

In Helene's wake, leadership is crucial

October 1, 2024 | Daily Herald (Roanoke Rapids, NC) Author: John Hood| Section: Local| 671 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — I got it wrong. Deeply wrong. Embarrassingly wrong.

It was a few days after Hurricane Floyd struck the coast on Sept. 16, 1999. I'd been covering North Carolina politics for more than a dozen years by then, penning my syndicated column and appearing regularly on radio and television. Our discussion program "N.C. Spin" had debuted the previous fall on the Triangle's Fox affiliate and was in the process of expanding to some two dozen TV and radio stations across the state.

During a segment of the show devoted to the destruction wrought by Floyd, I said something to the effect that North Carolina's emergency personnel, government agencies, utilities, private contractors, and relief organizations knew what to do and how to do it. They didn't need politicians holding press conferences and yapping incessantly about matters beyond their ken.

I thought I was praising the skill and determination of those at the forefront of the response to Hurricane Floyd, which devastated much of eastern North Carolina and killed an estimated 85 people, including 51 North Carolinians. I thought I was championing policy expertise over political exploitation.

What I was really doing was exhibiting my ignorance.

One "N.C. Spin" viewer was particularly incensed: then-Gov. Jim Hunt. One of the targets of my criticism, he let it be known through a mutual acquaintance that he considered my argument poorly reasoned. I don't remember the specifics of what got passed on to me, but it was something to the effect that in times of crisis, political leadership is crucial.

Emergency responders aren't necessarily sure what to do when. Agencies butt heads. Harried public and private actors misinterpret, miscommunicate, and inadvertently misinform. Sometimes they move too slowly, making people wait too long for rescue and relief. At other times they react recklessly, misspending scarce resources on lower priorities rather than waiting to make wiser decisions with a firmer grasp of the facts on the ground.

It is the task of leaders, elected and appointed, to make such judgment calls, to focus minds and referee disputes, to comfort the suffering, and to offer hope and reassurance to a panicky public.

Now, as North Carolinians grapple with the tragic aftermath of another monstrous storm, Gov. Roy Cooper and other political and civic leaders must rise to the challenge Hunt helped me grasp a quarter of a century ago.

Helene has ravaged western North Carolina. Her path of destruction is broad, deep, and jaw-dropping. Homes, businesses, entire towns crushed or swept away. At this writing, hundreds of thousands of people remain without power, some trapped in place by gaping holes or raging rivers. The death count, already heart-rending, will grow as more of the missing are found.

North Carolina will recover. We will rebuild. We've done it before. But there's nothing automatic about the process. And we all have parts to play in it, whatever our roles, wherever we live.

If you have family or friends in the affected areas, keep trying to reach them. Once you do, offer help and comfort. If you'd like to contribute money, supplies, or volunteer time to relief and recovery efforts, there are many organizations well-situated to deploy your gifts effectively, including Samaritan's Purse, Baptists on Mission, Catholic Charities USA, and Operation Airdrop.

At the state level, lawmakers have prudently accumulated \$4.75 billion in our rainy-day fund plus billions more in unreserved credit balance. That rainy day is here. Localities will spend additional dollars from their own reserves, as will utility companies, cooperatives, and municipal agencies.

There are many tough decisions to be made, some now, some weeks or months from now as the full extent of the needs and priorities come more clearly into view. That's something else I learned from past disasters. Some funds originally earmarked for reconstruction after Hurricane Matthew in 2016 have still not been expended.

Through it all, North Carolinians will look to our leaders for guidance and reassurance. Pray for them, and for us all.

John Hood is a John Locke Foundation board member. His latest books, Mountain Folk and Forest Folk, combine epic fantasy with early American history (FolkloreCycle.com).

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Helene's cost could be 600 lives, \$160B in damages

October 1, 2024 | Daily Record, The (Dunn, NC) Author: ALAN WOOTEN The Center Square | Section: News | 679 Words OpenURL Link

(The Center Square) — Six hundred people are unaccounted for, and one of North Carolina's hardest-hit counties by the remnants of Hurricane Helene on Monday said at least 35 have died.

Six states total at least 121 fatalities, many places in the Blue Ridge Mountains have yet to be checked because of failed infrastructure, and critical aid is being rushed to survivors of historic flooding. Buncombe County, where Asheville is county seat, had withheld a fatality number pending notification of kin, a protocol made more troublesome by lack of power, internet and cellphones in many big pockets throughout the region.

Twenty-five years to the month after people in the mountains of the state and elsewhere sent resources to eastern North Carolina for the 500-year flood caused by Hurricane Floyd, convoys of bottled water, cleaning supplies and necessities were heading west. AccuWeather recorded more than 30 inches of rain in two locations and estimated damage between \$145 billion to \$160 billion, up from weekend estimates by others of \$95 billion to \$110 billion.

South Carolina and Georgia each lost 25 lives, and Florida 11, according to published reports.

Asheville has been like many other locales along North Carolina's stretch of the Appalachian Mountains — only reachable by air. At 4 p.m. Eastern on Monday, DriveNC.org reported 432 total road closures due to Helene — nine interstates, 25 federal highways, 42 state highways, and 356 secondary roads.

More than 150 have been cleared since the storm began, U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards, R-N.C., said in a release. He also shared that his district — the southern-most part of the mountain range bordering Tennessee, Georgia and South Carolina — should have most of its service from Duke Energy operable by Friday.

More than 600 National Guardsmen have been deployed to western North Carolina, their mission bolstered by highwater vehicles, palletized load systems and forestry support teams for debris clearance. They were expected Monday.

AccuWeather said rainfall totals were 32.51 inches in Jeter Mountain, 31.36 inches in Busick, and 26.65 inches in Hughes. From Asheville, Jeter Mountain is about 40 miles due south not far from South Carolina, Busick is about 40 miles northeast just off the Pisgah National Forest, Hughes about 70 miles northeast near Sugar Mountain.

Gov. Roy Cooper said he expects, as crews reach more areas that are yet to be accessed, the fatalities total will rise. White House Homeland Security Adviser Liz Sherwood-Randall said Monday, "It looks like there could be as many as 600 lost lives. We know there are 600 who are either lost or unaccounted for."

President Joe Biden, before departing Dover Air Force Base aboard Air Force One, on Monday said, "It really is amazing. You saw the photographs. It's stunning."

The 81-year-old, besieged from the public by health questions halting his attempt for reelection on July 21, said he would visit the North Carolina areas when safe and not an intrusion on recovery and relief efforts.

