

OLD FORT SCHOOL CLOSED

October 13, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: MIKE CONLEY nconley@mcdowellnews.com| Section: News| 377 Words OpenURL Link

Hurricane Helene damage has closed Old Fort Elementary.

Old Fort students will attend Pleasant Gardens Elementary until the school is repaired, according to McDowell County Schools officials.

McDowell students returned to school on Oct. 9. Classes have been on a two-hour delay all week, Superintendent Tracy Grit said, as the schools work toward a regular schedule following Helene, which ripped up roads and damaged homes.

The school schedule will return to normal on Monday.

Pleasant Gardens Elementary has enough space for the students from Old Fort to remain together in their own dedicated space, said Amy Dowdle, public information officer for McDowell County Schools.

Meanwhile, the school system will start the repair of the damage at Old Fort Elementary, which was dedicated in 2022.

"There was anywhere from a foot of water to a couple of inches on the bottom level in the school," said Dowdle.

"Crews have come into the school and cleared out all the mud and began removal of the (luxury vinyl tile) fl ooring in the classrooms. Cabinets on the bottom level were torn out and will be replaced. Doors throughout the bottom level will also be replaced."

Dowdle said the damage was limited. "Thankfully, most electrical and HVAC

equipment were located upstairs in the building and were not damaged," she said. "The moisture mitigation process is currently taking place in the building."

Repairs to the building include the following: replacement of cabinets on the first floor, LTV flooring replacement, gym flooring replacement, replacement of damaged sheetrock in the office, replacement of doors on the first floor, electrical and plumbing work, and removal of mud from drains and gutters, according to Dowdle.

"Due to the extensive flood damage, we currently do not have an estimated date of return to the building," she told The McDowell News.

As for the teachers and staff at Old Fort, they are currently setting up classrooms at Pleasant Gardens Elementary.

"We will have a staggered attendance next week for Old Fort students. Grades 3-5 and pre-K will begin Monday at Pleasant Gardens Elementary," she said. "On Tuesday, K through 2 will begin and Wednesday all students Pre-K through 5 will be in attendance. Our Smart Start part-day pre-K classrooms from Old Fort will have class at Pleasant Gardens Baptist Church Campus starting on Monday."

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Citation (aglc Style)



McDowell, Mountain 3A/4A Conference finalize plans to return to play football

October 13, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: JUSTIN EPLEY Sports editor | Section: Football | 642 Words OpenURL Link

The Mountain 3A/4A Conference has finalized its plans to return to action in football following a four-week, Hurricane Helene-caused hiatus, and McDowell High School has a particularly important part to play in the process.

Not only will the Titans host Asheville in Marion at 7 p.m. this coming Friday, but MHS' football stadium also will serve as a home venue for other teams in the conference whose facilities were damaged during the storm, particularly hard-hit Buncombe County.

"A revised football schedule for the Mountain Athletic Conference has been created," the school announced on Saturday. "Due to current utility outages, McDowell High School and T.C. Roberson will serve as host sites for football at least the next two weeks. Updates on other fall sports will be provided as soon as they become official."

In addition to hosting the Cougars this Friday in Week 9 action, which will be McDowell's first contest since its MAC-opening 60-26 loss at T.C. Roberson on Sept. 20, the Titans (1-4, 0-1 MAC) will host Erwin for a normal 7:30 p.m. kickoff on Oct. 25 before welcoming Enka for another 7 p.m. kickoff on Nov. 1.

Details regarding McDowell's remaining two games against A.C. Reynolds and North Buncombe have not yet been announced, but the NCHSAA recently amended the fall calendar to add one week to the football season and is allowing teams to play games as close together as 72 hours apart, freeing up the Titans to potentially play those remaining two contests in the bonus Week 12.

The remainder of the Week 9 MAC football schedule announced on Saturday includes Enka versus A.C. Reynolds (5 p.m.) and Erwin at T.C. Roberson (7:30 p.m.), both at T.C. Roberson, this Friday.

In Week 10, McDowell High School will be the site of an Asheville-North Buncombe contest at 5 p.m. on Oct. 25 and T.C. Roberson will host A.C. Reynolds (7 p.m.).

And in Week 11, the A.C. Reynolds-Asheville and Erwin-North Buncombe games will be played on Nov. 1, though times and sites were not announced.

Here are additional changes made by the NCHSAA as they apply to other fall sports:

Boys soccer

The weekly contest limit has been extended to four to allow teams to make up multiple postponed games.

The reporting deadline has been moved from Oct. 31 to 11:59 p.m. on Nov. 6. Seeding will take place on Nov. 7.

The revised playoff schedule includes the first round on Nov. 9, second round on Nov. 12, third round on Nov. 14, regional semifinals on Nov. 16, regional finals on Nov. 19 and state championships from Nov. 22-23.

Cross country

The reporting deadline has been moved from Saturday to 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 22.

Regionals now will be held on Oct. 26 and state championships are scheduled for Nov. 2.

Girls golf

The minimum number of matches to qualify for regionals has been reduced from five to three.

Girls Tennis

The individual reporting deadline was moved from 3 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. on Monday to allow for another day of competition. Individual regionals will be held this Friday through Saturday. Individual state championships will be held from Oct. 25-26.

The dual-team reporting deadline was moved from Oct. 10 to 11:59 p.m. this Thursday. Seeding will take place this Friday. The first round will be held Oct. 21, followed by the second round on Oct. 23, third round on Oct. 28, regional semifinals on Oct. 30, regional finals on Nov. 5 and state championships on Nov. 9.

Volleyball

The weekly contest limit has been extended to eight to allow teams to make up multiple postponed matches.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

JUSTIN EPLEY Sports editor, 'McDowell, Mountain 3A/4A Conference finalize plans to return to play football', *McDowell News, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3EDA236F0D5A8>



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JUSTIN EPLEY Sports editor, 'McDowell, Mountain 4A Conference finalize plans to return to play football', *McDowell News, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C2EFB1BA77F8C8>



McDowell schools on regular schedule Monday

October 13, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: FROM STAFF REPORTS | Section: News | 210 Words OpenURL Link

McDowell County Schools will operate on a regular schedule starting Monday with a modified bus service.

On Friday evening, School Superintendent Tracy Grit announced the return to a regular school schedule as McDowell County rebuilds from the devastation from Hurricane Helene.

On Monday, McDowell County Schools will operate on a regular schedule with limited bus routes and some designated community stops. For a detailed list of the routes, review the bus lists provided on the McDowell County Schools website at www.mcdowell.k12.nc.us.

"To ensure the safety of your children, parents or guardians should always remain present to supervise at each of our community bus stops," reads a news release. "Safety is, and always will be, our top priority.

"Students and staff living in the affected area of our county, please work individually with principals should your commute require additional time in the mornings."

In addition, Grit stated in the news release: "I am also happy to report that our athletic practices will resume on Monday for our student-athletes in our middle and high schools. Fans, we ask for your patience while we allow our teams to begin practicing, and our administrators an opportunity to adjust the fall schedules. As soon as we have game dates available we will post them for you on our websites."

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FROM STAFF REPORTS, 'McDowell schools on regular schedule Monday', *McDowell News, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C2EFB1C4CDFB00



Disaster brought out the best in Haywood: Many helping hands sprang into storm relief

October 13, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Carol Viau | Section: Hurricane Helene | 4011 Words OpenURL Link

There are stories big and small about how people in Haywood County came out to help each other in the wake of Helene's destruction. In the powerless days and dark nights of late September and early October, folks here came together to offer help, supplies and solace. Here are a few of their stories.

Toddlers to grandparents, Fugates reach out

For the Fugates of Waynesville, jumping into action was natural for the entire family, from grandparents Cindy and Larry to the youngest grandkid, 21 months old.

Monday, Sept. 30, was granddaughter Novella Brown's birthday.

"We couldn't give her a party due to the disaster," Cindy said. "It was Novella and (cousin) Dewayne Fugate who came up with the idea to go help folks, instead."

The grandparents and five cousins — toddler up to age 12 — booted up, driving around, looking for people who needed help. First stop was the Sara and Jerry Roten's residence and thrift store, Thrifty Treasures, in Clyde.

"We didn't see any vehicles there helping at that house and that's where we started, helping clean out the flooded property, bagging everything and dragging the trash bags to the curb for pick up," Cindy said. "We didn't know them personally before this, but we know them now."

Even toddler "Lil Larry" dragged the trash bags as he could. Cindy said his efforts to help put a smile on many faces.

"After that we picked up and delivered food, clothing, water and other supplies for nine, 12 hours a day," Cindy said. "At New Beginning Baptist Church, we filled backpacks with personal items and food for those who have nothing left."

How did this family get motivated in such meaningful ways?

"We weren't taught to sit around while people suffer," said Cindy. "We are taught by our core family values. I'm so proud of our 'baby grands.' We haven't stopped yet."

The Fergusons give folks all-important boots

Linda and Wendell Ferguson, owners of Work Boots & More in Waynesville, have been a Haywood County fixture for 21 years with a loyal following of boot-loving buyers.

They sprang into action after the storm, knowing the special value of rubber work boots for people deeply affected by the devastation and the workers helping with relief.

The store gave away all the rubber boots it had in stock, Linda said. Then various sales reps the store works with began reaching out to the Fergusons asking how help.

The result was a big donation of men's, women's and children's rubber work boots from Rocky brands, socks from Carolina Mills, hoodies from H&S Brown and taboggan hats from Chippewa Boots. The store lined up the rubber boots outside the store and posted availability on Facebook for storm victims or workers who might need them.

"Come get them for whoever may need them," the store posted on Facebook.

When the rubber boots went fast, the store got another rubber boots donation, which went just as quickly.

Linda estimates they gave away more than 100 pair of rubber boots and have received an outpouring of thanks from the community.

One community recipient of the free items posted this on Work Boots & More's Face Book page: "Our family is so incredibly grateful for those boots. We were able to outfit our family of four so that we can make way to finish our efforts in salvaging what's left of our things. This has been a tumultuous journey that we could not achieve without the help of our community, and businesses like yours."

Unnamed heroes to the rescue

In the Lake Logan area of Canton, a landslide buried Little East Fork Road.

"It was like 10 of the largest dozers in the word had been side-by-side, pushing the whole mountain down at once," said Kevin Ensley, who has a family farm in the area.

The slide landed on the road and in the creek, diverting the creek to a new channel, which crossed over the road itself. It was impassable — cutting off residents who couldn't get in or out.

A neighbor and business owner stepped up in a huge way. Declining to be named, he said he did what he did "out of goodness, love and a service heart."

"He was in his backhoe trying to get that debris away so water could get back in the creek bed and then went on to cut a one-lane tunnel through the debris so people could drive through," Ensley said. "He was a life saver. There were elderly folks up there with health issues, and they couldn't get out if they needed to."

With \$400,000 damage to his own property, the unnamed neighbor said he didn't think twice about jumping in to help with heavy equipment.

"So many have it worse because of the storm, including loss of life," he said.

The neighbor has been volunteering daily in the Lake Logan area; since he lives there, he knows what needs to be done. When The Mountaineer received an offer of help from an industrial maintenance tech in Georgia who was supposed to be camping this week in the Sunburst area, the newspaper put him in touch with the unnamed hero.

Hot meal collaboration

For Nathan Lowe, owner of Southern Porch in Canton, relief that the Canton flooding mercifully stopped two blocks from the restaurant turned into action, doing what the restaurant does best, cooking and serving good meals.

Southern Porch, along with Canton's Grateful Table and the Lunch Box Café, were mobilized by Beverly Banks, self-professed "food mover." Banks was the impetus behind 505 Main Street, the free-market community pantry in downtown Canton that was started October 2021 in the wake of Tropical Storm Fred. Through her years of volunteerism, Banks had contacts in Tallahassee, Fla., working with an arm of World Central Kitchen (WCK).

"I reached out to them, and within 24 hours they (WCK) were here, independently of the big food distribution the organization is doing in Asheville," Banks said.

Together with her army of 40 volunteers and the three Canton restaurants, Banks said they served more than 3.700 hot meals in the week after Helene.

"Fortunately, Southern Porch only lost power for seven, eight hours in the storm; we had thousands of (dollars in) inventory of perishable items that survived," Lowe said. "So we cooked whatever we had on hand, offering good meals from pulled pork, to pimento cheese and mac, pot roast and mashed potatoes. The House of Raeford Farms reached out to us and sent 400 chicken breasts, which became baked-chicken orders to go."

Southern Porch fed Town of Clyde first responders and employees for several days and offered Starlink and Wi-Fi to anyone who needing a place to connect.

Lowe said he's gotten messages of thanks from folks who benefitted from the meals, some saying, "It was the best meal we've gotten all week." Helping in this way also lifted the spirits of the restaurant's staff — "they wanted to work," he added.

Action in the face of devastation

Felisha and Hunter Wyman are community-focused in their approach to business and life. Their Dog House pet shop in Canton is a total loss; nothing in the shop was salvageable.

"The water level was at 14 feet inside the building, and 12 inches of mud covering the whole floor," said Felisha. "All foods were contaminated with the water. The display racks were bent or broken. It was a huge loss, but we feel blessed that the Dog House in Waynesville and our Woof Street Bistro food truck were both safe."

The Wymans, who actively support their four-legged friends, care deeply about the community and their customers. They turned their personal business loss into positive action, putting their food truck in service.

"Many of our customers lost so much, and we felt it was important to help any way we can," Felisha said.

