Publix Pharmacy, 635 Greenville Highway, Hendersonville. 828-393-6925.

Sam's Club, 300 Highlands Square Drive, Hendersonville. 828-698-6282.

Walgreens, 1148 Asheville Highway, Hendersonville. 828-693-8934 or 828-693-8308.

Wal-Mart Supercenter Pharmacy, 250 Highlands Square Drive, Hendersonville. 828-696-8021.

How to help

Donations may be dropped off at 118 McAbee Court, Flat Rock. Needed: Non-perishable food, especially meal-type canned goods, plus cleaning supplies, tarps, plasticware, paper plates, cups, flashlights and batteries. Not needed: diapers, perishable food, clothing items at this time.

For more information

Henderson County's call center handles non-medical requests for information. Call 828-771-6670 or email Helene-info@hcem.org. For emergencies, call 911. For more, visit www.visithendersonvillenc.org/helene-relief.

Churches, businesses and nonprofit groups offering services: https://www.hendersoncountync.gov/em/page/community-involvement

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Rescue to recovery: The grim task in flood-ravaged NC

October 8, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Rick Jervis; USA TODAY NETWORK | Section: News | 1479 Words Page: A2 OpenURL Link

WALNUT ISLAND RIVER PARK – Typically, Mitch Hampton leads tourist groups on whitewater rafting adventures along the speedier stretches of the French Broad River just north of Asheville.

On a recent afternoon, he helped paddle a raft filled with two volunteers, a North Carolina State Bureau of Investigations agent and Onna, a 6-year-old black German Shepherd trained to detect human remains, along the banks and tributaries of the river, looking for bodies.

The raft sped downstream with the current, then turned upstream to slide by a fallen tree. Onna's ears perked up, her black paws perched on the raft's bow. Hampton and the others paddled to the shoreline and let Onna jump out, her nose to the ground, sniffing for human remains.

Hampton, a longtime river guide and volunteer at the local fire department, has lent his skills — and rafts and employees — to the grisly effort of recovering victims from the recent catastrophic floods in western North Carolina. Since Sept. 29, two days after the floods, Hampton and his team have paddled along miles of the French Broad River and recovered multiple bodies. He declined to give an exact number, saying many of the victims have yet to be identified.

Hampton follows one self-imposed rule, he said, that helps ease the pain of the macabre task.

"I always think to myself, 'Don't look at their face," he said. "That's what really gets me."

The floods unleashed in North Carolina and other states following Helene have led to one of the deadliest natural disasters in recent U.S. history, with at least 228 confirmed deaths across the Southeast, including 115 in North Carolina, and scores more still missing. As floodwaters receded, they revealed their victims across the muddied, mangled landscape: Bodies tangled in the roots of overturned trees, under crushed roofs, in submerged cars, or wedged in riverbanks.

'Hit pretty hard'

AcrossWestern North Carolina, where the lion's share of fatalities have occurred, emergency crews have pivoted from rescue to recovery.

As of Sunday, Oct. 6, 53 search and rescue teams – a combination of local, state, and federally active teams from across the country and consisting of more than 1,600 personnel – have conducted search and rescue operations in Helene's wake, according to North Carolina Emergency Management. Usually, three FEMA task-force teams, consisting of 35 to 70 members each, are initially deployed to disasters, said Robert Lipp, a spokesman with the federal agency's Incident Support Team, which oversees the effort.

In Helene's wake, 22 teams were mobilized to the battered region.

"It's extremely high," Lipp said. "We have more teams in theater right now than we normally do."

Some communities, where roads were ripped apart and entire towns washed away, are still struggling to recover all the dead. In the hillside town of Garren Creek, near Chimney Rock, two landslides converged on part of the town and demolished more than a dozen homes, sweeping residents away with them.

Along the town's main street, overturned cars rested in muddled yards and homes were obliterated as if hand grenades had detonated inside.

So far, 12 people have been confirmed dead and another five are still missing there, said Steve Nesbitt, 70, a fifth-generation local and former fire chief. The dead included a few of his cousins, he said.

"For our small community, we've been hit pretty hard," he said, blinking back tears.

After the storm, Joey Busalacchi, 54, was riding his ATV along the Nolichucky River near Tipton Hill, when he saw a body on a sandbar in the river. In the following days, he and other volunteers spotted four more victims along the river. Swift-water rescue crews later retrieved the bodies.

"It was hard to process for a couple days but that's the reality of a situation like this," Busalacchi said. "People did live along the river and the river did come up."

'A slow-moving process'

On Saturday, crews with Missouri Task Force One, a FEMA-deployed unit, dropped a Zodiac inflatable boat into a large retention pond in Marion, about 35 miles east of Asheville. Cadaver dogs – known as "Human Remains Dogs" in FEMA parlance – had earlier sniffed around the banks of the pond and given off several "hits," or indications of human remains within the muddy water.