Vice President Kamala Harris, No. 2 in charge of his incumbent administration, changed her campaign plans so she could visit the Southeast this week, newswire Reuters said.

The images Biden referred to have blitzed the internet many in the region can't access. Some structures floated off foundations and went down roads in whole; others were torn apart by the downhill rapids, splintered and spread as

if dropped by a tornado. In published reports, residents were aghast at the magnitude and offered "never seen anything like it" over and over.

They would have had to remember July 1916, when six straight days of rain started July 5. It was associated with a hurricane coming out of the Gulf of Mexico that weaved from the Mississippi-Alabama line to eastern Tennessee, and a second one that made landfall in Charleston, South Carolina, on July 14.

Asheville, at 94,589 easily the largest city in the state west of Winston-Salem near the Virginia border and Charlotte toward South Carolina, has a city water system damaged and has been cordoned by a mudslide blocking Interstate 40. Going west, I-40 is closed because two eastbound lanes fell into the Pigeon River along a mountainside about 4 miles from Tennessee.

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Cumberland County: Community resources for Hurricane Helene relief

October 1, 2024 | Daily Record, The (Dunn, NC) Author: For the Record | Section: News | 285 Words OpenURL Link

FAYETTEVILLE — In response to the impact of Hurricane Helene, Cumberland County Emergency Services has provided information to help support Western North Carolina neighbors in their time of need. A dedicated resource page is now available at www.cumberlandcountync.gov/stormupdates.

This page will provide updated information about ways residents can contribute to relief efforts including financial donations, volunteer opportunities and donation drop-off locations.

According to a release from Cumberland County, "Currently, monetary donations are needed most to assist with recovery efforts. We encourage residents to contribute to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund to aid communities in their recovery from the storm.

"As our community comes together to support those affected by the storm, we ask residents to please refrain from sending physical donations or volunteers to Western North Carolina at this time. Instead, we encourage individuals to connect with accredited organizations that are coordinating relief efforts. These organizations are equipped to ensure assistance reaches those in need efficiently and effectively.

"Those interested in donating or volunteering can visit www.cumberlandcountync.gov/stormupdates, which will be regularly updated with accredited organization information.

"Please note that, until further notice, roads in Western North Carolina (generally anywhere west of Hickory, NC) are closed to all traffic, except for emergency services and pre-approved shipments coordinated through the Business Emergency Operations Center (BEOC).

"All accredited organizations and businesses must coordinate with the BEOC before deploying resources or logistics. Without prior approval, there is a significant chance teams may be turned away at various checkpoints.

"To request supply logistics or movement, please email BEOC@ncdps.gov with the subject line: Logistics Support. Include the following information in your email:

Description of what you are movingReason for needing special accessPlanned date and origin of movementDestinationAnticipated arrival time at the 'border to Western NC' and location."

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BBB shares tips for donating to Western NC after Hurricane Helene

October 1, 2024 | Daily Record, The (Dunn, NC) Author: For the Record | Section: News | 573 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — After a disaster or public tragedy, such as Hurricane Helene, people want to help in any way possible, often contributing to fundraisers to help the survivors and the victims' families. Sadly, scammers often take advantage of these moments of vulnerability to deceive donors. In addition, there are often campaigns set up by well-meaning individuals who may not be able to deliver on promised relief activities. Better Business Bureau Serving Eastern Carolinas (BBB) urges donors to be cautious about appeals that do not specifically identify the intended use of funds.

To donate to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund, visit nc.gov/donate. Eligible nonprofits can seek grants and reimbursement of up to \$10,000 from the NC Disaster Relief Fund for efforts to meet immediate storm recovery needs via the United Way of North Carolina.

There are many road closures going in and out of Western NC. You can visit drivenc.gov to check road conditions in the area.

Those affected by the storm can apply for federal assistance through FEMA's website.

BBB advises you to utilize the BBB Wise Giving Alliance, which offers the following giving tips and a list of BBB Accredited Charities soliciting for relief efforts.

What to Look For:

Can the charity get to the impacted area? Not all relief organizations will be positioned to provide relief quickly. Check to see if they are already in the area or will be soon.

Be alert to possible social media scams. Scammers recognize the emotional motivation to help in response to emergency situations. Be wary of responding to appeals without taking the opportunity to verify the trustworthiness of the social media source or the specified charity.

Consider donating money rather than clothing or food. Local drives to collect clothing and food to send overseas may not be practical as the logistics and timing to deliver and disperse such items will be challenging. Relief organizations are better equipped to obtain what is needed, distribute it effectively and avoid duplication of effort.

Is the charity experienced in providing emergency relief? Experienced disaster relief charities are the best bet to help deliver aid as soon as possible. New entrants may have difficulty in following through even if they have the best of intentions.

Are you considering crowdfunding appeals? If engaging in crowdfunding, it is safest to give to someone you personally know and trust, keeping in mind that some crowdfunding sites take measures to vet posts, others don't. If the poster claims they will forward funds to a specified charity, consider visiting the charity's website on your own and giving to them directly after having checked them out.

Be cautious about "100%" claims in appeals. Charities have fundraising and administrative expenses. If a charity promotion claims that all funds collected will be used for relief, see if there is an explanation about how they are able to do this. Even a credit card donation will have a processing fee.

Watch out for charity name confusion. Be alert to questionable groups seeking to confuse donors with names that

sound similar to charities you know.

BBB Wise Giving Alliance (BBB's Give.org) is a standards-based charity evaluator that seeks to verify the trustworthiness of nationally soliciting charities by completing rigorous evaluations based on 20 holistic standards that address charity governance, results reporting, finances, fundraising, appeal accuracy and other issues. National charity reports are produced by BBB's Give.org and local charity reports are produced by local Better Business Bureaus — all reports are available at Give.org.

For more information about BBB, visit BBB.org.

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October 1, 2024 | Daily Record, The (Dunn, NC) Author: John Hood| Section: Opinion| 503 Words

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Guardians of the State: NC Guard deploys

October 1, 2024 | Daily Record, The (Dunn, NC) Author: For the Record | Section: News | 422 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — "Call out the Guard," a cliché in 1950's movies, but a call to action for hundreds of North Carolina National Guard (NCNG) Soldiers and Airmen deployed for the North Carolina Government's Hurricane Helene response. Their mission, provide military capabilities in support of state authorities in order to protect the lives and properties of fellow citizens.

"Help is on the way, we are going to be there until the mission is finished," said U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Wes Morrison, NCNG assistant adjutant general for maneuver.