The couple's Woof Street Bistro truck, often participating in community events, went into flood relief mode, cooking and offering free hot food at various Haywood stops, from Cruso Community Center to the parking lot at The Dog House in Waynesville.

"We have fed about 600 people so far (through Oct. 8) and expect to do another 150 today at The Dog House Waynesville and 200 tomorrow at WPTL radio in Canton," Hunter said. "It has been extremely heartwarming to speak with people hit hardest by the flood and see them out trying to help others. We've had grown men get food (at our truck) for their families and break down to tears because they hadn't had hot food in over a week."

Cataloochee Ranch and the Swag make impact

Maggie Valley's Cataloochee Ranch staff jumped into action, taking the Ranch's Hitch food truck to the Maggie Valley fire department for three days, serving hot food to first responders and anyone needing a meal.

"We wanted to support the efforts of the heroes within our community," said Terry Spalding, Cataloochee Ranch general manager. "Approximately 500 black Angus smash burgers were served, thanks to executive chef Jeb Aldrich and the team."

The Ranch and its sister property, the Swag, went further. With reopening of the two properties, management committed to donate 100% of revenue (not just profits) from October stays to local recovery efforts.

"While supporting rebuilding, it also supports our local farmers and suppliers who need to sell their crops and services to keep afloat," Spalding said. "We are proud to work with an amazing team — many of whom are volunteering to serve those in greater need."

Proprietors Annie and David Colquitt demonstrated their support of the community by donating \$1,000 per employee (198 total staff) to the nonprofit of the staff member's choosing for recovery aid. They also made a

personal commitment of \$2 million in donations to recovery efforts, divided between The North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund, World Central Kitchen, Haywood Christian Ministry, United Way of Haywood County, and Samaritan's Purse.

"Annie and David's commitments to the employees, plus their personal commitments, are simply inspiring," Spalding said.

"There are so many organizations doing great work," the Colquitts said in announcing the donation. "In the coming weeks and months, we will highlight other organizations as well. We invite you to join us and so many others around the country in supporting our beautiful region and the people who make it special."

Sarge's feeds Haywood's dogs and kitties

Sarge's Animal Rescue Foundation continued its pet rescue mission in a big way by giving pet families supplies for furry friends after Helene blew through. Members of the community jumped in, donating pet food and other items to Sarge's for distribution.

"We were incredibly lucky that Sarge's facility didn't sustain damage," said executive director Jessie Metcalf. "In the wake of so much disruption around, we're really trying to step up for our community."

About 20 volunteers, staff and board members helped collect supplies, bagging and loading food at the Sarge's Waynesville Adoption Center. Sarge's went "mobile" into Cruso, Bethel, Canton, Fines Creek and Waynesville distributing pet supplies, including crates, carriers, bedding, leashes, collars, cat litter, disposable litter boxes, cleaning supplies and water.

Board chair Windy McKinney helped drive the Sarge's van and deliver the estimated 1,000 pounds of donated pet food.

"Our volunteers at Sarge's really came through," McKinney said. "They bagged and loaded food and helped people find the right food for their pets."

Sarge's set up pre-bagged food for the community to pick up at its Waynesville location and plans to continue its efforts to bring food to those who need it.

"There is so much generosity coming from right here in Western North Carolina, including several churches and organizations bringing donations," Metcalf said.

Plus, Sarge's has announced a joyful fundraiser, the "Howl-O-Ween Dog Costume Contest," to be 10-11:30 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 26, at the Waynesville Historic Courthouse steps. Grab a costume for your pup — or make a donation of your choosing at Sarge's Adoption Center and use one of theirs.

"We wanted to be able to do something fun and festive for the fur babies," Metcalf said.

Funds raised from the \$10 per dog entry fee will go to missions in the area helping animals with foods, medications, boarding and foster supplies after Helene.

Hurricane veteran comes home to help

Haywood County native, now New Orleans, La., resident Caleb Hensley, knows a thing or two about storm relief efforts, having been through hurricanes Katrina, Ida and more.

By trade, he's a building contractor and musician who enjoys helping educate folks about filing insurance claims. By heart, he just wants to help people.

When he saw the videos of the flooding in Waynesville's Frog Level on Facebook, he said his heart sank. Hensley's mother lives near there, just above Charlie's Corner. He asked Facebook friends for donations to load up his trailer with supplies, then headed to Haywood County.

"Initially, I came to check on my family," Hensley said, "but then it turned into something much more. After seeing they were OK, I drove to Candler to check on my sister. Along the way, there was no cell service, no communication so people didn't know where to get supplies. People were stuck with little gas. I filled up a tank for an elderly couple in their 80s who felt they couldn't leave their house because they didn't have fuel to make it to a station."

He believes it's important to go out to where the people are who are in need. Hensley spoke Spanish at a trailer park he encountered and was soon surrounded by people needing necessities.

Through Facebook posts of his daily stops, people donated cash, which he handed out as needed, since "green cash was in short supply." Longtime Haywood friend Dave Partin loaded up a truck with baby supplies; he and Hensley roamed the neighborhoods of Haywood, giving out necessities.

Hensley said he would love to help organize a seminar here to help people navigate the process of filing FEMA claims, if anyone requests help.

"I'm just a guy who's been through multiple disasters who came to check on his family, but I'm grateful to be a small part in helping people and being of service," he said. "I've seen the best in people through this disaster, and I know how good they can be."

In Cruso, country club serves community

On the edge of Cruso, Springdale Resort and its Rocky Face Tavern used Facebook to reach out to their community, including first responders, rescue crews, linemen and anyone working in the area, inviting them for a free lunch at the Village Grill snack bar.

"We have been serving the Cruso community and all first responders since Monday after the flood," said Curt Davis, resort manager. "After the storm, Springdale served more than 1,000 meals from the Village Grill Snack Bar."

The resort is reminding folks online that "these mountains bring comfort, even in the storm," and shared information on distribution sites for supplies.

"In the wake of this tragedy, Springdale is accepting donations and those wishing to donate to our community relief fund may call 828-235-8451," Davis said.

Thankfully, the road to Springdale is open and cleared.

Balsam Range, Laurel Ridge team up to help

Haywood County's own bluegrass sensation, the multi award-winning Balsam Range, always is ready to help the community. Proud of their Haywood roots, band members love spreading the good word about the Western North Carolina mountains with the joy of music.

With typical "Grit and Grace," as in the band's song, they made music in an "Evening of Hope" fundraiser for post-Helene needs at Laurel Ridge Country Club, Waynesville.

"After the devastation of Hurricane Helene that affected so many, we all were looking for ways to help," said Duane Page, Laurel Ridge general manager. "At the end of the season, we already had a pre-scheduled Oct. 4 concert with the band. Together we agreed that we would only move forward with the event if we could turn it into a fundraiser to support our community."

Many Laurel Ridge members who would normally come to the concert were scattered, due to the storm. Even with lower attendance, the Balsam Range concert raised \$13,000.

Balsam Range and Laurel Ridge will divide the funds raised to support their individual charities and causes.

"There is so much devastation," said Balsam Range member Tim Surrett, who has been getting the word out about the local situation via his radio show on Canton's WPTL.

Surrett said the station used a Starlink antenna to broadcast much-needed flood information, "with a little music to give listeners an uplifting break" from the aftermath of the storm.

Balsam Range is kind of a roving troubadour for WNC, spreading word of mountain life. Now, Surrett said, the band has to use alternate driving routes to get to upcoming shows, since both Interstate 40 going into Tennessee and Interstate 26 into Virginia were closed due to the storm. But Haywood's favorite band is keeping the dates they can and letting people know about the situation in WNC. Surrett said they are sorry about the cancelation of the Haywood Arts Council's October concert in Maggie Valley, but "it didn't seem right, having a festival here now."

Drive-by water heroes much appreciated

Donna Trantham from Clyde contacted The Mountaineer with an uplifting story of a small, but meaningful gesture from a group of four young men.

"I was driving home from work on Friday through Clyde and these boys stopped me and ask if I needed water," Trantham said. "They were driving their own truck, knocking on doors, distributing water and other supplies."

While she tried to offer them gas money for their kindness, she said they wouldn't take it.

"These boys right here were a guardian angel," Trantham said. "It made me cry knowing what these young men were doing for Haywood County."

Darren Nicholson Band goes on a mission

Canton resident and noted musician Darren Nicholson and his band are on a mission — getting into action with post-storm relief.

"This is an extremely stressful and traumatic time for so many in our region," said Nicholson, whose band has gone out into hard-hit areas offering a helping had and who set up a GoFundMe page to receive donations from his Face Book and music fans.

"We are extremely grateful and blessed, so watching so many in our community in need, that put us immediately into action," he said. "The Bluegrass community, Western North Carolina and friends around the world have given me so much over my lifetime. Here's an opportunity to carry that forward and to be of service to others."

While Nicholson took a chainsaw to clear trees from driveways, band members Kevin Sluder delivered water, Richard Foulk delivered necessities, and east Tennessee residents Aynsley Porchak worked at a distribution center while Avery Welter worked as a first responder. Nicholson's wife and often vocal contributor, Jennifer, picked up donations from local resources.

To date, the GoFundMe page has raised \$18,500; Nicholson has issued a challenge to try to go over \$20,000 in donations. With the funds, he and band members personally purchase and deliver groceries and necessities, posting results on Face Book.

"One hundred percent of this money is going back into the community," he said. "We are buying supplies — mostly hazmat cleanup suits, gloves, paper products, generators, consumables and clothes— and delivering them.

Nicholson said most of the supplies purchased have been from local merchants, including Sav-Mor, Hometown Hardware and Flying Pig, all in Canton.

"We are trying to help folks, while also supporting local businesses," he said.

Nicholson, always community-minded, did the same thing in 2021 after tropical storm Fred, when he was able to deliver more than \$14,000 worth of groceries and supplies through his personal fundraising campaign.

"This community supports us and it's our obligation to support our community," said Nicholson. "When a catastrophe occurs, it's the human response to go in to fight or flight mode. These kind of situations can bring out the absolute worst in people, and it can also bring out the very best in people. Those good qualities are the solution."

Volunteerism steps up at Pigeon Center

The Pigeon Community Multicultural Development Center in Waynesville has been a community fixture with its mission "to strengthen harmony among the residents of our county," fostering inclusiveness.

After Helene hit, the Pigeon Center mobilized immediately, checking on Haywood folks, then opening its doors to fill needs from cleaning supplies, hot meals, food boxes and other essential things people needed, including financial information.

Even with spotty internet, the Pigeon Center started posting a daily schedule of what was available at the center and welcoming volunteers.

"Sometimes we just relied on what we could do on paper and pencil, making the runs on foot," said the center's executive director Lin Forney. "We're trying to get our neighbors what they need. We've had a ton of beautiful, wonderful volunteers from all over, plus people have brought things from Raleigh, Charlotte, Winston-Salem, Durham, South Carolina and Georgia. They have brought us all kinds of supplies Haywood County folks needed right now."

Waynesville resident Ann Simmons works at the Haywood County Board of Elections, but when internet was down post-storm and office work couldn't be done, she used her time to volunteer in relief effort. Simmons chose the Pigeon Center after seeing a post on Facebook.

Simmons said she did whatever was needed at the Pigeon Center, from unloading trucks to finding resources for people who had downed trees — and she helped spread the word about relief effort at the center. Simmons daughter, Emily Wheeler, of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, heard the word and secured donations for the center from her residence, then drove a truck up here with supplies.

After her experience at the Pigeon Center, Simmons posted on the center's Facebook page: "I felt honored to be there with you all today. What a true blessing to the community you and the center are."

"Thank you to all the volunteers who have dedicated hours, days and weeks to help," Forney said. "They took people, cooked, stored, sorted and received, organized, repackaged and coordinated — All to make sure people are fed, safe and have what they need."

'Small stuff' matters

Some of the most appreciated help was on 'the small stuff.' From personal experience, much appreciated help was given by neighbors during the subdivision's five-and-a-half-day power outage, including Tuscola High School special education teacher Ben Garner, who helped my husband, Paul, unload and set up a new grill when our old one wouldn't work. It's noteworthy that Garner is now deployed as senior enlisted leader for the N.C. National Guard,

assisting all of Western N.C. As we brag on him, he is quick to brag on the troops, saying they are doing "a great service."

There were neighbors who helped in other ways, one couple forwarding cash so we could get a new grill to cook. Another neighbor alerted us that gas trucks were at Ingles in Canton, so we could fuel up. Neighbors walked the development talking to neighbors, exchanging information; in the days of darkness, there was no other way to communicate.

A shout-out goes to Town of Clyde staff, sending maintenance employees door-to-door in our subdivision to advise folks to reserve water in buckets in case the subdivision supply ran out. The Clyde staff came back to give people the boil-water order and to let us know when it was rescinded.

The maintenance employees told me about cell reception and a Wi-Fi hot spot on Paragon Parkway in Clyde — and which stores had power.

A stranger helps

Being "power-less," I went looking for a store to plug in electronic devices. Jumping for joy, I saw Valé 243 Italian Kitchen with its door open. Owner Valerio Vuotto's staff was welcoming and gracious, letting me charge the electronics.

That lead to a stranger helping me after I offered her a seat. While waiting for a carry-out order, Clyde resident Susan Shumolis told me she retired as Pisgah High School's librarian.

She was visibly moved when I told her about my junior high homeroom teacher — a librarian — who nurtured my interest in the media, making me editor of the school newspaper, leading to what I do today.

