

# Pensacola’s battered lone road adds twists to Helene response in remote Western NC town

BY BRIAN GORDON  
bgordon@newsobserver.com

Stanchions of trees, embedded vehicles and mangled trailers line the only road through Pensacola, North Carolina, a week after Tropical Storm Helene crashed into the small Yancey County town. But the worst physical damage, locals say, isn’t as evident.

“There are a lot of homes where you wouldn’t know they were ever there if you hadn’t lived here your whole life,” said Noah Davis, a local handyman. “There’s going to be a before-the-storm and after-the-storm Pensacola.”

Consecutive days of heavy rains late last week overwhelmed the remote community of around 500 people in Pisgah National Forest — 22 miles and a world away from Asheville. Pensacola lays south of Burnsville in a holler between two hillsides. The Cattail Creek runs



A Pensacola Fire Department truck, photographed on Thursday truck fell victim to flood waters from Hurricane Helen that flooded the nearby Cane River. Firefighters stationed the truck at this end of the community, dividing their resources, to better serve the community in case the main fire station became inaccessible.

down one mountainside and the Cane River flows below.

Early Friday, the creek flooded and sent a torrent

toward the town while at the same time, the river swelled and encroached. “We were surrounded by water,” said resident

Joyce Maness. “Our floors were giving in.”

After three days, Christa Robinson felt the creek had receded enough to

leave her house in the Cattail Creek community, which sits above Pensacola. With her 7-year-old daughter Lilly, she walked — and at times slid — into Pensacola, where they spent the next night at the local fire station.

Robinson remembers the immense local flood of 1977. Unlike then, she felt the entire mountain move last week.

“The highway is gone,” said Mark Harrison, medical officer for the Pensacola Fire Department. “Most of the homes are gone.”

Rescue and recovery began over the weekend as volunteers drove four-wheelers along rutted, muddy passageways. Pensacola Road is the town’s only direct connection to the rest of Western North Carolina, and by Thursday, enough of the eroded blacktop had been cleared to allow trucks to narrowly inch through.

U.S. Army personnel arrived on the ground Thursday to hand out supplies as helicopters delivered medicine, appliances and food to hard-to-reach areas. Search-and-rescue teams from Charlotte, Pittsburgh, Kansas and elsewhere visited each standing home to document the destruction. Civilians pitched in further, offering neighbors their

services as mechanics, movers and transporters.

“The lack of roads has been the biggest thing logistically,” said Davis, who estimated he has evacuated at least 30 people on his four-wheeler.

Another major hurdle is accounting for everyone affected. The Cattail Creek community in particular has a sizable number of vacation homes. Were their owners out of town during the storm? Or are they now missing?

These are the questions people want answered.

“After COVID hit, a lot of people came in here, and we have no idea how many are residents,” Harrison said. “We’ve evacuated all of the critical people that we could. Now, it’s more or less preventative.”

As for fatalities, Harrison declined to share a specific number but said “it’s obvious” people have been killed. Donations in recent days have poured into the fire station, the community’s makeshift recovery hub. Asked what Pensacola residents still need, Harrison listed medications, including antibiotics and methadone.

Brian Gordon:  
919-861-1238,  
@skyoutbriout

# Juvenile among 3 hit by gunfire along North Tryon Street, CMPD says. One has died

BY MARK PRICE  
mprice@charlotteobserver.com

One person was killed and two others were wounded in a series of north Charlotte shootings that Charlotte-Mecklen-

burg police believe are related.

The man who died has been identified as Derrick Answon Baker, 22, CMPD said in a news release.

His body was discovered around 10 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 3, near the

intersection of Tom Hunter Road and North Tryon Street, officials said.

“Shortly after, officers received an assault with a deadly weapon with injury call for service in the 6700 block of N. Tryon Street where they located

a second victim suffering from a gunshot wound. The juvenile victim was transported by MEDIC with life-threatening injuries,” CMPD said.

“Just before 11:30 p.m., a third victim arrived at a nearby hospital with non-

life threatening injuries.”