Before the hurricane made landfall in Florida, North Carolina state and local government leaders prepared for the worst. Across the state, public safety and emergency management leaders prepped for catastrophic flooding, infrastructure failure, evacuations, blocked roads and highways, widespread damage, and disruption of basic services.

"Our National Guard is embedded at the local level working with emergency management, they know the needs," Morrison said.

Faced with such a task the state leaders asked for NCNG support. On order by the governor, the NCNG called for volunteers for State Active Duty to report to armories and readiness centers and other NCNG facilities or report direct to civilian leadership statewide at warehouses, emergency management sites, community colleges, airports, and many, many other local and state government sites.

"They help fill in the holes, we work with the Guard all the time," Jay Joyster, an emergency planner with North Carolina Emergency Management.

Senior NCNG leaders kept in constant contact with civilian government superiors preparing NCNG force packages, preselected teams of Soldiers and Airmen able to provide skills and services matched to the local government needs. Armory Support Packages prepare NCNG facilities to quickly process and deploy Soldiers and Airmen, All Hazards Response Teams with High Mobility Multi Wheeled Vehicles able to cross rugged terrain and washed-out areas issued radios designed to integrate with local government leadership, Truck Force Packages with long haul trucks to deliver much needed supplies on demand from local and state government agencies, and many other teams.

"We are very qualified to do the job, we are logistics, anything that has to be moved, that's what we do," U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Leslie Cook, noncommissioned officer in charge small air terminal at the Charlotte Air National Guard Base.

All these Soldiers and Airmen planned, prepared, and deployed with one overall goal, to save lives and property of North Carolinians.

"It is what you raise your right hand for, it is home," U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Stonehouse, North Carolina Emergency Management Central Branch NCNG command and control noncommissioned officer in charge said.

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Takeaways from the Trojans' 2-0 AAC start

October 1, 2024 | Daily Record, The (Dunn, NC) Author: Donnell Coley| Section: Sports | 555 Words OpenURL Link

ANGIER — Harnett Central football now takes Daily Record Game of the Week honors in back-to-back outings.

This time, it was a 42-0 romp against Westover in a contest moved up to last Thursday because of Tropical Storm Helene.

The home rout handed the Wolverines their first shutout loss in five years. Through four meetings, dating back to 2021 when All American Conference competition began, the series is now tied at two apiece.

Here are the top three takeaways from a soggy evening in Angier.

'Growing up fast'

Only a handful of defensive starters return for Central (4-1, 2-0 AAC) coach Cory Barnes this fall.

But after giving up just six points through the first two league matchups, his budding talent is starting to feel more comfortable.

"They're growing up. There's a bunch of young guys, with a couple seniors, and now they're getting game reps in and they're really learning how to play with each other within the scheme of our defense," said Barnes. "As they keep going through games, they'll keep getting better."

The Trojans secured three takeaways against the Wolverines (3-2, 0-2 AAC) while also claiming three sacks.

Junior pass rushers Nolan Bullock and Charlie Stedman accounted for the sack totals, with fellow third-year defender Eli Muhammad plucking a pick. Another junior, middle linebacker Will Jones, forced a fumble and added seven tackles.

The first-year varsity members are led by upperclassmen like Deacon Stewart and Quamarhi Barnes, who combined for six stops for loss Thursday.

What rain?

While one team struggled to maintain possession and sustain drives, the other thrived.

"Our guys were locked in ... and boy were they fired up to play in this because they knew we had been prepared for it," said Barnes, noting the practices in rainy conditions the past two weeks.

Landon Culbreth reached the end zone three times for a second straight contest.

His 47-yard catch-and-run in the first quarter broke a scoreless affair and helped Central move ahead, 7-0. Culbreth's only other reception was another TD connection that spanned more than 40 yards, this time in the second to put HC up 21-0. He also scored on a 23-yard run in the fourth.

Sophomore QB Koby Howard expanded his AAC-leading passing total, collecting close to 200 yards through the air with three TDs. Running backs Ethyn Muhammad and Cody Ammons shared the rushing load, with each finding pay dirt before the break.

It was a reversal from the previous outing that saw Barnes' bunch put up just 15 first-half points.

"You can't take anybody in this conference lightly. You got to go out and put your best foot forward every week," he said. "And I don't feel like we did that last week to start with and we kind of rectified that tonight."

On the right path

The Trojans join two other AAC teams with perfect conference records so far.

But, they know more challenges await as matchups with both squads — Terry Sanford and Pine Forest — are just around the corner. There are also a couple of in-county rivalries still left on the slate.

Barnes is well aware of the obstacles that block his club's road to a first All American championship.

"We're on the path to where we wanna be. But we got to be locked in and doing the things that we're coached to do ... and keep getting better each week."

Up next, Central travels to E.E. Smith on Friday, Oct. 4.

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Officials: Massive effort underway to respond to Helene's devastation

October 1, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Bobby Burns | Section: State | 899 Words OpenURL Link

State officials said a massive effort is underway to search for and rescue victims of Hurricane Helene, assess damage, provide relief and begin the process of recovery and rebuilding.

The Associated Press reports that President Joe Biden plans to visit western North Carolina today, and Gov. Roy Cooper toured the area around Asheville on Monday, according to reports from his office and the Associated Press.

Helene roared ashore in northern Florida late Thursday as a Category 4 hurricane and quickly moved north. The storm upended life throughout the Southeast, where deaths were also reported in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia. Officials warned that rebuilding would be lengthy and difficult.

The storm unleashed the worst flooding in a century in North Carolina. Rainfall estimates in some areas topped more than 2 feet since Wednesday, and scores of roads are blocked by fallen trees, washed away or blocked by mudslides. That includes a 4-mile section of Interstate 40 that was heavily damaged.

Joey Hopkins, North Carolina's secretary of transportation, asked people on Monday to stay off the roads.

"The damage is severe, and we're continuing to tell folks if you don't have a reason to be in North Carolina, do not travel on the roads of western North Carolina," Hopkins said at a news conference. "We do not want you here if you don't live here and you're not helping with the storm."

In addition to torrential, flooding rain, strong winds caused heavy damage to trees, buildings and infrastructure, according to multiple reports. Exhausted emergency workers continue to work around the clock to clear roads, restore power and cellphone service, and reach people who are stranded, the AP reported. The storm killed at least 133 people and hundreds more were still unaccounted for on Monday night, four days after Helene initially made landfall.

Officials in the hard-hit tourism hub of Asheville said their water system suffered "catastrophic" damage that could take weeks to fully repair. Government officials, aid groups and volunteers were working to deliver supplies by air, truck and even mule to the town and surrounding mountain communities. At least 40 people died in the county that includes Asheville.