While electronics were being charged, she asked if my household didn't have a portable charging station, like the Halo charger she used. I was clueless, and she offered to lend me her Halo, since she had power.

"I was wondering what I could do this day to reach out to people," she said. "I wanted to personally help someone close to home."

Shumolis drove home, bringing the portable charger back to Valé 243, then treated me to a pizza to take home. It lifted my spirits. — Carol Viau

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Carol Viau, 'Disaster brought out the best in Haywood: Many helping hands sprang into storm relief', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3952F41878E48



Disaster brought out the best in Haywood: Many helping hands sprang into storm relief (copy)

October 13, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Carol Viau | Section: On Premise | 47 Words OpenURL Link

There are stories big and small about how people in Haywood County came out to help each other in the wake of Helene's destruction. In the powerless days and dark nights of late September and early October, folks here came together to offer help, supplies and solace.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Carol Viau, 'Disaster brought out the best in Haywood: Many helping hands sprang into storm relief (copy)', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3952F09885690>



When Helene crippled NC's - small mountain communities, lifelines lived next door

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Julia Coin; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1444 Words

Page: 7A OpenURL Link

A week after Hurricane Helene brought once-in-a-century flooding to Appalachia, mountain folk pepper the cracked roads that few outsiders have navigated. They carry Pampers and Spam, water and protein bars they grabbed from the longstanding community centers - churches, fire departments, restaurants - that are now survival centers.

Disaster relief workers are in the sludgy streets, too, looking down at their frozen phone screens. Maps don't load here. Cell towers are down or overwhelmed.

Two men wearing blue and red search and rescue shirts stop in front of mangled driveways to ask for directions. They're met with first names and a finger pointing down the road.

Jimmy, up on the mountain, might need some food.

Someone should probably check on Nance again. She's one of the town's widows. Lives right over there.

Oh, Jerry, I forgot about him. If he made it, he'll need more oxygen soon.

Most volunteer group leaders give the same orders when setting up in the most rural of mountain areas between hard-hit Asheville and Hickory, a city an hour northwest of Charlotte.

Find a local. Find out what they need. Find out where to go.

When streets are shredded, rivers are relocated and forests turn into fields of logs, rescue teams can't always get to the stranded. For a few days, they don't know who the stranded are.

But neighbors do. Helene turned some small mountain towns into mostly rubbled buildings. Still, community remains.

Helene, the Category 4 hurricane that made landfall in Florida's Big Bend region, hit North Carolina as a tropical storm. But even before Helene's bands barrelled over mountaintops, Appalachia saw days of rain - 10 inches, in some places.

By Sept. 27, as Helene settled over the sloped towns, houses and Christmas tree farms that dot the region, the area became overwhelmed with floods, mudslides and log-slides.

First came rescue, now comes restoration.

Across the U.S., more than 200 have been reported dead so far in the monster storm. Some remain missing.

Sinking in mud

Logan Brown had a home near Frank, an Avery County town about 40 miles southwest of Boone. It perched atop a hill and had a view of the scenic Route 19E and North Toe River.

That's where the 17-year-old sat on Sept. 27. He was inside the two-story, green-shuttered house with his dad and siblings.

Then came the roaring mud.

The four escaped out the back before Helene gouged logs into the door frame and punched holes into the rest of the house.

Brown says they sat by the river, waiting for the storm to pass. Then they made it to his dad's work truck down the road. Then to his girlfriend's mountainside trailer home 10 miles away, which - miraculously - made it through the storm, says Ashley Clawson, the girlfriend's mother.

"He was just caked in mud," she says, "from head to toe."

Brown was in new clothes taken from a store with a broken window, she says.

"I don't blame him for stealing," she continues. "What else was he supposed to do?"

Brown has stayed in their trailer for the last few days, Clawson says.

On Thursday, Brown's hands are cut from moving branches and debris to make paths near his home, but they aren't nearly as muddy.

He and his dad, with shovels in hand, walk up the highway to their driveway. They decline help from a makeshift group of volunteers, passing their toppled, nearly vertical, 6,000-pound RAM truck without a second glance.

In Western North Carolina, mangled metal has become more common than a deer sighting. Trailers wrap trees like tinsel. Asphalt crinkles like paper mache. Wooden crosses and Jesus statues poke out of piled debris.

The Browns have a mission. The Clawsons - from nearby Clawson's Holler, where all but two people share her family's name - are there to help.

There's four dirt bikes inside a shed next to the Brown homestead. They're getting them out.

"Be careful," Brown's ax-holding brother cautions as Clawson's children leap into the mud and around an old-school can of Mountain Dew.

Jennavi Clawson, 11, makes room on a branch resting above the mud. Ashley Clawson and her grandson - a tall 2-year-old named James, pull themselves onto it.

Brown heaves the bikes out, easily revving the first, second and third bike.

The fourth sputters as his brother tries to start it.

"That one might not work," Brown says. "It's hard to start."

He leaps on the red and white frame, pumping his cowboy boot on top of the kick starter. It rattles, then shoots out a cloud of exhaust toward the forest behind him.

Everyone smiles.

"We don't have much, but we make do," Ashley Clawson says, watching her daughter's boyfriend of two years load the bikes onto his trailer.

This is a highlight of their day.

On Oct. 1, their source of light was more literal: candles on Brown's chocolate swirled ice cream cake. He turned 17 four days after the storm slopped debris onto his bed pillows.

Sending supplies down the line

In Turkey Cove, a ravine 60 miles south of the Browns' home, down past Spruce Pine and Little Switzerland, a 57-year-old woman wears a "Glenwood Elementary" t-shirt. She responds to volunteers asking if crated dogs on a disheveled hill need anything.

They're good, she says before loading them into a silver Nissan Rogue.

She drives down the bumpy side road and stops to talk to four men helping deliver supplies and a Charlotte Observer reporter in a fleet of ATVs.

"My daddy did a good job, didn't he?" Karen Hollifield says, pointing to the small wooden cabin her father built on the hillside above years ago. It survived Helene.

Somehow, in a house half a mile up the mountain, so did her brother and sister-in-law, she says.

The couple lived in a doublewide trailer nestled up the side road Hollifield just drove down. They heard cracking and rushing water. They stood up and took one step, but the mud stopped them there. It launched them out of the home, broke Hollifield's brother's back and buried her sister-in-law up to her neck, Hollifield says.

Her dad's craftsmanship held up once more. His china cabinet, ousted from its spot in the corner of the room, fell on top of the sister-in-law - trapping her, but also shielding her from the rushing water above.

Hollifield's brother got out first, she says. Then he went to the neighbors'.

"I give all the credit to them," Hollifield says. They dug her sister-in-law out.

Her family and their neighbors all survived, but the seven dachshunds that roamed the property are gone. Hollifield found one of them dead, she says as she shooed a yellowjacket away from her bicep.

The bees have sent several people in Western North Carolina into anaphylactic shock, according to officials who made calls for more Epipen and Benadryl donations.

Both are stocked in one ATV manned by an Operation Airdrop volunteer from the Outer Banks. He and his neighbor drove west to put their hobby to use - to help.

Hollifield doesn't want either medicine. She just needs to make sure she doesn't get stung, she says, her t-shirt sleeves rolled up, resting on top of her shoulders, exposing her arms.

Down the road, at Turkey Cove Baptist Church, a lady with the same "town name" - Hollifield - similarly rejects supplies, saying other places probably need it more.

The church got its first stockpile on Oct. 1, four days after the storm severed them from the rest of the world. Many members of the congregation stayed as the "little bitty creek" flooded, says April Hollifield, 72. They stayed in the days after, too.

They knew what would happen if they left before the storm: they wouldn't be able to come back, she says. Not for a while, at least.

The souls who stayed through the storm quickly threaded lifelines between each other.

"The immediate response came from the citizens... from the victims," says Jennifer Bowman, a volunteer who took Jeeps, trucks and horses stocked with supplies to Burnsville - one of the state's hardest hit towns.

A "sweet local lady" had set up a distribution point and was trying to manage it by herself. Bowman and a fleet of others organized the supplies, multiplied them and dispersed them.

"Nobody wanted to take more than what they absolutely needed," Bowman says.

One woman asked for just two rolls of toilet paper. When Bowman brought out a "Sam's-Club-sized" pack, she cried and muttered.

I just feel so greedy taking that much toilet paper.

Julia Coin: 7042189350, @juliamcoin

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Julia Coin, Staff Writer, 'When Helene crippled NC's small mountain communities,lifelines lived next door', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 7A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDBA60AFBB0>



Updates on storm damage - at Western NC attractions

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon; Staff Writer | Section: Living | 850 Words

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Nearly two weeks after Hurricane Helene swept through the southeast as a tropical storm, much of the damage across North Carolina is still being assessed, even at some of the state's most loved tourist attractions.

Along with several roads shut down after being washed out, several big businesses and landmarks in Western North Carolina are closed after flood damage from the storm.

From popular roadways to state parks, here's the latest on some of the damage left behind from Helene's destructive wrath on some of the top spots in North Carolina's biggest mountain towns:

Biltmore Estate

Latest update: Temporarily closed

While Helene storm damage varies across the 8,000-acre property of America's largest home, the Biltmore House, conservatory, winery, gardens, and hotels had little to no damage from Helene, but the entrance to Biltmore and other low-lying areas of the property did have some flooding.

According to the estate's website, guests with daytime tickets for Sept. 27-Nov. 1 can reschedule a visit once the estate is reopened or request a refund online. Overnight guests with stays scheduled for Sept. 27-Nov. 1 will be emailed with more details about alternative options.

While the estate is being restored, the team launched a \$2 million "Biltmore Relief Fund for WNC" to support estate employees, emergency response teams and nonprofit partners in Asheville.

An estimated reopening date has yet to be announced.

Blue Ridge Parkway

Latest update: Temporarily closed

While damage from Helene is still being assessed, the entire length of the Blue Ridge Parkway remains closed, the National Park Service announced. One week following the storm, tens of thousands of trees across the roadway and nearly three dozen rock and mudslides have been discovered, which is why officials warn that "until the parkway has been reopened, entering closed sections is not only dangerous to visitors and recovery crews, but also illegal."

"The damage left behind by the storm has created dangerous conditions, some of which are not immediately visible from the road itself," Tracy Swartout, superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway, said in a release. "We thank the public for their cooperation in respecting closures for their safety and to allow crews to complete their work."

An estimated reopening date has yet to be announced.

Grandfather Mountain and other state parks

Latest update: Temporarily closed

Both the private park and state park at Grandfather Mountain are closed at this time. According to the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation website, Helene brought landslides, flooding and an "extreme number of downed trees and powerlines" to the area. Along with the state park portion of Grandfather Mountain, all state parks and recreation areas west of I-77in Western North Carolina have temporarily closed.

The Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation is accepting donations to provide relief to those in need around the area. You can contribute online at grandfather.com/helene.

All state parks west of I-77 and most park programs are closed through at least Oct. 31.

The North Carolina Arboretum

Latest update: Temporarily closed

Storm damage is still being assessed at the North Carolina Arboretum in south Asheville following Helene so it is closed until further notice. At this time, the team is warning the public to avoid trying to walk or bike onto the 434-acre public garden.

An estimated reopening date has yet to be announced.

The Omni Grove Park Inn

Latest update: Temporarily closed

The team at The Omni Grove Park Inn says they are in the early stages of assessing the impact on the property's infrastructure so the hotel is temporarily closed and does not have water or power. While the team is working on restoring full operations, the Omni's website says the team is also clearing debris from its golf course and addressing minor flooding.

Guests with bookings through Oct. 26 have been canceled and those who pre-paid will be issued refunds. Those with future reservations will be contacted about alternative arrangements.

During its temporary closure, the hotel announced that it is collecting donations to assist its associates affected by the storm. Contributions can be made online at linktr.ee/omniresources.

An estimated reopening date has yet to be announced.

Tweetsie Railroad

Latest update: Temporarily closed

While storm cleanup continues from Helene, North Carolina's first theme park remains temporarily closed through the fall season.

A spokesperson for the park told The Observer that the park incurred some damage during the storm and flooding.

"This storm has touched the lives of so many in ways we never anticipated," Chris Robbins, President of Tweetsie Railroad, said in a statement. "Many of our team members and local families are facing tremendous challenges, and we want to ensure they have the time and resources they need to get back on their feet. Their safety and well-being are our top priority."

According to the park website, all ticket sales have been paused but those who already purchased some can request a refund or exchange by emailing tickets@tweetsie.com.

To support relief efforts in the area, the team launched the #TweetsieMatchingChallenge. The park made an initial \$10,000 donation to Samaritan's Purse, with a pledge to match and even triple additional contributions.

The park plans to reopen for the holiday season on Nov. 29.

Chyna Blackmon: @chynablackmon

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Chyna Blackmon, Staff Writer, 'Updates on storm damage at Western NC attractions', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 1C https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB5B334990



Western NC NPR station opened doors for others

October 13, 2024 \mid News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Mary Ramsey; Staff Writer | Section: Living | 614 Words

Page: 1C OpenURL Link

Blue Ridge Public Radio provided not just for its own staff ,but for journalists from across North Carolina and the country, as reporters descended on Asheville after Hurricane Helene's hit.

Western North Carolina's National Public Radio affiliate remains on the air amid ongoing power and water outages in Asheville, where the station is based. Staff are working extended shifts and have expanded the station's services since the storm hit to bring critical news to a wider audience.