Crews zeroed in on a partially submerged vehicle in the middle of the pond. A Zodiac ferrying Mazie, a 7-year-old black Lab, and her handler, paddled out to the car, as N.C. National Guard troops walked the banks, poking through branches and debris, looking for victims.

As the raft neared the water-logged vehicle, Mazie perked up but didn't bark. A drone flew nearby, relaying images to task force members on land.

The effort didn't turn up a body. The crews packed up and moved on to the next site.

"It's a slow-moving process," said Randy Sanders, 68, the task force's leader. "But it has to be done."

In nearby Old Fort, team members with Colorado Task Force One climbed onto a large debris pile as a Bobcat backhoe clawed away at some trunks and branches. Two days prior, the task force had recovered a woman's body in a creek bed near the town center. Then, two of their dogs had given "hits" in the debris pile a few miles away.

As team members dug through the pile — a process known as "delayering" — they discovered a cow carcass, which had likely triggered the dog's alert. Most challenging to the teams are the sheer scope of the disaster area and the rugged terrain, which includes mountain canyons, still-swollen rivers, and hard-to-reach communities, said Lipp, the FEMA spokesman.

About 90% of the buildings and structures in Western North Carolina have been searched and cleared, Lipp said, so the effort is increasingly focusing on rural stretches.

"It's really challenging," he said. "There's not just a ton of needles; there are even more haystacks."

'Humbled by the river'

Hampton and his crews are organized through the Madison County Sheriff's Office, not FEMA. Finding bodies is one challenge — extracting them from the river is another, he said.

Sometimes, the bodies are fastened to the boats and paddled to a safe opening in the shoreline, where they're

placed in body bags and driven over to county officials. Other times, the bodies need to be hiked out of a particularly dense stretch of wilderness.

The dogs are trained and led by Lisa Briggs, director of the Emergency and Disaster Management program at Western Carolina University and a regional leader in training cadaver dogs. At the start of the day, she gave a command, "Hunt up!" and Onna, the cadaver dog, excitedly pranced toward the raft.

At a shoreline littered with downed trees, roof siding, and shards of ripped clothes, Onna crisscrossed the sandy area, squeezing between branches and passionately sniffing the ground. Later, she jumped back in the raft and the team drifted downriver.

On that day, Hampton's raft covered the right shoreline while another of his rafts with his twin brother, Mike, and other volunteers covered the left. They paddled and drifted down more than five miles, until around 5 p.m., when they pulled the boats.

It was a rare day: No bodies were found.

Hampton, who co-owns French Broad Adventures with brother Mike and wife Korey, has been guiding visitors along the swift-moving river for over three decades and knows it well. One of the key challenges now is navigating through the submerged trees and light poles lurking under the surface, which has damaged some of their equipment.

His fire department has launched a fundraiser to repair and replace equipment damaged during the storm and recovery efforts.

The French Broad flows from Asheville north to their area and unfortunately has brought many victims from there, he said.

"You never know what condition (they're) going to be in," Hampton said. "Of course, the longer it's out there and the more it floats to this area, the harder it's going to be when you recover it."

In normal times, Hampton helps recover accidental drowning victims in the river for his fire department, usually someone who capsized fishing or canoeing. But nothing compares with the sheer volume of victims discovered since the storm, he said.

He realizes recovering the bodies helps bring needed closure to families searching for loved ones. But the job has been emotionally draining.

Still, Hampton, who first started canoeing down the French Broad as a 10-year-old with his grandfather, said the disaster hasn't changed his perception — or love — of the river.

"I was raised to have respect and be humbled by the river," he said. "When you think you can control it, you can't."

Follow Jervis on X: @MrRJervis.

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Helene was for the dogs

October 8, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Philip Hunt | Section: Opinion | 504 Words OpenURL Link

The power and destruction on display two Fridays ago shook my family to its core. By the time the waters started to recede, I was thankful that all the trees around my house landed on the ground. Knowing others didn't fare so well, the urge to do something sent me to dust off my chainsaw and try to help clean up. Neighbors were being neighborly, kids were unplugged from video games, and we could all agree that Helene was for the dogs. My dogs agreed, too, but for other reasons.

The trees that fell behind our house were large oaks that had been around for a century. During that time, they had built a large root system. When the combination of soggy soil and high winds met these oaks, they toppled with a crash. Those large root balls exploded from the ground, taking my backyard fence with them.

The dogs, oblivious to the human trials surrounding them, rejoiced at becoming inside dogs for a while.

Our dogs spend most of the day in the backyard, napping and watching for intruders. As the cool air arrives in the fall, they start to howl and sing to welcome the long-awaited change in weather. While they are content to be outside, they would much rather be inside, sleeping on a rug or maybe even the couch.