The North Carolina death toll included one horrific story after another of people who were trapped by floodwaters in their homes and vehicles or were killed by falling trees. A courthouse security officer died after being submerged inside his truck. A couple and a 6-year-old boy waiting to be rescued on a rooftop drowned when part of their home collapsed.

Cooper arrived by plane at the Asheville Regional Airport in Fletcher about 10:30 a.m. There he met Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanna Criswell, who got updates on storm recovery needs from Cooper and three Cabinet secretaries.

Asked by a reporter later whether he believed enough was done last week to evacuate residents before the storm, Cooper said officials knew it was going to be a significant event, and that local leaders told residents to leave low-lying areas.

"The devastation was beyond belief, and even when you prepare for something like this, this is something that's never happened before in western North Carolina," Cooper said.

Cooper's office reported Monday that state, federal and local partners are surging resources into the region to provide food, water and critical supplies. "Progress also is being made to improve access and telecommunications in communities damaged by the storm. While the focus remains on emergency response and rescue, the state is simultaneously stepping up recovery services in collaboration with federal and local partners across North Carolina," Cooper's office said.

State Emergency Management Director Will Ray said more than 7,000 North Carolina residents had already registered to receive FEMA assistance, and "there is money already rolling in to these pockets." Almost 800 hundred North Carolina National Guard members have been activated.

Cooper said 92 search and rescue teams were working in the region as of Monday afternoon including 27 teams from as far west as Colorado and as far north as New Hampshire, plus 18 federal teams.

They had rescued more than 500 people with 422 of those rescued by the NC National Guard, Cooper's office reported. Forty-two were critically injured, four were infants and 64 animals. As of Monday the Guard also had also delivered 306 pallets of water and 230 pallets of food since the storm started.

Twenty-nine shelters have been opened in affected areas, housing a total of 1,107 people, Cooper's office reported. President Biden approved an expedited request declaring a major disaster for 25 North Carolina counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The declaration paves the way for public assistance to help hard-hit local governments, as well as access to FEMA's Individual Assistance program. More than 5,000 households have contacted FEMA to apply for assistance by phone and online.

Across the region, more than 450,000 customers remained without power as of Monday, down from a peak of more than 1 million. More than 400 roads remained closed. NCDOT said the focus is on restoring primary roads and access to communities that have been isolated by damage. First responders also want to keep the roads as clear as possible to help ensure they may carry out all response missions.

Cellphone providers are working to fix the damage and coverage issues caused by the storm and get stopgap solutions in place and rapid progress is being made, Cooper's office reported. Restoring communications is critical to saving lives, finding where people are and getting in supplies, according to the governor.

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Helene leaves mountain community like no-man's land, firefighter says

October 1, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Bobby Burns | Section: Local | 531 Words OpenURL Link

A former photographer for The Daily Reflector who is now a volunteer firefighter in western North Carolina said people need to know about the isolation and devastation brought by Hurricane Helene to rural mountain communities like his.

Will Stricklin moved to Bakersville in Mitchell County in northwest North Carolina in 2022 and joined the Mitchell County Volunteer Fire Department along with his wife about six months later. He has been on duty since the hurricane began pelting the region on Friday and was able to make his first calls out on Monday after an emergency cellular connection was established.

"Our 9-1-1 dispatch went down at 6 p.m. on Friday. The cells went out, too. We had no communications from Friday until today," said Stricklin, who also was able to send a few photos and video he shot during his department's early response in hopes of publicizing the damage. (He hopes to share more in the coming days.)

The small contingent of local first responders based in Bakersville — the Mitchell County seat and a town of 500 between Asheville and Boone — was cut off and worked to reach stranded neighbors with personal vehicles and chainsaws. Stricklin said microbursts from the storm snapped acres of pine trees and nearly 30 inches of rain swelled creeks into raging rivers.

The Iraq War combat veteran who covered news and sports and shot Scene Around party pics for the Reflector from 2011-17 compared the damage to scenes captured in images from World War I.

"It's like no-man's land where all the trees are snapped off at 10 to 15 feet high, where artillery burst above them. It's like that," he said. "It's like the craziest thing I've ever seen. I've done hurricane duty with the National Guard, I've been to war, and this is the craziest thing I've ever seen."

A dozen or so firefighters worked with sheriff's deputies and a handful of other first responders to check on the welfare of neighbors they knew were at risk since nobody could call for assistance. The firefighters cleared trees from roads so emergency crews could travel from one mountain community to another.

Many homes still remained inaccessible, however, and Monday was too early to guess about the extent of property damage and loss of life, Stricklin said.

State-coordinated search and rescue teams began the work of accounting for lives and damage on Monday when the first heavy vehicles arrived and a large helicopter dropped supplies in the middle of town, Stricklin said. People are missing but no deaths have been confirmed, he said.

Isolation caused tension and worry between Friday and Monday, he said.

"We didn't know what was coming, we had no idea," he said about the help they needed to rescue friends and neighbors, wishing it had been there sooner. When it came on Monday, "it just showed up."

He said he hopes sharing details and images from the disaster will focus state and federal authorities on the dire situation of a community that already struggles with poverty.

"There is help rolling in now, but this help's going to be needed for a long time," he said. "If there is any attention that can be brought, then let's get these people some long-term aid."

• Citation (aglc Style)

Bobby Burns, 'Helene leaves mountain community like no-man's land, firefighter says', *Daily Reflector, The* (online), 1 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEFB525AA59FF0



Helene leaves mountain community like no-man's land, firefighter says

October 1, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Bobby Burns | Section: Across Carolina | 531 Words OpenURL Link

A former photographer for The Daily Reflector who is now a volunteer firefighter in western North Carolina said people need to know about the isolation and devastation brought by Hurricane Helene to rural mountain communities like his.

Will Stricklin moved to Bakersville in Mitchell County in northwest North Carolina in 2022 and joined the Mitchell County Volunteer Fire Department along with his wife about six months later. He has been on duty since the hurricane began pelting the region on Friday and was able to make his first calls out on Monday after an emergency cellular connection was established.

"Our 9-1-1 dispatch went down at 6 p.m. on Friday. The cells went out, too. We had no communications from Friday until today," said Stricklin, who also was able to send a few photos and video he shot during his department's early response in hopes of publicizing the damage. (He hopes to share more in the coming days.)

The small contingent of local first responders based in Bakersville — the Mitchell County seat and a town of 500 between Asheville and Boone — was cut off and worked to reach stranded neighbors with personal vehicles and chainsaws. Stricklin said microbursts from the storm snapped acres of pine trees and nearly 30 inches of rain swelled creeks into raging rivers.