The station also opened the doors to its downtown Asheville office to journalists from other news outlets who need a safe place and a stable internet connection to file their own stories about the devastation. Outside reporters, photographers and editors simply ring the building's doorbell, and they're greeted by BPR staff and ushered to whatever workspace is currently available.

"We're a little sub-community," said Laura Lee, BPR's news director. "... And like many communities, you sort of band together and open your doors in whatever ways you can."

Opening the doors

The station ran on a generator initially when power went out, Lee said. But with a central location, the building got power and internet back relatively quickly. That was particularly beneficial journalists traveling to the area still afflicted by hundreds of thousands of power outages.

"It just seemed to make sense to extend that benefit to other media," Lee said.

The open-door policy has brought in "a blend of familiar faces and new people," Lee said. Other local news organizations such as Asheville Watchdog have been frequent visitors, and other guests have included The Charlotte Observer and The New York Times.

The program is "a natural extension" of collegiality among North Carolina media, Lee said.

"This isn't to say we're not competitive with each other - of course we are in some circumstances. But I think generally, there's just more of a collaborative spirit in journalism now," she said.

Helene news

The first days after Helene hit were "pretty nerve-wracking," Lee said, as she and other leadership tried to track the staff's whereabouts. It took about 24 hours to reach one reporter, and almost 72 hours to make contact with another.

"We're feeling good now in terms of being able to account for each other every day and sort of working around some of the communication barriers that we had before," she said Tuesday.

Coverage has focused on the most vital information and updates across the station's typical 14-county coverage area and beyond. The station has regularly carried live updates from officials. For some still without power or internet access, the radio is their only source of news about where to get water, food and other essential aid.

"It just became apparent how valuable and how critical that was for people who were completely blocked off from other access to other information," Lee said.

The station also launched a text-only version of its website at text.bpr.org, making it easier for folks with slow or limited internet access to load articles. BPR also expanded its Spanish-language coverage.

What's next for Blue Ridge Public Radio?

"It's really hard," Lee said, to know what comes next for BPR as the station and the community move out from the immediate aftermath of Helene.

"Even though we're not, you know, a day or two out of the storm, we are still without water. The vast majority of Asheville .. is still without power. So in some ways, it doesn't feel like we have hit a recovery place yet," she said.

Mary Ramsey: @mcolleen1996

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Mary Ramsey, Staff Writer, 'Western NC NPR station opened doors for others', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 1C https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB78E93AA8>https://infoweb.news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&document-view?p=AMNEWS&document-view?p=AMNEWS&document-view?p=AMNEWS&document-view?p=AMNEWS&document-vi



What Western NC lawmakers say about Helene aftermath

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan and Avi Bajpai; Staff Writer Section: News 1557 Words Page: 2A OpenURL Link

RALEIGH As North Carolina's 170 state lawmakers returned to Raleigh on Wednesday to pass a Hurricane Helene relief package, they brought stories of what they've seen, and what they want, in their devastated districts.

Here's what many in the self-described "mountain delegation" have said about Helene, and the response so far:

'A very isolating event'

* Republican Rep. Tim Moffitt, who represents Henderson, Polk and Rutherford counties:

"We've often complained here in Raleigh as the mountain delegation, that the mountains are often forgotten, that we're often overlooked, and that the rest of the state tends to be the beneficiary of all the efforts that begin here in Raleigh," Moffitt told reporters on Wednesday.

"We're different: We're mountain folks, we're tough, we're resilient, and we're uncomfortable in the spotlight, but it is needed. When you wake up, there's a total collapse of telecommunications, your power, your water, your sewer, your roads and your bridges. It is a very isolating event. This is something that is beyond description," he said.

On the Senate floor, Moffitt spoke extensively to thank everyone from both the public and private sectors for their help.

"It reinstills your faith in people," he said.

Moffitt talked about what happened right after the storm, for those left on their own and determining who they'll rely on for help.

"So who are you going to rely on? Go up in the mountains. Go listen to rednecks just like me. They're the first wave of first responders, with the chainsaws and with the 4-wheelers, and they're out in the hills and the hollers and they're checking on their neighbors. They're the ones that have the skid steers and the miniature trackhoes. They deploy themselves, and they get out there and they start working with their neighbors. And this is all while our first responders, our volunteer fire departments, our sheriff's departments are really trying to assess the scope of the need and how they're going deploy their assets in order to best serve our citizens," Moffitt said.

Others in the first wave included the faith community, he said, and local churches rose to the occasion.

"So all of this is going on while the bigger picture is starting to come together. So heartfelt gratitude for all of our our unofficial first responders, and thank you for being there. Our sheriffs and our deputies, they did a great job. Our volunteer fire departments, they did a great job, and they're still doing a great job, and we're doing our best to relieve them with volunteers from other parts of the state and other parts of the nation," he said.

Water treatment 'unsalvageable'

* Republican Sen. Ralph Hise of Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Caldwell, Haywood, Madison, Mitchell, Watauga and Yancey counties:

"This is by far the most devastating thing I've ever experienced. Many of the areas I represent - all the counties I

represent - have been devastated by the storm," Hise said.

"We've had entire counties without water, power, sewer, cell service. We've been trying to rescue areas - there's still areas you can't access unless you're on a motorcycle, unless you're on side-by-sides, communities that are tied off. We've had an incredible outpouring from so many communities across the state and others, but we're in a long term recovery ... Mitchell County, the water treatment system for the entire county, both towns - it's gone. It does not exist. It's unsalvageable. It's a four-year process to put a water treatment plant back in. We don't have a temporary solution to these things right now."

"People at the fire departments every day are having the first hot meal they've had in more than two weeks. We have a lot of things to ask for. I'm excited to be here today to see that we're asking as a community for the support of the state, and that the state of North Carolina is stepping up to do that initially. And so there's a lot of distrust in the areas I have, but I hope we can begin to show that North Carolina is stepping up with responsibility, and we are here," Hise said.

'FEMA showed up'

* Democratic Sen. Julie Mayfield of Buncombe County:

Mayfield said during the Senate floor debate that "nothing happens as fast as you want it to. And the first couple of days were terrifying because things weren't coming."

"But then they did start to come, and the National Guard is there, pulling people out of houses. And that's still happening, still happening. FEMA showed up. And despite what you read on the internet, and don't believe any of it, FEMA is everywhere," Mayfield said.

People living 'up to the best versions of themselves'

* Democratic Rep. Caleb Rudow of Buncombe County:

"There have been a few moments in my life when I've been able to see people live up to the best versions of themselves, to step up to a tremendous challenge, to, regardless of the odds, run into danger to save the neighbor, and that is what I saw so many times over the past 12 days," Rudow said on the House floor.

"I saw neighbors helping neighbors. I saw first responders perform acts of heroism that were just incredible. I saw communities come together. I saw people drive from all over this country, and all over the world, to come and help us."

Rudow said the photos of the destruction "don't do it justice," and "don't show the terrifying power of this storm." He said that in some areas, flood waters rose 25 feet above normal levels.

As a point of illustrating that to his colleagues, Rudow told lawmakers to look up at the the blinds above the gallery in the House chamber.

"If you look, right up there to the top of those blinds, that is 25 feet high," Rudow said. "And you imagine that power in a river moving downstream, and that is a pressure washer that washes away houses, blows houses into bridges, that takes out the bridges, that destroys people's lives."

Heating, housing solutions needed

* Republican Rep. Dudley Greene of Avery, McDowell, Mitchell and Yancey counties:

"There was not a corner of my district that wasn't impacted, if not decimated, by this storm," Greene said.

"The injury has occurred, hopefully we are starting to get the bleeding stopped up that way. And this will be the first step for healing to begin. We still have people in shelters, so we're starting to look for what's a housing solution for folks up there, what's a heating solution for folks up there," he said.

'Thank God we have the rainy day fund'

* Republican Sen. Kevin Corbin of Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain and Transylvania counties:

"I thank God we have the rainy day fund. I thank God it's there," Corbin said during the Senate floor debate on the bill. "We have over \$4 billion in the rainy day fund, because in Western North Carolina, we had a rainy day. That's what it's for," Corbin said.

The \$273 million Hurricane Helene relief bill uses money from the Savings Reserve fund, which is also known as the rainy day fund.

'Start their lives over again'

* Republican Rep. Jennifer Balkcom, Henderson County:

"Back home, people are trying to start their lives over again," Balkcom said Wednesday.

"The lives in the mountains are different. We're strong, we're resilient. We will rebuild, absolutely, and a lot of times we hate asking for help. I know that myself, and I promise I wasn't going to cry, but people are still needing help, even though they don't ask for it. And this is just a start. This is a start to help give people what they need. Our community has come together. It's been such a blessing to see the strength that is out in Western North Carolina," she said.

She thanked everyone across the state who has helped, including those who sent supplies.

'Need to show folks that the government has their back'

* Democratic Rep. Lindsey Prather of Buncombe County:

Prather praised the response and coordination by officials at all levels of government.

She said lawmakers were in touch with and receiving updates from Gov. Roy Cooper, FEMA, the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, and the military, but she highlighted officials at the local level too, including the Buncombe County emergency management director, local fire chiefs, and volunteers.

"This is personal, and y'all know that," Prather said. "Western North Carolina is a special place, unlike any other. The people are creative, and caring, and resourceful, and resilient. The mountains are homey, and lush, and lifegiving. Each little community has its own character and style, but we are all mountain folk."

Prather said everyone had stepped up to help however they could, including local radio stations that provided news, but also some "musical levity" to their communities, restaurants that immediately began to give away what they could, and neighbors who checked in on each other before emergency officials could even reach them.

"We need to show folks that the government has their back, right now, at the time they need it most," she said.
"Not just in my district, but in all of Western North Carolina, the vacation land that people watched get ravaged on TV."

"It's a permanent home to many, many people. Please don't forget us."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan and Avi Bajpai, Staff Writer, 'What Western NC lawmakers say about Helene aftermath', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 2A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDBAE851690>



Want to support Western NC? Check out these fundraisers, drives & other ways to help

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Renee Umsted; Staff Writer | Section: News | 720 Words

Page: 14A OpenURL Link

In the wake of Helene, North Carolinians have mobilized to support communities in the western region of the state as they begin to recover and rebuild.

Well-known musicians such as Luke Combs, Eric Church, James Taylor, Billy Strings and Ben Folds have announced benefit concerts. Local businesses in the Triangle and Charlotte have collected clothing and other supplies to share as temperatures drop. The Carolina Hurricanes donated ticket sales and donations to hurricane relief funds. Michael Jordan and his 23XI Racing team contributed \$1 million to Second Harvest of Metrolina and the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund. Restaurants in the Triangle set aside some proceeds from sales for relief efforts.

And still more is being done.

Here's a list of fundraising events and donation drives.

Raleigh-area musicians hold free concert & donation drive

The Heart of Carolina Jazz Orchestra and Triangle Youth Jazz Ensemble are hosting a free concert in Raleigh.

Attendees are asked to bring cash to donate to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund or items such as tarps, bottled water, charcoal and lighter fluid, ready-to-eat food, manual can openers, plastic eating utensils, cleaning supplies, diapers and wipes, pet food and paper plates and cups.

The concert is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 13, at Greystone Baptist Church, 7509 Lead Mine Road.

Donate while buying NC State Fair tickets

You can support disaster relief efforts while purchasing tickets to the NC State Fair. All money collected will go to the MANNA FoodBank of Asheville, which lost its distribution warehouse in the hurricane.

When purchasing fair tickets online, a "State Fair Cares" boxed link will pop up on the shopping cart page before you check out. Visit ncagr.gov/divisions/ncstatefair/2024/buytixnow to buy tickets and donate.

Buy T-shirts to benefit western North Carolina

Many local and regional shops are selling apparel, like tee shirts and sweatshirts, to donate funds to organizations working in storm-hit areas, and all you have to do is click "buy."

For details, designs and prices, visit charlotteobserver.com.

Country artist Sturgill Simpson fundraising concert in Cary

Country musician Sturgill Simpson will perform a benefit concert at Cary's Koka Booth Amphitheatre on Monday, Oct. 21. All proceeds from the event will be donated to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund.

Tickets will be available beginning with a local venue pre-sale on Thursday, Oct. 10 at 10 a.m. and general sale

Friday, Oct. 11 at 10 a.m. Visit sturgillsimpsonlive.com for information and tickets.

Simpson was originally scheduled to perform at Asheville's ExploreAsheville.com Arena on Monday, Oct. 21, but the show has been canceled with plans to be rescheduled.

Appalachian Aid Music Festival to benefit Helene victims

The Appalachian Aid Music Festival will take place at Carolina West Wireless Community Commons in downtown Wilkesboro on Saturday, Oct. 19, 12-9 p.m. Tickets will be \$20 for general admissions and are available on Eventbrite. The event will feature Alex Key, John PayCheck, Wayne Henderson, The Contenders, Taylon Hope, Matt Bizzell, Holy Water, BRB and others. Proceeds will be distributed through Musicians Mission of Mercy, a nonprofit based in Ashe County.

Western NC shops and restaurants could use our help from afar

The hurricane devastated so many of our mountain towns who rely on tourism, especially right near the peak of leaf-changing season, and supporting these businesses feels more critical than ever. Officials have asked us not to travel to Western North Carolina for fun right now, and many of these shops were absolutely devastated, so there would be no place for us to visit even if we could get there.