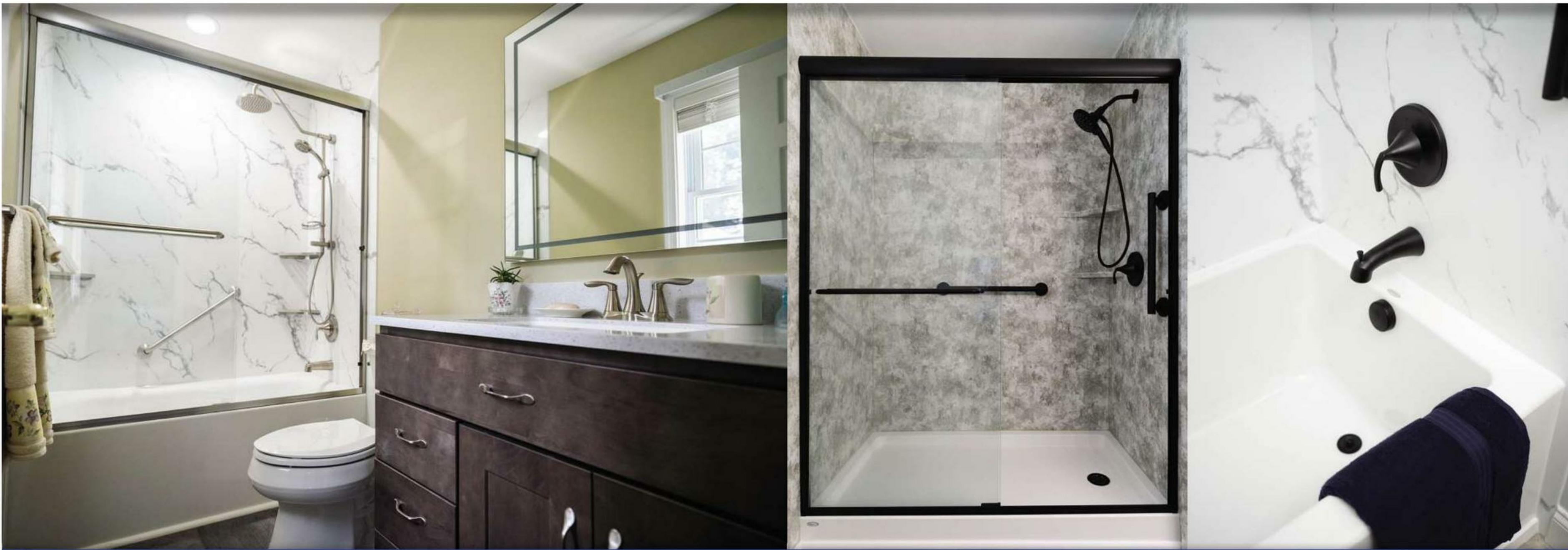
Details of the third victim’s injuries were not released.

“Detectives are working to determine the relationship between the three victims,” CMPD said.

Anyone with information in the case is asked to call the CMPD Homicide Unit at 704-432-TIPS and speak directly to a detective. Anonymous tips can be provided to Crime Stoppers at 704-334-1600 or <http://charlottecrimestoppers.com/>.

Mark Price: 704-358-5149,  
@markprice\_obs

## Home Remodeling Done Right!



FULL BATHROOM REMODELING • WALK-IN SHOWERS • BATHS • TUB TO SHOWER CONVERSION

**BIGGEST**  
SALE EVER

**0% APR**  
for 6 Years'

plus  
up to

**\$1,500 OFF**

Bathroom Remodeling Projects\*

CALL OR VISIT US ONLINE TO GET STARTED!

## Bathroom Remodeling Experts!

- ✓ Local, Employee Installers
- ✓ Precision Measuring
- ✓ Custom Built for YOUR HOME!
- ✓ Showers Installed in Just 1 Day
- ✓ Evening Appointments Available
- ✓ Easy Maintenance Products
- ✓ Custom Styles and Options
- ✓ Affordable Financing Plans

Subject to credit approval

FROM AMERICA'S MOST ADMIRED HOME REMODELING BRAND\*

CHECK OUT OUR  
RECENT REVIEWS!

facebook  
**4.7/5**  
★★★★★

Google  
**4.8/5**  
★★★★★

**225,116+**  
COMPLETED BATHROOM  
REMODELING JOBS

(Company reviews across all branches as of 9/01/2024)

**704-387-5927**

RiskFreeRemodel.com



**WEST SHORE**  
HOME

\*Promotional period financing available to well qualified buyers on approved credit at a 0.00% APR for 72 months, with equal monthly payments. If you elect to not participate in the promotional period financing, APR may vary from 13.99% to 23.99% by state. You may prepay your account at any time without penalty. Financing is subject to credit requirements and satisfactory completion of finance documents. Any finance terms advertised are estimates only. Normal late charges and any default rates apply. See your Truth in Lending Disclosures for more information. Minimum \$10,000 purchase required. \*Up to \$1,500 off remodeling projects. Discount may vary based on project price. New orders only. Offer not valid on previous sales or estimates and cannot be combined with other offers. See design consultant for details. Other restrictions may apply. Expires 10/28/24.