The Iraq War combat veteran who covered news and sports and shot Scene Around party pics for the Reflector from 2011-17 compared the damage to scenes captured in images from World War I.

"It's like no-man's land where all the trees are snapped off at 10 to 15 feet high, where artillery burst above them. It's like that," he said. "It's like the craziest thing I've ever seen. I've done hurricane duty with the National Guard, I've been to war, and this is the craziest thing I've ever seen."

A dozen or so firefighters worked with sheriff's deputies and a handful of other first responders to check on the welfare of neighbors they knew were at risk since nobody could call for assistance. The firefighters cleared trees from roads so emergency crews could travel from one mountain community to another.

Many homes still remained inaccessible, however, and Monday was too early to guess about the extent of property damage and loss of life, Stricklin said.

State-coordinated search and rescue teams began the work of accounting for lives and damage on Monday when the first heavy vehicles arrived and a large helicopter dropped supplies in the middle of town, Stricklin said. People are missing but no deaths have been confirmed, he said.

Isolation caused tension and worry between Friday and Monday, he said.

"We didn't know what was coming, we had no idea," he said about the help they needed to rescue friends and neighbors, wishing it had been there sooner. When it came on Monday, "it just showed up."

He said he hopes sharing details and images from the disaster will focus state and federal authorities on the dire situation of a community that already struggles with poverty.

"There is help rolling in now, but this help's going to be needed for a long time," he said. "If there is any attention that can be brought, then let's get these people some long-term aid."

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Pitt County emergency personnel move to aid areas ravaged by Hurricane Helene

October 1, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Ginger Livingston| Section: Local | 811 Words OpenURL Link

Local first responders are mobilizing to help residents in western North Carolina reeling from Hurricane Helene's destruction.

Pitt County Sheriff Paula Dance is sending 10 deputies to Buncombe County for a week before replacing them with a second contingent of 10-12 deputies. The first group left Tuesday.

After that Dance will continue to assess needs and personnel availability, she said, adding that deputies staying in Pitt County have agreed to step into roles left behind by those who volunteered to aid in storm recovery.

Deputies will bring food, water, hygiene items and other resources, which will be distributed by state and local emergency management. Dance said Buncombe County Sheriff Quentin Miller told her water is a chief need.

The deputies' exact role had not been determined but could range from traffic control to recovering human remains, Dance said. She added that similar assistance from outside agencies was "invaluable" during Hurricane Floyd in 1999.

"I can't really tell you how much we appreciated for our community as a whole," Dance said. "They stepped up and came from everywhere, and so that's what we are giving back this week and next week and however long it takes to make sure that their community is taken care of as well."

Detective Christopher Hobbs, an investigator with the major crimes unit, was one of the first to volunteer. His experience includes fast water rescue from his time with the Washington Police Department. Hobbs said there was not much he could do to help when Floyd struck in 1999 since he was in middle school. That is no longer the case.

"I've got a couple of older friends who worked with me in Washington that moved out west and got out of law enforcement," Hobbs said. "One of them called and told me his house was messed up, things like that.

"As far as just the brotherhood, they're asking for help and we need to help them."

The Greenville Police Department deployed 10 people to assist Hendersonville police on Monday morning. From there they will be dispatched as the need arises, a Greenville police spokeswoman said. Additional personnel may rotate with the deployed officers.

The police department also is collecting relief supplies along with Ignite Church, Greenville Fire-Rescue and other organizations. The department planned to accept donations at National Night Out from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Town Common.

Department personnel traveled with a truckload of resources gathered from an outreach event at Ignite Church on Bayswater Road. The outreach efforts at Ignite will continue throughout the week from 9-4 p.m.

Organizers are asking for items such as water, non-perishable food, baby formula, bug spray, trash bags, toiletries, sanitation items, feminine hygiene products and soups.

A swift water rescue team from NC Task Force 10, made up of two Greenville Fire-Rescue personnel and four from the City of New Bern, are currently at work in the Chimney Rock area, said Greenville Fire-Rescue Deputy Chief Jesse Harris.

The crew is working alongside federal personnel from Michigan and New York to conduct searches and rescue people who are stranded. Harris said some areas are accessible only by water.

He said the team deployed with swift water equipment and will remain on-site through the week. Any extended deployment will be determined by state emergency management.

"There's a lot of federal teams that are on site and a lot of state teams, so there's a tremendous amount of personnel up there," Harris said.

Greenville Utilities Commission sent a 20-person electric crew to the City of Morganton and to the Town of Drexel on Friday.

"Our crews will work alongside others from across the country who operate under mutual aid agreements," GUC said. "These agreements allow community agencies to come together following disasters where system damage is widespread and significant."

ECU Health and Eastern Healthcare Preparedness Coalition team members took a medical ambulance bus to assist in collaboration with NC Emergency Management.

"ECU Health Emergency Management is in regular contact with state officials and prepared to provide further assistance as needed," a spokesmand said. "Our thoughts and prayers are with all of those involved in this effort and, importantly, those directly impacted by this (devastating) storm."

U.S. Rep. Greg Murphy, who represents Pitt County and much of coastal North Carolina, was scheduled to tour western by North Carolina with U.S. Sens. Ted Budd and Thom Tillis, U.S. Rep. David Rouzer and N.C. Commissioner of Agriculture Steve Troxler on Tuesday. After the tour, the officials were scheduled to meet with Rep. Chuck Edwards for an operational review of the recovery effort.

"Eastern North Carolina has a history of natural disasters, and we understand the critical nature of recovery efforts," Murphy said. "Western North Carolina has been there for us in those moments, and we must do the same in return. I host an annual WATERS Summit focused on flood mitigation and hope to be helpful in dealing with this catastrophe."

The summit, which was scheduled for Tuesday, has been postponed because of the disaster.

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Election Board and state legislature poised to ensure voting continues

October 1, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Elyse Apel | The Center Square | Section: News | 585 Words OpenURL Link

(The Center Square) – With five weeks left until Election Day, the North Carolina State Board of Elections and staff are poised to ensure that voting continues and voters are assisted as needed, even in the midst of unprecedented damage from Hurricane Helene.

"This storm is like nothing we've seen in our lifetime in North Carolina," said Karen Brinson Bell, executive director of the board.

The counties in western North Carolina were particularly hard hit, but Bell said the board will do everything in its power so voting continues.

"Mountain people are strong and the election people who serve them are tough and resilient too," she said. "We've battled through hurricanes and tropical storms and still held safe and secure elections."