But there are a few ways you can help support the area from afar:

Local shops and restaurants are beginning to offer ways to support them online, including making purchases and supporting fundraising efforts. One business suggested including a note stating "Ship when the time is right" with your purchases, and that's probably a great idea for all of these places.

Another idea is to book a rental or a session with a place that you don't plan on using, so the business is able to pocket the money. This may help hospitality folks who can't work during this time.

Find a list of businesses and ways you can help at charlotteobserver.com.

Is there a fundraising event we missed? Let us know.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Renee Umsted, Staff Writer, 'Want to support Western NC? Check out these fundraisers, drives & other ways to help', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 14A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB6A7AF830>



Thousands in Western NC are - still without water after Helene. - When will service be restored?

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Mary Ramsey; Staff Writer | Section: News | 763 Words Page: 6A OpenURL Link

Extensive work remains to restore clean water access for North Carolina communities hit hard by Helene two weeks ago.

Repairs are underway across Western North Carolina, including the main city of Asheville's facilities, which serve more than 156,000 people in Buncombe and Henderson counties, according to the system's 2023 water quality report. Crews are trying to finish work that would normally take months or years on a much shorter timeline, Asheville Assistant City Manager Ben Woody said Wednesday.

At other public water systems throughout Western North Carolina, a variety of issues are stopping water restoration, according to state officials.

Even people with private wells need to take precautions to avoid health risks after Helene's flooding, officials say.

How many people in Western NC are without water?

About 3.7% of the region's public water systems, serving 24,330 people, were closed and not producing water as of Wednesday morning, according to the the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality's tracker. An additional seven systems serving 238,967 people, including the City of Asheville's system, were down or limited due to water pressure problems.

Another eight systems had no power, and 48 systems serving tens of thousands were either running on back-up power or operated on stored water only.

Hundreds of thousands are under boil water advisories.

When will water be restored in Asheville, Western North Carolina?

Asheville's Mills River Water Plant is "fully operational," the city said Monday. That plant serves about 20% of the city's water system, according to the Asheville Citizen-Times.

But the North Fork Reservoir and its plant, which serves the other 80%, need more extensive and time-consuming repairs. City officials did not give an updated timeline Wednesday on when water would be restored but said previously it could be weeks.

Woody on Wednesday said crews are laying a new bypass line connecting North Fork's treatment plant to the water distribution system and hope to finish that by Friday. Boulders clogging pipes slowed down that project, he added.

"That's just the contingencies we have to be prepared for," he said.

Asheville also is working to repair distribution lines throughout the city, Woody said. The city is partnering with the Environmental Protection Agency and engineers to purify the water in the reservoir, which was contaminated by sediment during the flooding from Helene.

"When the storm came, it essentially flipped the reservoir," he said. "... All this sediment, pieces of clay particles,

are now suspended in the water column."

Workers need to get much of the sediment out of the water before it goes through the treatment plant, Woody said. Not doing so could cause more damage that could take months to fix.

The city will also have to repressurize its system, which will likely lead to the discovery of more damage, Woody said.

"Even when the water is able to leave the North Fork treatment plant, the process of refilling thousands of miles of pipe is going to take time," he said.

Asheville's water system also serves parts of Black Mountain, Hendersonville, Woodfin and Weaverville.

Issues in other water systems include a lack of consistent power, storm debris that needs clearing and damaged distribution infrastructure such as pipes and pumps, said Josh Kastrinsky, spokesman for the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality.

"The spectrum of needed improvements is broad," he said.

What about well water?

Officials are also urging caution for those in Western North Carolina using well water after Helene.

Floodwater can contaminate wells with livestock waste, sewage, chemicals and other contaminants that can lead to illness, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services advises.

Dug wells, bored wells and wells less than 50 feet deep are especially vulnerable to contamination, according to NCDHHS.

Property owners should reach out to their local health department, the NC State Laboratory of Public Health or their local county extension about getting their well water tested after flooding, the agency says. Additional testing may be needed if the well is near animal feeding operations, fields that use pesticides or industrial chemical factories.

Test kits will also be available for pick-up starting Thursday at 30 Valley St. in Asheville, county officials said at their Wednesday briefing.

NCDHHS also recommends property owners reach out to their local health department or a licensed well driller to "shock chlorinate" their well - a process that disinfects wells using liquid bleach or chlorine - after flooding.

Mary Ramsey: @mcolleen1996

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Mary Ramsey, Staff Writer, 'Thousands in Western NC are still without water after Helene. When will service be restored?', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 6A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDBCA0F1E78>



Fact check: FEMA isn't diverting disaster funds for immigrants

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Emily Vespa, correspondent | Section: News | 1105 Words

Page: 15A
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After the Homeland Security secretary last week warned that the Federal Emergency Management Agency can meet immediate needs but is short of funding to make it through hurricane season, false claims about the agency's spending are proliferating.

Some allege that the projected shortfall means Helene survivors won't get the help they need, wrongly blaming agency spending on migrant services for draining disaster relief funds.

Here's how FEMA is spending disaster funds - and how it isn't.

Migrant services

Both former President Donald Trump and Elon Musk have peddled a claim that FEMA emptied its account to "import voters." The unsubstantiated conspiracy theory that Democrats allow people to cross the border illegally and then register them to vote is one that Trump and Musk echo often, despite evidence that noncitizen voting is extremely rare.

"The GREAT people of North Carolina are being stood up by Harris and Biden, who are giving almost all of the FEMA money to Illegal Migrants in what is now considered to be the WORST rescue operation in the history of the U.S.," Trump wrote on Truth Social Monday.

In truth, FEMA did not divert disaster relief funds to people who are living in the country without legal authorization. And it has enough money for immediate disaster relief, the agency says.

Some Trump supporters amplifying this claim are alluding to a migrant services program funded by Customs and Border Protection money at Congress' direction. FEMA distributed about \$650 million last fiscal year under the program to support communities that are receiving migrants and relieve overcrowding in temporary shelters.

Others, like right-wing X user Libs of TikTok, are referring to a FEMA program that helps provide food and shelter to those in need. Congress previously appropriated funds under the program to a now-defunct arm that provided humanitarian relief for migrants, which was replaced by the CBP-funded program.

FEMA's disaster fund, which supports federal disaster relief, is a separate spigot. There are stringent spending terms for the fund, which Congress replenishes through appropriations. It's most often used to provide federal assistance after the president declares a major disaster.

Though those migrant programs don't spend disaster relief funds, the Trump administration in 2019 told Congress it was taking \$155 million from the disaster fund to give to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Washington Post reported.

COVID-19

Libs of TikTok also ignited fury over FEMA's COVID-19 assistance, which is doled out from the disaster relief fund.

"Billions of dollars are being spent on a pandemic that's been over for years while Helene victims are struggling," the post read. "See for yourself where the priorities lie in Kamala's America."

Trump first authorized the use of the disaster fund for COVID-19 relief in an unprecedented move in March 2020. It was the first time the fund was used for simultaneous disaster assistance nationwide. When President Joe Biden took office, he expanded the pandemic relief.

FEMA has promised nearly \$15 billion in disaster relief funds for COVID-19 assistance in the past fiscal year, including \$491 million to North Carolina, according to its latest report. That's because it's still reimbursing states, territories and tribes for pandemic-related costs, like vaccination and testing services. It's also still covering COVID-19-related funerals. The deadline to incur all COVID-19 costs is in 2026.

A Government Accountability Office analysis found that FEMA underestimated pandemic-related costs. It's taking FEMA years to review and reimburse COVID-19 expenses because the agency faced a slew of requests from across the country during the pandemic, the GAO said.

Armed guards

This week, FEMA posted a contract opportunity for private, armed security guards as part of its disaster response in North Carolina, which sparked outrage on X.

"If they were helping people as well as they could, the people themselves would protect FEMA," one user posted.

The FEMA posting says the agency uses armed guards to "safeguard federal employees, visitors, and property at both temporary and fixed facilities during disaster and emergency declarations." The contract will likely be between \$5 and \$10 million.

North Carolina isn't the only state where FEMA's hiring armed guards: It also recently posted similar contract opportunities in Iowa, Texas, Connecticut and South Carolina.

Helene survivors

FEMA is providing a one-time payment of \$750 to households impacted by Helene to help survivors cover immediate costs like food, water and hygiene items while they apply for more assistance. It's a new grant that the agency launched in March.

The \$750 is not a loan, an agency official said on X in response to a user that said survivors had to repay it or "the feds can seize their property."

"This is not true," wrote FEMA spokesperson Jaclyn Rothenberg. "We do not ask for this money back."

That's the case for most FEMA grants, notwithstanding agency assistance for costs later covered by insurance, which must be paid back. The Small Business Administration, a different federal agency, offers disaster loans.

The \$750 isn't the only disaster relief FEMA will provide, contrary to some claims.

Disaster-affected people can receive FEMA assistance to cover a variety of expenses up to a cap of \$42,500, including:

Immediate housing for the displaced

Home and property repair or replacement

Disaster-related medical or dental care

Funerals

Child care

The maximum of \$42,500 doesn't include assistance for rental housing in the 18 months after a disaster or expenses for people with disabilities.

FEMA has approved nearly \$70 million in housing and other assistance for over 57,000 North Carolinians thus far, according to its website. The deadline to apply is Nov. 27.

What happens when disaster relief funds run low?

North Carolina's House speaker, Tim Moore, said the federal government will bear the brunt of storm relief costs, The News & Observer previously reported. Congress passed a stopgap spending bill last month to temporarily alleviate the budget shortfall through the end of the year, which shook loose about \$20 billion in disaster relief funds.

President Joe Biden last week asked lawmakers for more disaster relief funding. Rep. Chuck Edwards, who represents North Carolina's 11th Congressional District, said it's coming.

"I'm confident that supplemental disaster relief funding, which I am already involved in the process of creating, will be considered in the House once we return to session in mid-November," Edwards said in a news release.

Scant funding forces FEMA to limit nonurgent relief efforts. When restrictions are in place, the fund is still available for critical needs and housing assistance. It also still can provide grants to cover lifesaving and life-sustaining community expenses, like debris clearing or road repairs.

FEMA last imposed nonurgent relief restrictions in August, which it lifted after Congress passed the September stopgap.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Emily Vespa, correspondent, 'Fact check: FEMA isn't diverting disaster funds for immigrants', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 15A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB56F28EB8



Two weeks - withoutrunning water - This is life in Western North Carolina after Helene

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Josh Shaffer and Martha Quillin; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1712 Words Page: 4A OpenURL Link

Around the mountain town of Banner Elk, neighbors have endured two weeks without running water - a harsh and dirty reality that has hundreds living in the 19th century, toting buckets to the river, collecting trickles from a spring, answering nature's call behind a bush.

Hurricane Helene carried off the town's water and sewer system, and since then volunteers established a relief station that rivals the local Walmart, stocking enough bottled water to fill a reservoir, drawing from a tanker truck parked behind Town Hall.

But that only covers thirst. Consider bathing.

"Wet Wipes are a great way to wash yourself," said Kimberly Tufts, a retired teacher who went a week without showering. "My husband's not a fan. He says they leave a residue."

Or flushing toilets.

"We carry buckets from a retention pond," said Tufts. "We get three flushes out of a bucket."

Or almost anything else.

"It's been hell," said Nancy Owen, the town's tourism director. "You can't brush your teeth. You can't wash your hands. I can't fill up the dog's bowl. I can't take a shower. I can't mop my floors.

"But it's fun. I don't need the basic comforts," she said sarcastically.

After two weeks, it's impossible to know how many people remain without water in North Carolina's 25 most western countries - the sprawling territory wrecked by Helene on Sept. 27.

But U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards, who represents much of North Carolina's west, reported that Asheville, Black Mountain, Woodfin, Spruce Pine, and Burnsville water systems were unable to deliver water to some or all of their customers.

When they talk about a timetable for bringing it back, officials there use phrases like "yet to be determined," and residents brace for months without water at the least.

In Banner Elk, the town warns that washed-out water and sewer lines must be replaced, disinfected and thoroughly tested. NC Sen. Ralph Hise told WRAL this week that replacing Mitchell County's water plant is a "four-year process."

"If at any time you find that you have water for even a brief moment," wrote Town Manager Rick Owen in a townwide message, "it should not be considered safe to drink."

In Asheville alone, that list represents tens of thousands of people - perhaps half of its nearly 40,000 households.

Workers there scramble to rebuild a distribution system blown apart by flooding that scoured out lines buried more than 20 feet underground, some encased in concrete engineers believed would protect them from devastating storms.

Before Helene, Asheville claimed some of the most pristine drinking water in the world. Now, city officials describe the North Fork Reservoir as looking like chocolate milk from silt churned off the bottom and now refusing to settle.

Meanwhile, across all of the Western North Carolina region, including rural areas where people rely on well water but don't have power to the pumps that would deliver it, residents persist in a world more like 1824 than 2024.

"You kind of just have to get used to being unkempt," said Paige Carter, a 17-year-old senior at T.C. Roberson High School in Buncombe County, waiting for a turn at the shower in a YMCA.

'Eight days without a shower'

In Banner Elk, the city celebrated the arrival of laundry machines set up inside of a tractor-trailer, and the hundreds still remaining in town rejoiced that the Best Western opened its showers in four rooms to all comers.

"I went eight days without a shower," said Dylan Joslin, drying his hair with a towel outside room 108. "It was pretty miserable. I've been doing a lot of chain-saw work in the mud, with the dust flying everywhere. Wet Wipes are your friend."

