

Tree that killed 1 when Helene hit Charlotte should’ve been cut down already, neighbor says

BY JULIA COIN
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A person died inside a home in northwest Charlotte’s historic Hoskins neighborhood when a tree busted through the roof as Tropical Storm Helene pushed through North Carolina — the fifth state it passed through.

There was a crashing bang, silence, then sirens. According to the Charlotte Fire Department, another adult was trapped with the person who died. That person was rescued,

and two children inside weren’t harmed.

My dad’s suffocating, the victim’s adult son told a neighbor at about 5 a.m. Friday. He’d just come out of the Brookway Drive home that now had a gaping hole in its side.

That neighbor described the large-trunked tree as two trees joined at the base. Months before Hurricane Helene started barreling toward the United States, the other half of that tree had crashed onto another house. It’s had a blue tarp on its roof and a hole in its side ever since.

The tree probably should’ve been chopped down then, the neighbor said.

The neighbor, a purple-shirted woman who has lived two doors down from the affected home since the 1970s, didn’t want to give her name. She’d already spoken to television news, and too many people were calling to check on her, she said.

As she spoke with The Charlotte Observer, two people in a green Kia Soul slowed in front of her brick home. The lawn was decorated with 20 potted

plants, an angel bird bath, yellow bird houses and a bench held up by two stone squirrels.

“I heard the news, I just had to come check on you,” the passenger said.

“Oh, I’m all good, honey. It’s the house over there we should be worried about,” the neighbor replied.

The home, a block away from a Baptist church and a tobacco shop sharing borders with railroad tracks, still had branches inside, downed power-lines on the lawn and a sign from the fire department in the window: “This building has been deemed unsafe.”

The family who lived inside can’t come back, according to the fire department. “Occupancy is prohibited.”

A few houses down, another massive, uprooted tree sprawled its branches across a yard. It was feet away from knocking into the home’s

vinyl siding. A few top-level leaves touched its brick foundation.

The man killed was identified as Tony Taylor, 62, a Charlotte father of four who treated everyone he met like family, his nephew, Stephen Barbour, said. “Uncle Tony was a friend to everyone,” Barbour recalled on the GoFundMe he started for Taylor’s wife, Sandy Lucille Taylor, and the couple’s children.

Although Taylor’s wife and four children survived, “the loss of such a kind and loving man has left a profound void,” Barbour said on the GoFundMe site.

“For some time, we had been trying to get the tree removed, but since it wasn’t on our property, there was little we could do,” he said. “Now, we are left not only to mourn the loss of a man whose smile could light up any room but also to support his grieving family

through this incredibly difficult time,” Barbour said.

A woman donated \$100 with this message to the family: “I will be praying to Jehovah God our Heavenly Father to provide you comfort and peace in your time of grief and loss.”

Barbour started the site Friday to help pay for his uncle’s funeral expenses and repairs to the home, and to replace the family’s belongings. Donations also would help pay for a temporary place for the family to stay and to assist with day-to-day expenses, Barbour said.

“We are asking for any contribution to help support his wife and children as they rebuild their lives in the wake of this unimaginable loss,” Barbour said.

Observer staff writer Joe Marusak contributed to this story.

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‘We’ve lost everything.’ Western NC town of Clyde is rebuilding — again — after Helene

BY RYAN OEHRLI
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CLYDE

People in Clyde were rebuilding Saturday — again.

For many residents, it was their second time getting hit by a storm and having to start over. For some, it was the third. In 2021, Haywood County got hit by Tropical Storm Fred. Before that, Ivan in 2004.

But neither compared to what they saw after Helene, residents told The Charlotte Observer. Helene, which struck Florida as a Category 4 hurricane before dumping historic rain totals on western

North Carolina as a tropical storm, washed out roads and brought untold damage to a swath of the state. Cellular networks and internet access remained limited.

The water line from flooding nearly reached the ceiling of a home on Broad Street in Clyde, where Brandon Patterson raked mud and trash out of his stepfather’s home.

Patterson’s stepfather, Tomas Quiroz, bought the house after Fred flooded it in 2021, hoping to fix it up.

Now he is back to square one, and his family says they will rebuild there.

Others on Broad Street were dealing with the

same, familiar issues.

“We lost everything in the house just about,” said Denise Dean, who lived just a few doors down from Quiroz, and who’s lived on Broad Street for about eight years.

Unlike Quiroz, she’s moving somewhere with higher ground. She’s staying across the Pigeon River from her home after the storm. Her family has been in a hotel.

Nearby, husband and wife Lora and Mitch Nelson shoveled mud out of Lora’s salon and barber shop, Superior Cuts, on Depot Street.

“That building never flooded before, if that tells you anything. They said FEMA and the National

Guard are coming. But people’ve got livelihoods,” said Mitch Nelson.

Lora Nelson’s shop is plastered with mud. It’s surrounded by buildings trashed by Helene. She’s not sure how she’ll be self-employed.

“It’s devastating,” she said.

There were some silver linings Saturday for people in Clyde.

Amy Russell and Lisa Monteith had about a dozen customers who, without any phone calls possible, just showed up to help.

Their pet food and dog training business flooded heavily — so much so that a bag of dog food found

its way into someone’s house on another street. They had the store for about three years, and already dealt with the “little flood,” said Russell. There wasn’t so much water then.

“We weren’t expecting this,” she said. “It’s so

heartbreaking.”

Russell said they’re planning to reopen the smaller shop for dog grooming and training, just around the corner, and move the retail inside that location.

Her customers helped to clean out both locations.

“Lisa says that a customer becomes a friend before a friend becomes a customer,” Russell said.

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