On Monday, the board voted unanimously to allow counties affected by the disaster to delay absentee voting board meetings, which were supposed to start Tuesday.

In a press conference Tuesday morning, Bell said the meeting was likely the first of many.

"This will be an ongoing process," she said.

As of Tuesday morning, 12 election offices remain closed. The priority of the board is to ensure the safety of election and poll voters and that everyone who is eligible to vote is able to, Bell said.

Across the state, nearly 250,000 absentee ballots have already been requested. The board is working with the U.S. Postal Service to make sure mail-in ballots are secure and will stay in communication with the agency to see if there are other steps that are necessary to ensure the mail-in voting process continues.

For those voters who are displaced, the board advises that absentee ballots can be redelivered to a new location, if necessary.

Bell said that special emergency kits will be deployed to election offices that are having internet and cell service issues, which are in four or five counties. The state election board has 10 of the kits available.

Not only is the board partnering with the postal service, but it is also working with emergency management and federal authorities to determine what counties are most at risk and in need of assistance.

Bell said she hopes voters will continue to have confidence in the security of the election, even with the disruptions.

"I hope this helps them have more faith in the results and what we do," Bell said. "We might have to do it a little differently," but she is confident that the results will be accurate.

In initial reports, all county election offices are believed to be intact, Bell said. The board has also confirmed that essential voting materials like ballots and voting machines are secure.

They are not as sure about polling centers, but Bell said they are poised to look into alternatives, including temporary polling centers, if necessary.

Though the situation remains fluid, Bell says the board has processes in place ready to address any and all needs of counties.

"We feel it doesn't matter if it's this type of storm ... there are many things that can be disruptive, but we still figure out how to proceed," she said.

Voter registration will continue as normal, as the main objective for the state board is to get county boards of elections up and running.

She encourages voters to use local media, radio stations, and ncsbe.gov to keep up with the latest voting information.

While the election is coming up, Bell assures voters that the board and the state Legislature will continue to monitor the situation and what steps are necessary over the next few weeks.

"We do have some time still," Bell said.

Early in-person voting is scheduled to begin in 17 days.

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College golf: Hurricane-ravaged colleges make trip to Pirates' Ironwood Classic

October 1, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Patrick Mason | Section: College | 641 Words OpenURL Link

Golf can be a relaxing game.

Tee times are often booked on nice days with blue skies. Spending a few hours on the course can feel like a mini vacation from the world zipping past the trees and manicured grass.

Sometimes, golf can be an escape. And it was quite literally that for some teams visiting East Carolina's Ironwood Classic on Monday and Tuesday.

For Presbyterian coach Thomas Addison, the tournament allowed for some unique family time.

Addison brought his eight-year-old son, Connor, with him to the tournament as Connor's school was closed due to damages from Hurricane Helene that pounded the southeast region with rain and wind. Presbyterian doesn't expect to return to classes until at least Oct. 9.

Connor asked his dad if he was going somewhere with power. Addison said yes, and Connor jumped at the chance to hang out with the golfers.

Presbyterian, in Clinton, S.C., was impacted by the storm and made an announcement over the weekend to cancel classes. The town had internet and cell tower outages, and the college's email system was down, too.

For Appalachian State, simply making the tournament was a surprise.

When Mountaineers coach Alan Cress called ECU coach Kevin Williams before the tournament, the Pirates' coach thought for sure that the call was about App State having to cancel.

"I can't believe they made it," Williams said. "I was so surprised when their coach said they were coming. When he called me, I fully expected him to say, 'Hey, we're not coming,' right? They didn't have electricity. So they came here where they had electricity.

"But I was kind of surprised to see App. I think it's good for those guys to be able to get away and get electricity. So that was really cool. They were so appreciative. They said, 'We're so glad we got out of town.' It's bad at home and I can't imagine what they're going through. I somewhat can, because of Hurricane Floyd, but I wasn't super impacted other than the region was so bad. But I think it was worse in the mountains because you had so much rain and landslides and all that. Towns were wiped out."

Williams said he took his mom on a retirement trip to Lake Lure about seven years ago and was blown away by the beauty of the town. He has thought about that trip during the past week and how much has changed.

"And then to see Lake Lure and Chimney Rock now, and what happened?" he said. "It's incredibly sad."

The Pirates won the 15-team tournament with a two-round score of 18-under-par 270. The 18-under tied the school record, and the two-round score of 548 set a program record.

ECU was 10 under after Monday's first round and two shots behind leader Florida Atlantic. The Pirates made up ground with a furious back nine on Tuesday to claim the victory. Long Island finished second and FAU was third.

Presbyterian was 11th and App State finished 12th.

"The guys played really well on the back nine and ended up 28-under-par and in 36 holes which is phenomenal," Williams said. "And we had two guys make the All-tournament team. Both of them shot 9-under for 36 holes. So, yeah, it's a great team win."

Tyler DeChellis and junior Phillip Bondestad tied for third. FAU's Biagio Gagliardi earned medalist honors with a 13 under.

"Senior Tyler DeChellis, he hadn't been in the lineup the first two tournaments and we let the guys play for it,"
Williams said. "Like, you earn your spot in the lineup and he did this week. I was so proud of him to come out with a
9 under, and to finish tied for third was really good. Philip Bondestad, who finished tied for third with him as a
junior, he's been playing great. And so I was really excited to see Philip continue his wonderful play."

Cress decline comment for this story.

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Active rescue efforts continue as EMS make way into hardest hit areas

October 1, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Moss Brennan The Watauga Democrat | Section: Across Carolina | 301 Words OpenURL Link

Emergency services personnel are still focused on active rescue missions as they continue to push into some of Watauga County's hardest-hit areas.

As of Monday evening, Helene's devastating path through Watauga County has killed two people and left countless others without homes, power, and cell service.

Emergency services personnel are still actively working on rescue missions in the western part of the county. Multiple families were rescued in Zionville and Cove Creek Monday after being cut off due to flood damage, according to Watauga County Emergency Services Emergency Planner Kristi Pukansky.

"We definitely are still in an active rescue situation," Pukansky said. "We aren't even to damage assessment yet."

There is no timeline for how long rescues will take as some places have not been reached yet during house-to-house checks.

"There are still areas that we are cutting and pushing through (to get) to inaccessible areas," Pukansky said. "We really don't know until we get to the last one how long that's going to take."

Pukansky said some areas in Beaver Dam are not passable as crews continue to work to push in and create access points.