Even more welcome in Banner Elk are the dozens of portable toilets set up at Town Hall, at the Lowe's hardware store or in bank parking lots. Still, the convenience only reaches so far.

"Everyone is trying to pee outside as much as they can," said Nola Bloemendaal, mother of four. "But not everybody is comfortable with that. My kid stepped in people poop. Those porta-potties took a while to get here."

Outside the town of 1,000, where the elevation reaches 4,000 feet and the woods crawl with wildlife, the line between human and nature is easily blurred.

"It's like camping inside your house," said Jarrett Koski, preschool teacher. "The novelty wears off when you go to use the potty and the deer is on one side and the bear is on the other."

With four kids, Bloemendaal initially found life without electricity to be hardest.

Her oldest son, Blake, has Down syndrome and uses a breathing machine that was impossible to charge. Her second-oldest, Evan, has both autism and epilepsy, and he became very agitated about dwindling battery levels.

But when the lights flicked back on, the water problems were waiting.

At first, her family lugged buckets up from the Elk River. Then they realized they could drive to the nearby mill pond and dip them into the surface, collecting water for toilet flushing and, once boiled, dishwashing and baths.

"I actually used rainwater to wash my hair," she said.

"One time I went out in the rain and got my hair wet," said her youngest daughter Molly, 10. "I didn't have any soap."

"Just don't take a shower," said her third-oldest, Paul, 13. "Third option. Never let anybody tell you what to do."

Mother rolled her eyes.

On Wednesday, the Bloemendaals had a new 5-gallon Igloo cooler perched on the bathroom sink for brushing teeth and washing faces, and their dog McEnroe had a case of bottled water waiting next to his bowl.

Even with two weeks of practice, the daily challenge of finding distilled water for Blake's breathing machine tests

their humor and endurance.

Poop jokes only carry them so far.

"Our house has not washed away in a mudslide," Bloemendaal said. "This is OK."

Finding water for toilets, drinking

In Asheville, some hotels that still had guests sent them to scoop water from the swimming pool for flushing. People who have fishing ponds or live near creeks fetched from those.

Residents of Aston Park Tower, a 1970s-era 11-story, 119-unit public housing apartment building near downtown Asheville, don't have a swimming pool or a fishing pond.

Immediately after the storm, they had to find ways to get enough water to live.

"I called it the zombie walk," said James Kesterson, 53, who has a one-bedroom apartment on the tower's top floor. Every day he would walk from one site to another and gather water: bottles given away here, a tanker truck filling containers there.

With no electricity in his building, he had to lug the water upstairs, stopping at each landing to rest. With a case of 16-ounce bottles weighing about 30 pounds, he wasn't about to flush that water down the toilet.

The power has returned so the elevators are working in the tower, and drinking water is easier to find. According to Edwards' updates, FEMA has delivered more than 6 million liters of water to Western North Carolina, and relief agencies and volunteers have delivered millions more.

In some places, bottled water is so plentiful it's used as temporary door stops so that stuffy buildings with no cooling can be open to fresh air.

There wasn't much fresh air in Aston Tower on Wednesday.

Though drinking water is more readily available, no one wants to use it to flush toilets, so the building has a fetid air.

Garbage that had piled up in the building has been cleared out now that collection trucks are running again, but that scent lingers, too.

A 'flush brigade' in Asheville

When volunteers from BeLoved Asheville knocked on Kesterson's door Wednesday and asked, "Do you need your toilet flushed?" he welcomed them in.

Leeza Regensburger and Erica Dowd had gathered with two dozen others in the parking lot of a Gold's Gym on the south side of town earlier that morning, part of what organizer Rebekah Todd called a "flush brigade.

"Todd's scouts went out ahead of the group to check on a list of low-income independent-living facilities whose residents likely don't have gray water to use for flushing or the strength to lift a 5-gallon bucket to their tank.

BeLoved Asheville's flush brigade and others plan to do this work as long as it's needed to reduce the spread of disease, improve quality of life and give volunteers a chance to do wellness checks on residents who may not be able to get help otherwise.

Asheville, Todd said, is not handling what comes out of the bottom of the city.

"It's a nightmare."

While the volunteers worked in his bathroom, Kesterson mused on how the water-system crash wrought by Helene has served as an equalizer in his community, where there is a strong contrast between wealthy retirees and the poor of the working class.

"We're getting back to basics," he said. "If you want to look for a silver lining, I think it's brought people together and brought them perspective.

"Waiting in line for water, I've run into people with a lot of money and people who were living in a tent. They're standing next to each other. Now we're all in the same boat."

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Martha Quillin: 919-829-8989, @MarthaQuillin

It's been hell. You can't brush your teeth. You can't wash your hands. I can't fill up the dog's bowl. I can't take a shower. I can't mop my floors. But it's fun. I don't need the basic comforts.

Nancy Owen, tourism director

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Josh Shaffer and Martha Quillin, Staff Writer, 'Two weeks withoutrunning water This is life in Western North Carolina after Helene', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 4A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB5ED612D0>



Western NC businesses could use help from afar - here's how

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Melissa Oyler; Staff Writer | Section: Living | 2362 Words

Page: 1C OpenURL Link

When it comes to birthday, holiday or "just because" gifts (one of my best friends calls them "happy presents"), we often want to support local shops, restaurants and other businesses.

And after Hurricane Helene hit and devastated so many of our mountain towns who rely on tourism, especially right near the peak of leaf-changing season, supporting these businesses feels more critical than ever.

Officials have asked us not to travel to Western North Carolina for fun right now, and many of these shops were absolutely devastated, so there would be no place for us to visit even if we could get there.

So, how can we help support from afar?

Local shops and restaurants that were affected by Hurricane Helene in North Carolina and are beginning to offer ways to support them online, including making purchases and supporting fundraising efforts. One business suggested including a note stating "Ship when the time is right" with your purchases, and that's probably a great idea for all of these places.

In addition to ordering material items from retailers, another idea is to book a rental or a session with a place that you don't plan on using, so the business is able to pocket the money. This may help hospitality folks who can't work during this time.

If your favorite mountain spot isn't on this list and you think our readers would like to know about it, please send us an email to charlottefive@charlottefive.com and we'll get it added. And keep checking in with your favorite spots - many of them are still trying to get their bearings after so much devastation. And so many of them need our help.

Here are a few to get you started - and if this isn't enough, refer to this list of Western North Carolina businesses started by an Asheville local and added to by the businesses themselves:

Ashe County Cheese

Location: 106 E Main St., West Jefferson, NC 28694

Ashe County Cheese is back open after Hurricane Helene: "We are okay, but our community has been devastated," the West Jefferson cheese shop posted on Facebook. Ashe County was hit especially hard by Helene and needs all the support it can get. "Please let people know about the Ashe County Cheese factory as an alternative," a reader emailed me on Tuesday, "when it comes to shipping cheese, wine and other regional treats such as jams, jellys, apple butter and more." I think that is a wonderful idea: With the holidays coming up, cheese is always a great gift.

Black Mountain Cider & Mead

Location: 104 Eastside Drive, #307, Black Mountain, NC 28711

Black Mountain Cider & Mead's building was flooded and damaged, and the cidery lost equipment, supplies and product. "The timing couldn't be worse. October is usually our busiest month, when tourists flock to the area for leaf-peeping season," the meadery posted on Instagram. Additionally, local apple and bee suppliers were also damaged. As it tries to figure out how to stay afloat, you can donate to this business via Venmo or its Go Fund Me.

"Without running water anywhere in Black Mountain/Asheville, our hands are tied," Black Mountain Cider stated.

"Running a fermentation business depends on clean, reliable water, and we've been told it could be months before it's restored."

Burnsville Candle Company

Location: 132 W Main St., Burnsville, NC 28714

Burnsville was devastated by Hurricane Helene, with many roads and businesses completely gone. Burnsville Candle Company's physical location is closed, but you can still order candles online. "In a time when, at least for those of us in WNC, things have gotten pretty dark, we all need a little love and light in our lives," wrote owner Kem Muller on Facebook.

Cedar Mountain small businesses

Location: Greenville Hwy, Cedar Mountain, NC 28718

Cedar Mountain is personal to me (family has a house near Caesar's Head State Park), so to see the businesses suffering that I've visited over the past couple of decades has been difficult. Many of the businesses here along Little River were flooded, some with up to four feet of water. In the meantime, residents were trapped for days on the mountain, as the roads were damaged leading into both Brevard and Greenville, S.C. The restaurants and stores pulled together resources and have been feeding hundreds of people a day, even with all the damage. A GoFundMe has been set up to help these businesses recover and the funds will be split among all of Cedar Mountain's businesses.

Chimney Rock Brewing Company

Location: 461 Main St., Chimney Rock, NC 28720

Mars Hill-based Mars Theatre Brew Co.'s sister brewery, Chimney Rock Brewing Company, is gone after Hurricane Helene. There is nothing left where the brewery once stood. Owner Scott Spruill has posted a Go Fund Me, with hopes of setting up a new model that could help save the company. Mars Theatre has reopened, but "without them (Chimney Rock Brewing) it will be difficult to continue without your help," he wrote.

Chimney Rock Gemstone Mine

Location: 397 Main St., Chimney Rock, NC 28720

Chimney Rock Gemstone Mine has been a fixture in Chimney Rock for the past 21 years. The damage from Hurricane Helene was catastrophic to the gemstone mining attraction and jewelry store. Owners Matt and Michelle Banz also own RiverWatch Grill, which was also damaged by the storm (details below). Contributions to a Go Fund Me set up by the family will go toward the extensive repairs and restoration needed, as well as helping the Mine's team members.

DT's Blue Ridge Java

Location: 169 Locust St., Spruce Pine, NC 28777

DT's Blue Ridge Java was completely ruined when Hurricane Helene made its way to Spruce Pine. The coffee shop was faced with 10 feet of rushing water, and the space for community gathering was destroyed in an instant. The coffee shop owner's daughter has launched a Go Fund Me to help rebuild the space. Any additional funds will be given to the local community, others on Lower Street and in downtown Spruce Pine.

Euda Wine

Location: 164 Commerce St., Suite 10, Old Fort, NC 28762

Euda Wine's winery and inventory suffered major damage when the hurricane came through Old Fort. A home washed up to the winery from across the street. Euda asks that your donations first go to help the town, region or wider area. "And after that if you still want to support Euda then you can buy wine online or join our wine club," the winery posted on Instagram. "We have been able to salvage some bottles and are continuing to examine the rest of our inventory. We don't know exactly when it will be shipped, but if you buy it, we will ship it to you once we are able." You can also purchase a gift card.

French Broad Chocolate Factory & Cafe

Location: 821 Riverside Drive, #199, Asheville, NC 28801

You can still purchase chocolate online at French Broad Chocolate Factory & Cafe. Inventory is constantly being updated, but the Asheville chocolatier has items like hot chocolate, bars, merch and more that were housed in its warehouse. The storm caused flooding outside of the shop during the storm and it was left without water and power. It could take weeks before the team can start making chocolate again. The store also has an online fund.

[WHAT'S NEXT? After Helene, can NC businesses and tourist sites restore 'the magic of Asheville'?]

Folkwear Patterns

Location: 1185 Charlotte Hwy, Fairview, NC 28730

Folkwear Patterns has a studio in Asheville's River Arts District that managed to stay dry and with power during Hurricane Helene. The staff is all safe, but many at home are without water, power or internet. The team is unable to get back to the studio to fulfill orders, but in the meantime, you can purchase digital pdf patterns from Folkwear's online store.

Headwaters Outfitters

Location: 25 Parkway Road, Rosman, NC 28772

Headwater Outfitters kept people in the Rosman area informed leading up to the storm, including regular monitoring of the Upper French Broad's water levels. Then the shop and Forks of the River Taproom were affected by flooding and damage to the retailer's compound. The store is closed, paddling trips have been canceled and its campground is closed for the rest of the year. Team members have pivoted to helping those in the community, including with free hot meals. In the meantime, you can shop the outdoor shop's online store (send a note saying "Ship when the time is right", Headwater recommends) or purchase a gift card for a future trip.

Live Oak Gastropub

Location: 69 Locust St., Spruce Pine, NC 28777

Live Oak Gastropub was flooded in the hurricane along with much of the rest of Spruce Pine. "We are trying to save any equipment we have so we can maybe someday get back to doing what we love providing a great place for fellowship, good times and amazing great and good looking food," co owner Deanna Buchanan, who is a native of the Western North Carolina mountains, wrote on Facebook. "Still in shock at what this area and surrounding counties are experiencing." A Go Fund Me has been started to help the restaurant recover.

Old Marshall Jail Hotel + Zadie's Restaurant

Location: 33 Baileys Branch Road, Marshall, NC 28753

Downtown Marshall was devastated during Hurricane Helene, and the Old Marshall Jail Hotel and Zadie's Restaurant were both affected. Zadie's was completely destroyed, owner Josh Copus wrote in a Go Fund Me for both places. "Both businesses will be closed for the months ahead while we rebuild. It will be a long and expensive road to recovery, but we feel it is worth doing and will be possible with your help," he wrote.

Papertown Coffee

Location: 119 Main St., Canton, NC 28716

Papertown Coffee's building was unharmed during the storm, and it was closed for a few days after the storm as it did not have power. Closing was tough on the business that was already having a tough year, so it has launched a Go Fund Me to help pay staff and order supplies. In the meantime, the shop has reopened with limited hours and is inviting community members in to "charge their phones, get a change of scenery or to just connect with another human for a while."