Roaming the backyard for new smells and critters is fun, but they would rather put that time into monitoring the kitchen for leftovers. The soft crinkle of a plastic bag will wake them from the deepest air-conditioned slumber. Any time our pups are in the kitchen, they might as well have the Police song playing in the background: "Every step you take,... every move you make,... I'll be watching you."

Where we could once skip a walk because they chased squirrels all day, I now get to take them on multiple walks throughout the day. These walks have kept them very well informed with the other neighbors' dogs. Instead of reading their "pee-mail" once a day or every other day, they now read it multiple times a day.

One new river birch that fell always has new posts for them to read, and they practically pull me there each time. I'm thinking too much information could be a bad thing in their minds. The signs and warnings I am supposed to look out for in my children for too much social media I am now looking for in my dogs.

While our three dogs have no clue what happened with the storm and are probably happy for the destruction of their fence, I can't say they are completely selfish. At times when I would start worrying about cleaning up, retaining walls, and water damage, I'd find a head on my knee to pet and feel comfort. I hope in these tumultuous days you too have been able to find a head to scratch that makes the worries flee because Helene was for the dogs.

The post Helene was for the dogs appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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Huckleberry's provides support, music therapy in wake of Helene

October 8, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Storme Smith | Section: Arts | 292 Words OpenURL Link

TRYON—In the wake of Tropical Storm Helene, Tryon has found solace and support at Huckleberry's, a local restaurant that opens its doors daily to provide essential services to those affected by the natural disaster.

In the immediate days after the storm, Huckleberry's not only offered cold water and food but also critical Wi-Fi access for individuals cut off from the outside world. Additionally, the establishment organized music therapy sessions on Thursday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Friday from 12 to 7 p.m. Music Ministry from South Carolina brought together over a dozen musicians of various genres to create a soothing atmosphere.

The community also enjoyed a pair of drum circles, including a Saturday session from 4 to 6 p.m., which provided an opportunity for individuals of all ages to come together with their instruments for a musical jam.

Owner Michaila Lawter attributed the idea of music therapy to her mother, Christine Cosmus, who believes in its positive impact.

"From what people tell me, it gives them a distraction and a little bit of joy," Cosmus shared.

Lawter expressed the establishment's commitment to supporting the community.

"We're glad to do what we can to help the community, whether it's some music therapy or cold water," she said. "Everyone is still welcome to come visit us. We'll still be doing water and providing Wi-Fi this week."

Situated at 90 N. Trade St. in downtown Tryon, Huckleberry's also hosts a variety of events, including cooking classes, private chef-to-table dinners, food tastings, and catering, demonstrating a continued dedication to serving the community.

The community's resilience and the outpouring of support from businesses like Huckleberry's demonstrate Tryon's strength and unity in the face of adversity.

The post Huckleberry's provides support, music therapy in wake of Helene appeared first on The Tryon Daily

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Trusted news sources are more important than ever

October 8, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Jeff Allison | Section: From The Publisher's Desk | 491 Words OpenURL Link

In the aftermath of Tropical Storm Helene, which devastated our area last week, it is important to turn to trusted sources of information, such as the Tryon Daily Bulletin and local government agencies, as we all work together to recover from this disaster.

Rumors have run rampant on social media and via word of mouth as it relates to the confirmed death toll in our area and assistance provided by federal agencies.

While the numbers can change as recovery efforts continue, it is important to note that one death related to the storm occurred in Polk County, with three deaths confirmed in Rutherford County and nine in Spartanburg County, according to local government sources. There are still 62 active missing persons investigations in Rutherford County as of Monday, officials say.

"Claims of 'bodies everywhere' are completely unfounded," Rutherford County Emergency Management said Thursday in a statement.

A single death is one too many, but these claims inflating the number of residents who perished are just plain false. This type of misinformation is hurtful to those in the communities who have lost so much and sensationalizes what is already an immensely tragic event.

Other rumors circulating relate to FEMA assistance in the area. While it is fair to look at the response time of the Federal Emergency Management Agency with a critical eye and question whether the response from state and federal authorities was strong enough in Western North Carolina on day one, it isn't fair to mischaracterize verifiable facts.

For example, some have said that FEMA will only provide \$750 to disaster survivors to support their recovery. This is false.

This \$750 payment relates to one type of assistance that survivors may be approved for soon after they apply called Serious Needs Assistance. It is an upfront, flexible payment to help cover essential items. Other forms of assistance are available, but affected property owners must apply for it.

Serious Needs Assistance is an initial payment that is available while FEMA assesses eligibility for additional funds related to temporary housing, personal property, and home repair costs.