"Check on your neighbors, check on the elderly," Watauga County Fire Marshal Shane Garland said. "We're attempting to get through, but the road infrastructure is lost, and that's going to take some time, but just check on each other."

As of Monday early afternoon, 48 community members were being housed at the Holmes Convocation Center, the official Red Cross shelter during this incident. Pukansky said other places have opened up as shelters, but since the Holmes Convocation Center is the official Red Cross one, they only have numbers for that one.

WCES is continually working to push more resources into the county as agreements are implemented.

A curfew remains in place for Watauga County from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. until further notice.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF4F439C3538D0>



Razor-thin difference in battleground state facing catastrophe

October 1, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Alan Wooten | The Center Square | Section: News | 971 Words OpenURL Link

(The Center Square) – In western North Carolina where a fatal flood of historic proportion has torn apart normal, the 2024 election will go on and a razor-thin difference is watched between Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris and Republican former President Donald Trump.

Asheville in Buncombe County is known for a liberal bent, many counties along the Blue Ridge Mountains are red, though it was less than two decades ago Democratic Congressman Heath Shuler carried the area.

Election Day is five weeks away. And the State Board of Elections, as has been done for hurricanes and other unplanned occurrences before, is forging ahead. So, too, will everyone else.

"It would be an ironic shame if the people who most need strong representation in the national and state legislatures play no part in selecting those representatives," Dallas Woodhouse, North Carolina executive director for American Majority-Action, wrote in an email to The Center Square.

Every effort will be made, the state board said Monday and again Tuesday at a morning presser.

"When disasters strike elections, we use this mantra: 'We do not stop an election; we figure out how to proceed,'" said Karen Brinson Bell, executive director of the State Board of Elections.

History agrees. Four years ago, it was COVID-19. Primarily in the southeastern part of the state, the 2018 midterms were preceded by Hurricane Florence the first week of September and the 2016 presidential cycle overcame Hurricane Matthew's landfall on Oct. 8.

Laws, including for state elections, are set by the General Assembly. The state board and its executive director, however, do have emergency powers granted.

"We had emergency powers of the executive director during the pandemic," Andy Jackson, director of the Civitas Center for Public Integrity, told The Center Square in a telephone interview on Monday. "There was a lot of words back and forth on that.

"With emergency authorization under regulations for the executive director, one of the things you have to consider is how much time does the General Assembly have to act? I'd imagine the General Assembly, after evaluation of what is going on and what is needed, they can go ahead and pass a bill like they did for Florence in '18. If deadlines come before, the executive director will have authority."

The Center Square was unsuccessful getting comment from Anderson Clayton, chairwoman of the North Carolina Democratic Party. The party issued a statement of concern for the area, and added, "We take care of our neighbors. We will grieve and rebuild."

Matt Mercer, spokesman for the state Republican Party, said, "We want the focus for the next few days to be on relief efforts."

Invariably, debate is coming on how the challenges to even cast votes will impact races. Neither presidential candidate is exceeding the margin of error in polling, making North Carolina a toss-up. Many downballot statewide races have polled close, too.

For context, Trump won the state four years ago by 1.3% (74,483 votes) and eight years ago by 3.6% (173,315 votes). That's fewer than the 372,000-plus customers out of power at 10 a.m. Tuesday morning.

The state, with winner-take-all 16 electoral college votes, is up to more than 7.6 million registered voters. A 75% turnout rate, as was the case in 2020, would produce more than 5.7 million voters and mean a 4% difference is fewer than 230,000 votes.

"The mountain area of North Carolina is very heavily Republican in most elections," said Dr. Tom Eamon, associate professor of political science at East Carolina University, wrote in an email to The Center Square. "Exceptions are the city of Asheville and Boone. Too early to predict overall impact."

Dr. Steven Greene, political science professor at N.C. State, agreed.

"Furthermore, on a partisan basis, yes Asheville is a liberal hub, but a liberal hub within a sea of red," he wrote in an email to The Center Square. "The 11th Congressional District, in which Asheville sits, is reliably Republican and has been affected throughout by flooding, which suggests that if there is any partisan impact it is more likely to affect Republicans."

If anything, the region since the turn of the century may well illustrate why the state is called purple – the mix of red Republican and blue Democrat.

"There were counties still voting Democratic in the 20-oughts," Jackson said. "Heath Shuler won it. In the '90s and 20-oughts, the 11th District was back and forth. There are some residual Democrats. It's generally Repbulican-leaning.

"If raw numbers, if both sides are equally motivated, it would be a net loss for Republicans statewide. Considering how close the races are looking, that could be the difference."

Prognosticators nationwide have seven consensus battleground states. And from them, few if any are acknowledging a pathway to 270 electoral college votes without at least one if not both of North Carolina and Pennsylvania (19 votes).

Seventeen days before early in-person voting is to start, Tuesday morning's 10 a.m. road closure report had 401 statewide because of Helene. The recovery work is paramount and mourning the lives lost is first.

As Bell said, the election will come and go on schedule.

"As our neighbors, friends and family in western North Carolina, deal with horrific losses of life, property, income and security, it's important that we make sure these citizens don't lose their voice in the political process," Woodhouse said. "We at American Majority-Action are already having conversations with people across the political spectrum on how to guarantee citizens the ability to vote in the flood disaster areas. We don't know exactly what that looks like, but it will be a monumental effort.

"As far as what side may or may not benefit from the changes in the electorate, we don't know, and we don't care. We are all citizens, neighbors and friends. This is so beyond partisan politics. One area American Majority Action will focus on is making sure displaced residents know how and where they can vote once those arrangements are made."

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Community mobilizes to aid hurricane ravaged mountain residents

October 1, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Ginger Livingston| Section: Local | 1397 Words OpenURL Link

People across the Greenville area are donating supplies to help storm-ravaged regions in western North Carolina, saying they are happy to return favors given to this community when it was devastated by Hurricane Floyd 25 years ago.

Churches and community organizations set up collection points for volunteers who must coordinate with state emergency responders to deliver water and other supplies to mountain residents who suffered heavy damage from Hurricane Helene over the weekend. A donated tractor-trailer filled with water, food and cleaning supplies left Greenville for Rutherford County at 4 a.m. Tuesday after a relief drive organized by Ignite Church and Greenville Fire-Rescue.

The drive continues through Friday, said Fire-Rescue Deputy Chief Jesse Harris. People can drop-off supplies between 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at Ignite, 4150 Bayswater Road. The City of Greenville, Greenville Police Department, Minges Bottling Group and Inner Banks Media also are part of the effort.