Pisgah Coffee Roasters

Location: 6283 Asheville Hwy, Pisgah Forest, NC 28768

Pisgah Coffee Roasters was undamaged from Hurricane Helene, but it closed as it was unable to process transactions. It did have limited cell service in the parking lot, so it has invited community members to use it for any calls and texts they need to make. There may be some shipping delays, but you can purchase its coffee online.

The Purple Onion

Location: 16 E Main St., Saluda, NC 28773

The Purple Onion in Saluda is "closed until further notice" after Hurricane Helene. "Here in Saluda, we have many places that were hit hard by unforgiving water and we are still reeling from the disaster going on around us," the restaurant posted on Instagram. "In downtown, mudslides, flooding, and trees taking out our infrastructures have effected many of our businesses and by extension their employees and our community." The Saluda Downtown Foundation has launched a Saluda Disaster Recovery Grant for downtown Saluda businesses. Your donation will help the recovery of The Purple Onion and other places.

The Orange Peel + Rabbit Rabbit

Location: The Orange Peel: 101 Biltmore Ave., Asheville, NC 28801

Location: Rabbit Rabbit: 75 Coxe Ave., Asheville, NC 28801

Asheville's live music scene took a hit during the storm, and The Orange Peel and Rabbit Rabbit have needed to cancel shows as they will be closed for awhile. The Orange Peel, in the meantime, has set up portable toilets and rinse stations, including an ADA unit, for the community in its parking lot. The Orange Peel manager Lauren Davis is hosting a Go Fund Me for the two venues to help take care of the 100-person staff that is unable to work for the foreseeable future. Many of the team members have suffered personal losses. "These are the people who make the magic of live music and unforgettable nights possible, and now they need your help," Davis wrote.

RiverWatch Grill + Riverwatch Coffeehouse and Gift Shop

Location: 379 Main St., Chimney Rock, NC 28720 and 375 Main St., Chimney Rock, NC 28720

RiverWatch Grill has been a staple in downtown Chimney Rock since 1998. After Helene, the building is still standing as well as the next door coffee and gift shop, unlike so many others in the town, but it needs a lot of work.

"Hurricane Helene caused the Rocky Broad River to rise with a force we never imagined possible. Many buildings were swept away, and the flood waters surged through Main Street, leaving devastation in their wake. Though our beloved RiverWatch is still standing, it is deeply wounded and in desperate need of help to recover," wrote Shelly Banz of RiverWatch on its Go Fund Me. Donations will go to building repairs, equipment replacement and support of the RiverWatch family.

Star Diner

Location: 115 N Main St., Marshall, NC 28753

Star Diner in Marshall was completely submerged in floodwaters during Hurricane Helene, and its damage is extensive. Owner Kate Sonoskus doesn't know what's next for the restaurant. "In the meantime, I'm worried about our staff and how they're going to make their next rent & mortgage & car payments & buy groceries," she wrote in her Go Fund Me for the diner. "I cannot call this a 'rebuild' fund - I just don't know what's next," she wrote.

Switzerland Cafe and General Store

Location: 9440 NC-226A, Marion, NC 28752

Switzerland Cafe and General Store has been feeding its neighbors with any of its remaining inventory that was after the hurricane. Any donations made to the restaurant's owner's personal venmo (@Lora-Lanier-1) will go toward rebuilding the business and town.

Willow Hill Soap Company

Location: 429 N Main St., Hendersonville, NC 28792

Location: 80 Park St., Canton, NC 28716

Both of Willow Hill Soap Company locations (in Hendersonville and Canton) are closed after Hurricane Helene. "We will be able to check on orders whenever our internet is restored," the store wrote on Instagram. In the meantime, you can make online purchases of candles, soaps, bath bombs, beard care and more. Its products are made without harmful ingredients, so you can feel good about gifting them!

Melissa Oyler: @melissaoyler
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• Citation (aglc Style)

Melissa Oyler, Staff Writer, 'Western NC businesses could use help from afar - here's how', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 1C https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB639D0120



Repair crews will play Whac-A-Mole as first water flows from Asheville reservoir

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Martha Quillin; Staff Writer | Section: News | 615 Words

Page: 11A OpenURL Link

The City of Asheville will start pressurizing parts of its water system served by the North Fork Reservoir this weekend, the next step in trying to rebuild the network of distribution lines ripped apart by flooding from the remnants of Hurricane Helene.

The process likely will reveal new breaks and leaks in the towns of Swannanoa and Black Mountain, which sustained some of the worst damage from flooding in the Swannanoa River.

It won't immediately provide those areas with drinkable water.

Clay Chandler, spokesman for Asheville's water resources department, said Friday that repair crews are on standby and will be "playing Whac-A-Mole" with the leaks, some of which are likely to shoot water straight into the air, he said. Chandler and Ben Woody, Asheville's assistant city manager, explained the plan Friday during Buncombe County's regular Helene recovery briefing, live-streamed through the county's Facebook page.

This week, crews finished repairs to a 36-inch bypass line that will allow water to start flowing from the reservoir located north of Black Mountain. The North Fork Reservoir is the largest of the city's three impoundments and serves some 70% of its customers, including those in Black Mountain and Swannanoa.

But the water that will start flowing into the system this weekend won't be of the pristine quality to which Asheville customers are accustomed.

Why the North Fork Reservoir is so murky

Gov. Roy Cooper visited the North Fork Reservoir Thursday with state and local officials and heard that normally, water in the lake is so clear it's possible to see fish swimming 10 feet down.

However, Helene "flipped" the reservoir, bringing silt up from the bottom and stirring it into the water like it was run through a blender.

The particulates became electrically charged and have continued to bounce off each other, keeping the water murky and gritty and limiting visibility to just a few inches. Cooler temperatures this week have slowed the process even more, the city says.

The water can't be processed by the nearby treatment plant because the particulates are so large they would quickly jam up the plant's filtration.

Getting Asheville's water supply running again

Friday, Woody described for the public the process that will be used to try to accelerate the process of settling the particulates back to the bottom of the reservoir. Crews will curtain off sections of the reservoir with underwater semi-circular partitions and treat each section with aluminum sulfate, a coagulant that's expected to clump the clay particles together and cause them to fall to the bottom.

Officials won't make a guess about how long that process might take.

Meanwhile, though, the city will start drawing water directly from the reservoir - suspended silt and all - into the repaired 36-inch line and push it into the smaller feeder lines. That will allow them to find the breaks and leaks they haven't already located, all of which must be repaired before additional communities can be added back on.

Over the coming days or weeks, crews will continue to pressurize lines, find and fix leaks, and keep moving west until the system is repaired.

What to do if you see water flowing through your pipes

Woody said that customers in Black Mountain and Swannanoa might notice water flowing through their pipes this weekend, and told them it will contain lots of sediment. They should shut off intake lines to appliances, including water heaters, to prevent damage from silt buildup, he said. Power should be shut off to water heaters as well, he said, until the system is restored.

In Swannanoa, water that flows into the system through this process can be used if boiled, Woody said. But in Black Mountain, because of additional issues there, the water should not be used for drinking even if boiled.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Martha Quillin, Staff Writer, 'Repair crews will play Whac-A-Mole as first water flows from Asheville reservoir', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 11A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDBB3EF74B8>



JD Vance addresses Helene aid, immigration at NC town hall

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi and Caitlyn Yaede, correspondent; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1373 Words

Page: 12A OpenURL Link

Greensboro Republican vice presidential candidate JD Vance has been no stranger to North Carolina in the past few months.

And on Thursday, just 25 days from the election, Vance sat on an armchair across from moderator Danica Patrick - a former professional race car driver and Trump supporter - and took questions from the public during a town hall at the Koury Convention Center in Greensboro.

In a wide-ranging discussion, he addressed Hurricane Helene recovery, immigration and Social Security.

North Carolina is a battleground state and will play a pivotal role in determining who wins the presidential election this November. About 500 to 600 people were gathered at the convention center.

One person asked Vance whether he and former President Donald Trump promised "not to forget Western North Carolina" and, when a "legitimate conversation" could be had about "overhauling the process of disaster relief in the United States," to cut bureaucratic red tape.

"We're never going to let the people of that region of our country - the region really built our country," Vance replied. "We're never going to let them be left behind and forgotten."

Vance is a U.S. senator from Ohio but before that, he was known for "Hillbilly Elegy," a memoir where he writes about growing up in Appalachian Ohio.

"I think once we get past" the recovery phase, "then it's time to focus on the disastrous federal response to this incredible crisis," Vance said.

Trump has spread conspiracy theories on social media, including one that falsely claimed the Biden administration has used disaster relief funds for people in the country without legal authorization. And in Trump's first trip to North Carolina since it was hit by Helene, he said the federal government's response to the devastating storm had been "terrible."

Over the past week, Trump and President Joe Biden's teams have criticized each other's past and current disaster relief efforts. The news release announcing Vance's town hall said Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee for president, "completely left North Carolinians behind in the wake of devastation post-Hurricane Helene."

Federal, state and local responders have been working in Western North Carolina. And on Wednesday, state lawmakers passed a bill providing \$273 million for relief efforts. Legislative leaders have described this as a "first step."

Robert McKenzie, who had traveled from Cumberland County to see Vance for the first time, said before the town hall that "all the things that Trump and Vance stand for are important to us."

"Recovering from this last disaster - that is the most important thing for North Carolina," he said.

As for relief efforts, he said: "The actual civilians in North Carolina are doing more than the government."

Questions on immigration

Vance took a question asking for his and Trump's plan to manage illegal immigration. Vance said they planned to deport people in the country without authorization who had committed crimes.

"The plan, to put it simply, is we gotta send them home. We gotta send them home ASAP," he said.

Prior to Vance speaking, Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Whatley and U.S. Sen. Ted Budd of North Carolina gave brief remarks.

Vance also honed in on the fiscal impact of immigrants living in the United States without legal authorization and blamed undocumented individuals for the high cost of housing.

"The young generation in this country, they're growing up in a nation where they're going to become paupers in the country that their parents and their grandparents built," Vance said. "The American dream of home-ownership: not being deep in credit card debt, I want you to own a piece of the future and not just be a permanent debtor to people and institutions that don't care about you."

Home prices shot up during the pandemic and have remained high. Economists who spoke with Forbes said mortgage rates - which have been dropping recently - need to remain low and inventory needs to grow for prices to drop.

A woman asked Vance to clarify Trump and Vance's plan for Social Security.

Trump "is going to protect Social Security and he is going to cut taxes on Social Security income," Vance said. He then once more shifted to immigration, saying that "illegal aliens" would "bankrupt" the program.

Social Security benefits are for citizens with only some noncitizens, such as green card holders and refugees, allowed to access these benefits.

Vance criticized Harris's response in a recent interview on ABC's "The View," where she said "not a thing" came to mind after being asked whether she would have done anything differently than Biden over the past four years.

Vance's last visit came soon after Mark Robinson scandal

Vance is set to return to North Carolina Sunday with an appearance at the NASCAR race at the Charlotte Motor Speedway, the Charlotte Business Journal reported.

Before Thursday, he last visited North Carolina at a stop in Charlotte in late September. That visit came after CNN reported that North Carolina's GOP gubernatorial candidate, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, allegedly made a series of sexually graphic, racist, homophobic and antisemitic posts on a pornographic message board about a decade ago.

In Charlotte, Vance was asked about the Trump campaign's past support of Robinson. Vance said what Robinson "said or didn't say is ultimately between him and the people of North Carolina," The Charlotte Observer reported. Trump has previously endorsed Robinson.

Greensboro is Robinson's hometown. Vance did not mention Robinson on Thursday.

Voter concerns

Multiple people waiting to enter the Town Hall told The News & Observer they have Hurricane Helene at the top of their minds.

Penny Godfrey from Davidson County said Hurricane Helene had damaged two of her cars and her driveway, and a

tree had fallen.

"That \$750 will sure help pay for that," she said, referring to the \$750 that the Federal Emergency Management Agency makes available, and that does not need to be repaid, for disaster survivors to cover immediate costs like food and water. FEMA also provides up to \$42,500 for other needs.

Lisa Rancer, from Guilford County, said it's "very important for money to be available for people in Western North Carolina to receive aid instead of giving that aid to illegal immigrants."

"Having that FEMA money available for our own people," she said.

Others were concerned about the economy. Brendan Sheet, who relocated from Fort Worth, Texas, to Winston-Salem, said it was his first campaign event.

"I would like to see prices level out to where we can afford to live and not be slaves to money. It's like we work harder and have combined incomes, but are poorer than we've ever been," he said.

Unemployment remains low in the United States. But the purchasing power of a dollar has dropped by 23% between September 2019 and September 2024.

Rachel Withers said she was "broke." Withers was with her two daughters, who are homeschooled by Godfrey. She said this event was part of her daughter's civic education.

"My paycheck is worth 40% less than it used to be. I make one-third more than I did in 2020. I had savings in 2020," said Withers, who is from Mooresville.

"In 2024, I have \$40,000 in credit card debt," she said, citing data that shows that American credit card debt is the highest it's ever been.

Democrats speak on Trump's record responding to disasters

Ahead of Vance's visit, Democrats held a virtual press conference to "call out Trump's record of denying disaster aid to North Carolina and playing politics with disaster relief," and Trump, Vance and Robinson's "extreme Project 2025 agenda to gut future disaster relief and preparation," according to a news release sent out by Democrats.