Other falsehoods imply that FEMA only provides loans to disaster survivors (in the vast majority of cases, FEMA grants do not have to be paid back—and low interest loans are available for affected property owners through the SBA) or that FEMA is confiscating Helene survivor property (FEMA cannot seize your property or land).

If you have questions or need to apply for disaster assistance, visit disasterassistance.gov or call 1-800-621-3362 to speak with a FEMA representative.

I personally encourage folks to never depend solely on social media for news or quality information; it is often an amplification of hearsay that does more harm than good.

Local journalism is more important now than ever. If we get something wrong, we will issue a correction—something you'll rarely find on Facebook or X. Please, always get information from trusted sources.

We will get through this together.

The post Trusted news sources are more important than ever appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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Gran Fondo Hincapie event aims to raise one million dollars for Polk County

October 8, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Staff Reports | Section: Community | 629 Words OpenURL Link

Cycling event will be held on Oct. 19 with modified course within Greenville Co.

GREENVILLE—Gran Fondo Hincapie recently announced its 13th annual Greenville cycling event, scheduled to take place on October 19, will instead be held as a fundraising event for the local community impacted by Tropical Storm Helene.

"We initially thought that we were going to cancel the event," said Rich Hincapie, President of Hincapie Events. "But then I realized that we could use the Gran Fondo to draw attention to the massive devastation in our area and turn the entire thing into a huge fundraising effort. While we understand that many counties are in need, we want to focus on our neighbors in Polk County, who have partnered with us and supported our Gran Fondo event for thirteen years. We want to rally the global cycling community and really make a difference in Polk County. Our goal is to raise one million dollars.

"Our friends in North Carolina have supported this event for over a decade. Now, it is our turn to give back to them and help them rebuild their community. The proceeds collected will be donated directly to Polk County Community Foundation in North Carolina. We selected Polk County as this is the home of Saluda, Tryon, and Columbus, all of which have gladly hosted rest stops, partnered with our event, and cheered us on during our Gran Fondo Hincapie Greenville rides," said Hincapie.

The event will feature a new, modified 19-mile course entirely within Greenville County.

"We do not want to take away any police, rescue, or emergency support from North and South Carolina, and so we chose a course with minimal intersections and traffic," explained Jamie Godfrey, Hincapie Event Manager. "Our top priority is our staff and participants' safety, so we developed a course that has clear roads and does not go into North Carolina."

All three distances will still be offered: the Piccolo will do one lap of the course, the Medio will do three laps, and the Gran will do four laps. Hincapie staff and volunteers will man one rest stop along the course loop at mile 6.5, and Highway 11 will be closed for the entire event.

Held since 2012, Gran Fondo Hincapie originated as a retirement ride and celebration for retired professional and Olympic cyclist George Hincapie. Today, Gran Fondo Hincapie hosts events in Arkansas, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and California, in addition to the Greenville event, which will take place at Hotel Domestique, a European-inspired boutique hotel established by George.

As with all of Hincapie's Gran Fondos, the event is more than just a big ride. Athletes are encouraged to hang around after the finish for a free Festival and an afternoon of music, awards, food, and beverages.

All programming aspects of the Fondo weekend have been tailored to maximize fundraising, including special dinners, live auctions, and targeted events. The event schedule for the weekend includes the Hincapie Sportswear Warehouse Sale, a Celebrity Chef Dinner that allows participants to sample culinary creations from the country's top chefs, and an After Party where athletes can enjoy drinks and hors d'oeuvres. The After Party will feature a live painting of Mark Cavendish by local painter Jared Emerson at 9 p.m. Once the painting is done, there will be a live auction of the painting, and 100% of the proceeds will go to the Polk County Community Foundation.

A portion of the weekend's revenue will be donated to the Polk County Community Foundation. To donate to PCCF,

visit polkcountycommunityfoundation.dock.gives.

Online registration for Gran Fondo Hincapie Greenville is still open through Oct. 13. All registrations are still valid for this year's event.

For more information about the Gran Fondo Hincapie Greenville, visit hincapie.com/pages/gran-fondo-greenville.

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Public Wi-Fi now available at Tryon Town Hall

October 8, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Staff Reports | Section: Community | 148 Words OpenURL Link

Starlink satellite internet now set up

TRYON—Residents in the community who are still unable to connect to the internet after the widespread outages caused by Tropical Storm Helene can now access public Wi-Fi at Tryon Town Hall.

The Tryon government announced yesterday that it now has a Starlink setup with satellite internet available at the Tryon Town Hall for anyone who needs to connect. The connection will be available for guests to access during regular business hours for at least the next three months, according to Town Planner Tim Daniels.

"We think it would be helpful in the future for situations like what we've experienced after the storm, as well as downtown events like Tryon Midnight and Beerfest," said Daniels.

The town says the Starlink setup was acquired thanks to the Polk County Community Foundation.

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