

# THE NEWS HERALD

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WHERE **YOUR STORY** LIVES

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## HUB OF HOPE



MIKE STEWART, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Debris is strewn on the lake in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene on Oct. 2 in Lake Lure, N.C.

### Newton writer: In aftermath of Helene, Hickory rallied to help

I never lost power during Hurricane Helene. When friends and family called me about the hurricane, I had to tell them I was extremely lucky.

The storm was bad. A lot of North Carolinians lost family and friends, their home, their cherished belongings, their pets. Some saw their real estate literally washed away.

But I can't claim any of those stories.

I've tried to imagine the terror of seeing a wall of water crashing toward me, sweeping away my home and neighbors, pets, virtually everything I own.

Being a near miss — or even a far miss — leaves its mark. Last week a Face-

booker from Louisiana said she understood. She lived through Katrina, and could relate to the relief of being spared, but, at the same time, the overwhelming feeling of anxiety, numbness and profound sadness.

That's how it is with trauma. It takes different forms, and in one way or another, we've all been traumatized by being so close to destruction. In the end, I don't know why we were spared and why the folks west of here were not.

Perhaps TV's Mister Rogers responded best when he explained disasters in a way kids could understand. When there are scary things in the news, he said, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping."

In the wake of Helene, ordinary people dropped everything to come to North Carolina's rescue. Men and women,

young and old, helped turn Hickory into a hub of hope. Private pilots, many of them ex-military, arrived with their helicopters to make air drops to hard-hit areas. Community members rallied to organize places to bring necessary supplies and cash to support the effort.

On my way to the collection point in the parking lot of Appalachian State University in Hickory, I found myself behind a horse trailer and a flatbed. On the flatbed was a generator and power tools. In the trailer were cases of bottled water, packages of diapers, toilet paper and more. Obviously, he was on a relief mission. Had I not been caught by a traffic light I would have given the driver a thumbs up.

Surely Helene will be one of those calamities by which we mark time.

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### Florida digs out from mountains of sand swept in by Helene, Milton

Storm surge brought piles as high as 5 feet into state's Gulf Coast communities

KATE PAYNE  
Associated Press

BRADENTON BEACH, Fla. — When a hurricane sets its sights on Florida, storm-weary residents may think of catastrophic wind, hammering rain and dangerous storm surge. Mounds of sand swallowing their homes? Not so much.

That's the reality for some after Hurricanes Helene and Milton clobbered Florida's Gulf Coast with back-to-back hits in less than two weeks. Storm surge as high as 10 feet swept mountains of sand into communities — in some areas, 5 feet tall

or higher.

The fine, white sand helps make Florida's beaches among the best in the world. But the powerful storms have turned the precious commodity into a costly nuisance, with sand creating literal barriers to recovery.

"I've never seen sand like this," said Scott Bennett, a contractor who has worked in storm recovery since 2005's Hurricane Katrina. "Wind, rain, water, but never sand."

The morning after Hurricane Milton crashed ashore, the roads of Bradenton Beach, about an hour's drive south of Tampa, were lined with sandbanks a couple of feet high, surrounding some bungalows.



REBECCA BLACKWELL, ASSOCIATED PRESS

A car sits half-buried Oct. 8 in sand in Bradenton Beach, Fla., which was in the process of cleaning up after Hurricane Helene, as Hurricane Milton approaches on Anna Maria Island.

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