Project 2025 is a political initiative created by conservative think tank the Heritage Foundation. Democrats have said Trump and the GOP are behind the plan, and many of Trump's former staff reportedly helped create it, but Trump has denied involvement.

"As President, Donald Trump cut \$155 million from FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund, and denied North Carolina over \$900 million in requested disaster aid after Hurricane Matthew struck our state," said U.S. Rep. Kathy Manning, according to the news release.

The \$155 million number appears to be referring to the Trump administration's intention to transfer \$155 million from FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund to pay for transportation for adult migrants between detention centers and courtrooms.

As for the denied funds, the Trump administration initially denied most of a request for federal funds to respond to Hurricane Matthew in 2017, but later approved more aid.

Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi: @LucianaPerezUb

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Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi and Caitlyn Yaede, correspondent, Staff Writer, 'JD Vance addresses Helene aid, immigration at NC town hall', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 12A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDBC791D9D8>



UNDER THE DOME - NC governor's race: When and how Robinson's campaign staff quit

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1110 Words

Page: 13A OpenURL Link

RALEIGH Welcome to the governor's race edition of our Under the Dome politics newsletter. I'm Dawn Vaughan, The News & Observer's Capitol bureau chief.

There was an exodus of campaign and official staff for the Republican candidate for governor, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, in the wake of the bombshell CNN report in September, which he denies.

The News & Observer has learned more about how his staff left, and asked Robinson about it as well.

Robinson staff guit after he rejected offers to clear allegations

A source familiar with the campaign and LG office departures told The N&O that the campaign staff quit during a meeting with Robinson about the status of the campaign, on the Sunday after the CNN report.

Robinson had turned down multiple offers from staffers over multiple days, before the meeting, to use technology to help clear himof the allegations in the CNN report, the source says. A few days after the campaign staff quit, so did half of his official staff.

WRAL-TV first reported Robinson turned down offers for IT help to respond to CNN's allegations that he made hateful, racist and sexually explicit comments on a pornographic website, including referring to himself as a "Black NAZI" and supporting the return of slavery.

Robinson spokesperson Mike Lonergan denied that to WRAL. "That is entirely false. Lt. Gov. Robinson is in the process of retaining aggressive legal counsel to investigate who did this and how; we will leave no stone unturned, and will use every legal means to hold CNN and whomever else is involved accountable," Lonergan said.

While Robinson hired a law firm and said he was going to sue CNN soon, the campaign has not yet announced a lawsuit.

Robinson has spent the past few weeks back out on the campaign trail and helping the Franklin County Sheriff's Office with Hurricane Helene relief efforts in Western North Carolina.

In a speech to voters at a campaign event in a Dollar General parking lot in Hillsborough on Oct. 4, Robinson criticized his opponent in the governor's race, Democratic Attorney General Josh Stein, for various things. Taking questions from reporters at the campaign event, Robinson didn't want to talk about the recent departures.

Nearly all of his campaign staff quit within days of the CNN story, and a few days after that, half of the lieutenant governor's office staff also quit, including top officials.

At the campaign event, I asked Robinson how the departures came about, and if he asked his office staff to stay.

"No, I didn't ask them to stay. They chose to leave. The term is coming to an end. They chose to move on, and we moved on as well," Robinson said, then criticized being asked about it the week after the storm, going on to say that the Franklin County sheriff deserves more recognition.

"You like to highlight what was supposedly said 15 years ago on some website or something, that I didn't say, but

let's highlight the fact that there's been a very poor response to [Helene], and people are suffering because of it," Robinson told reporters.

The N&O and our colleagues at the Charlotte Observer have reported extensively on all aspects of storm relief and recovery. You can read our dozens of stories at newsobserver.com/topics/helene-nc and in print.

Berger didn't want to talk about Robinson; Moore focused on own race

Robinson presided over the Senate session on Wednesday, when senators unanimously passed a Helene relief bill that Cooper then signed into law on Thursday.

It was the first legislative session since the CNN fallout for Robinson. Reporters talking to Senate leader Phil Berger on the floor after session asked him about the scandal, and if Berger would keep his endorsement of Robinson.

Berger told reporters he'd answer the question "at some other point" and wanted to talk about the Helene relief bill that day.

I also asked House Speaker Tim Moore during his post-session talk with reporters if he still endorsed Robinson after the CNN report and the staff departures.

Here's what Moore said:

"I'm not going to change my endorsement," Moore said. "I've had a conversation with him. He tells me that those allegations aren't true. And so I've not drilled down, or cross-examined or anything like that, but my focus is on, really is on, of course, I'm running for Congress. I have my own race. I'm trying to help Laurie Buckhout, who's running (for Congress) in northeastern North Carolina, which is the really one competitive seat in North Carolina. And still as the speaker of the House, I'm focused on ensuring that the members running in here are in good shape, and that we maintain our supermajority."

I asked about Republican U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis saying that Robinson should show evidence to disprove it or sue over it.

"I don't know what else to say about it," Moore said. "I've just, I've talked to him, he's made his statements. I know he hired counsel to try to work through it, and I suspect that that process will take care of itself. And I think that, you know, the lieutenant governor has answered questions, has made his statements, and I'll leave it to him to make those statements and to run his race, and I've really got to focus on my race and the races of the state House."

That same afternoon, one of Robinson's social media posts criticized Republicans, but didn't specify who he was referencing.

"If Republicans opposed radical leftists as much as they opposed each other, imagine how much more successful we would be. Cut the intra-party crap and vote for Republicans up and down the ballot. This isn't about personality, it's about policy," Robinson wrote.

The General Assembly has another session scheduled before the election. They will reconvene on Oct. 24 to pass more Helene relief.

Stay informed about #ncpol

Don't forget to follow our Under the Dome tweets and listen to our Under the Dome podcastto stay up to date. Our new episode posts Monday morning, and I'm joined by my legislative team colleagues Kyle Ingram and Avi Bajpai to talk more about the Helene relief bill and what's coming next.

We also have an Under the Dome: Live! event coming up, recording the podcast in front of an audience. I'll be interviewing N.C. Central University political science professor Jarvis Hall as part of an election preview. It starts at 11:30 a.m. on Monday, Oct. 21 in the School of Education Auditorium on the NCCU campus in Durham. Register online for the event.

You can sign up to receive the Under the Dome newsletter at newsobserver.com/newsletters. Want your friends to get our email, too? Forward them this newsletter so they can sign up. You can also email me questions you may have about the governor's race at dvaughan@newsobserver.com.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan, Staff Writer, 'UNDER THE DOME NC governor's race: When and how Robinson's campaign staff quit', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 13A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB40176830>



Editorial/Opinion

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Section: Editorial/Opinion | 686 Words

Page: 20A OpenURL Link

Richard Stradling's report on failure-prone Interstate 40 west of Asheville reminds us that the highway's steep and narrow route along the Pigeon River has been the scene of recurring rock slides and scouring by floodwaters since its construction in the wrong place more than half a century ago. It will take many months to rebuild yet again.

The crucial east-west transportation artery should never have been built along the wild, jagged, remote Pigeon. Instead, I-40 should curve gently along the French Broad River valley. Yes, that river also flooded in Hurricane Helene. But its valley is wider, its elevation lower, and its slope more gradual, making the route into Tennessee far more accessible and repairs easier. It's time to re-route vital I-40 more sensibly along the French Broad.

Matthew Eisley, Raleigh

Rainy day fund

North Carolina has a rainy day fund of about \$4.75 billion. Well, that rainy day is here. No doubt much of the infrastructure repair and other costs will be covered by FEMA and other federal funds. Many current emergency needs are being addressed by charitable groups. But the state is well funded for both state infrastructure repairs and for helping individuals. It will be critically important to ensure those funds are expended as needed, but expended wisely.

Robert D. Brown, Cary

Building codes

I totally agree with Ned Barnett's "In Western NC, a lack of flood insurance deepens the damage." Our state legislators are more concerned about their developer friends when they do things like override Gov. Roy Cooper's veto of Senate Bill 166, which reshaped the state Building Code Council. Keep that in mind when you vote this November.

Daniel Oldman, Chapel Hill

Please vote

I believe most of us wish to live in a caring, compassionate world. In this election we have an opportunity to help make that wish come true.

Hurricane Helene is a powerful reminder of how Americans support each other and the importance of having a government comprised of experienced people dedicated to serving all of us with decency, skill and fairness. I urge everyone to become objectively informed and to vote wisely. Be wary of politicians whose ads disparage and demean an opponent. Pay attention to what candidates' records say about them, what they claim they will do and how.

Please vote - not only for what's best for you, but also for what you believe is best for our country. Listen to your heart. Let your better angels guide you as you vote.

Michael Glaser, Hillsborough

Trump projecting

Thank you for "Shame on Donald Trump for worsening NC's Helene tragedy with political lies."

The irony is that Trump's projecting, as usual. He's claiming that his opponents are doing what in fact they're not doing, but he is. When he accuses Gov. Roy Cooper and President Joe Biden of "going out of their way to not help people in Republican areas," what he really means is in 2018 Trump refused to release federal funds to fight wildfires in California, which he lost in the 2016 election, until someone showed him that his supporters were in danger. What he means is in 2020 he refused to respond to calls for help from Democratic governors because they criticized his handling of the COVID crisis. Just a few weeks ago, he threatened to withhold firefighting assistance from California again.

These are our tax dollars, not Trump's personal funds to punish or reward other politicians he likes or doesn't like. The very best use of that money is when we can help our neighbors in need.

Linda Falcao, Raleigh

Young voters

The writer is the NC Director of NextGen America

This year, Millennials and Gen Z together will form the largest and most diverse voting bloc in history, representing nearly one-fifth of the electorate. With over 40 million Gen Z voters, including 8 million newly eligible since 2022, our collective power is immense. In North Carolina, people aged 18-35 make up nearly a quarter of the electorate. Our generations face significant challenges - threats to reproductive rights, an urgent climate crisis and an economic system that often feels stacked against us. Young people must make their voices heard this November. We hold the power to create lasting change.

Brennan Steele, Charlotte

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• Citation (aglc Style)

'Editorial/Opinion', *News & Observer, The* (online), 13 Oct 2024 20A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C31CDB754D5708>



Helene gave them a chance to meet Kamala Harris. They didn't expect a follow-up call.

October 13, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Tammy Grubb, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 680 Words OpenURL Link

Politics wasn't on the radar when Justin Thompson and his wife loaded their 8-month-old son into the family car to leave Asheville on Sept. 28 for a safer place to stay after Helene.

A random connection landed them a meeting with Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee for president, when she visited Charlotte on Oct. 5, he said. But it was the call from the vice president on his cell phone Friday that really took him by surprise.

It was a quick call, said Thompson, 33. She was just checking in to make sure they were OK.

"We were out, and it took me off guard," Thompson said, recalling the conversation. "Hey, it's Kamala. How are you?"

He supported Harris for president before the storm, Thompson said, but his experience over the last week has "further reinforced" his decision that she's the right person for the job.

RAL_092722-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-41.JPGThe French Broad River breaks its banks in Asheville on Friday, Sept. 27, 2024 as the remnants of Hurricane Helene caused flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Finding a road to safety in Charlotte

Thompson and his wife, Rebecca, headed to the basement with their son Carter when Helene hit the north side of Asheville around 7 a.m. Sept. 27, he said. It was "pretty scary," he recalled.

The next day, they found over a dozen trees in the yard, including one that hit a neighbor's house and another wrapped in power lines at the neighborhood's entrance, he said. They were fortunate not to have flooding, but they ran out of supplies, he said.

Without a way to buy food and no water, they decided to leave for Charlotte, where he and his wife have family, Thompson said.

"That took a while. Our neighbors talked about it for a little bit (and contacted Duke Power), and then they went in and took the power line out and chopped (the tree) up," he said. "It was fortunate for us, because that was the only way we had to get out."

Because they didn't have cell service, they didn't realize how bad the damage was in other parts of the city until they crossed the French Broad river and saw the flooding, he said.

"It was devastating, very sad, to see the city that you love and contribute to - I feel like we've spent so much time there, grown up there - and to see it in that condition is very sad," he said.

After trying multiple ways to get out of town and finding roads blocked, they managed to get through on Interstate 26 to Gastonia and then Charlotte, he said.

They were "very fortunate" compared to "the folks who were not able to leave and have been struggling and going through a lot," Thompson said. "Focusing on the broader community outside of Asheville - all the small towns in

Western North Carolina - everyone was impacted, so I really want to make sure that relief and attention is on the wider focus and not just Asheville."

HarrisHelene_595.jpgVice President Kamala Harris meets with officials in North Carolina to receive on-the-ground briefing about the continued recovery efforts that are occurring in communities across the state after Hurricane Helene in Charlotte, NC on Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024.

Meeting the vice president

A few days later, a close friend who works in North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper's office and had also evacuated to Charlotte asked them if they wanted to share their story with the vice president during her Oct. 5 visit, he said.

"It was an incredible experience," Thompson said. "It was very intimate. It was just us and one other family."

Harris and Cooper shared updates on the response by FEMA and state resources to the storm in Asheville and the wider Western North Carolina community, Thompson said, and he got to emphasize to Harris how important federal support was going to be for the small businesses that make up the backbone of Western North Carolina's economy.

"That's going to make or break the recovery at this point, in my opinion at least," said Thompson, who works for community development financial institutions that support small business investment.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Tammy Grubb, News & Observer, 'Helene gave them a chance to meet Kamala Harris. They didn't expect a follow-up call.', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 13 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027D630A17C0>