"We've had some amazing turnout this morning (Monday) ... An amazing turnout of water," Harris said. "So much so that some of the stores in town have stopped allowing people to buy pallets of water."

Even though people are now limited to a few cases of water, many other items are needed including cleaning supplies, hygiene products, non-perishable food, pet food and household goods.

"They need everything you and I need every day to live," Harris said. "If you can't get water, get something."

Harris knows about the need. He was a new firefighter when Hurricane Floyd brought destructive flooding to eastern North Carolina and damaged his home.

"I was with the fire department, and we are relatively close-knit folks, and the fire department helped carry me," Harris said. "I was new. I had started with the department in May of '99 and I came on shift on Aug. 30th of '99 and then we flooded Sept. 16. There was a now-retired battalion chief (Shannon Terry), she actually carried my wife and me shopping to get clothes and things like that."

Volunteer Ashley Penn was 13 years old and living in Wilson with the 1999 floods struck. Over the weekend she and her husband were in Cashiers, located southwest of Asheville, for a friend's wedding.

"I remember flooding (in 1999) and the trees and school being out ... but this, full towns and communities are gone. It wasn't ideal here, but for some reason, this seems so much worse," Penn said.

While it wasn't the wedding her friend planned, the couple still got married. The Penns then endured a 12-hour trip to return to Greenville.

"We were lucky to get home and I said we have to do something," Penn said. She brought several cases of bottled water and baby supplies to Ignite Church. She then parked her vehicle and helped unload other cars that carried donations.

"We saw everything; things I've never seen before; mudslides, flooding. People were out cutting trees to get the roads cleared," she said. There was no cell service or internet, Penn said, except at one coffee shop where hundreds gathered to make calls and search for news.

"We were in a bubble so we had no idea how terrible it was because we couldn't get news," Penn said. "We had to go to South Carolina to get home. Luckily my husband travels with cash because I do not and we were able to get gas. When we got home we realized how fortunate we were."

Jared Mosley, Ignite Church's community minister, praised Monday's turnout.

"It's been absolutely mind-boggling and beautiful to see the community come together," Mosley said. "Something else that is extremely beautiful is how many people we don't know, who don't know us, are pulling in, dropping stuff and they are going, 'It looks like you need help,' and we're saying, 'Yes we do.' They are just parking their cars, coming inside and they've been here for hours. That's the beautiful thing about this community. We know how to help each other because we've received that help."

Sunday was the first time Alex Martinez attended church at Ignite, and when he heard about the donation drive, he knew he needed to help.

"My wife and I decided to grab a couple of items and pass off what we had. But once we saw the amount of items here we just decided to park and help," Martinez said.

So many donations were coming in that organizations like Eastern Pines Water Corporation sent several workers to help load the tractor-trailer.

The dean of Pitt Community College's Construction and Industrial Technology Division told instructors that volunteers were needed and any student who wanted to help could leave class without being counted absent, said Sam Lawson, a sophomore welding student.

"I have a bunch of friends who go to college in the mountains and their vehicles are gone, their apartments are ruined, they have to find new places to live and they can't go to classes anymore because all the buildings are torn up," Lawson said. "Personally, I know my friends and family up there need help so that's why I am doing it."

"I think it's important for everybody to help, especially for people who have been through it and seen it first hand, they know how devastating it can be," Lawson said.

Two members of Black Jack Original Free Will Baptist Church set out for western North Carolina Sunday with a U-Haul truck filled with food and water, diapers and other supplies collected for people affected by the hurricane.

Pastor Phillip Boykin said Chad Fornes and Robert Langston got as far as Statesville on Sunday night but had to wait until Monday to continue their trip to Black Mountain. Black Jack started collecting supplies over the weekend, hoping to fill a trailer, but donations coming in from members of the church and surrounding community quickly exceeded the space in two trailers.

"Those two guys just had a heart for it," Boykin said. "Our church responded well. I was amazed. I really thought it was going to be maybe 10 or 12 of our people giving, but then it just multiplied. It just blew us all away. ... It was really great to see God's hand (at work).

A church member donated funds to rent the truck, and another contributed a new generator to the load of supplies. Boykin said donors recalled the devastation after Hurricane Floyd.

"Every person I talked to said, 'We were there 25 years ago. We didn't have water. We didn't have food. We didn't have electricity. We were there. We know what it's like,'" he said. "So that response is what really brought this about."

Fornes, whose son is part of a Greenville Utilities Commission team assisting in the western part of the state, had initially planned to deliver supplies to a distribution center in Morganton, but found that access was limited to

certain rescue and humanitarian groups. Instead, he and Langston set out for Craigmont Camp and Retreat Center in Black Mountain, which Boykin said will serve as a staging point for another disaster group.

The Memorial Baptist Church in Greenville gathered supplies that Associate Pastor Tyler Roach plans to deliver to West Jefferson.

Pastor Brad Smith said the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina asked Roach to bring cleaning equipment and supplies from a church in Raleigh, along with donations from The Memorial Baptist including water and fuel.

"It is amazing," Smith said Monday. "We mentioned it in the service yesterday and said, 'This is the need. Can you help?' By 11 o'clock this morning, we already had a trailer full. Our congregation is a giving congregation. They definitely want to help."

Smith said the church will organize a group to serve in western North Carolina with Baptists on Mission, which aids in disaster recovery through feeding services and debris removal. He expects those services, along with rebuilding efforts, will be needed for quite some time.

Smith said volunteers do not have to be church members. Others, especially people with disaster recovery experience, may call the church at 252-756-5314. But he advised people against setting out on their own to deliver aid.

"You can't just drive up there," Smith said. "Not only is the road impassible, but they're also going to stop you. You have to have a specialized permit that allows you to go in."

Wintergreen schools, 4720 County Home Road, has announced a supplies connection from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Oct. 6 at the drop-off lane. Bottled water, nonperishable food, baby formula, insect repellent, trash bags, hygiene products, pet food, work gloves, sunscreen, diapers and new clothing will be accepted.

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Ginger Livingston, 'Community mobilizes to aid hurricane ravaged mountain residents', *Daily Reflector, The* (online), 1 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF128E1E3A5B88



Community Calendar 10-2-24

October 1, 2024 | Enquirer-Journal, The (Monroe, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Enquirer Journal | 568 Words OpenURL Link

Community Calendar

Museum of the Waxhaw's Kids Day: 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Oct. 3 at 8215 Waxhaw Highway, Waxhaw. Various activities will be available for kids and families to enjoy, including crafts and games and a scavenger hunt. Free admission for youth.

SPCC Furniture Yard Sale: 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Thursday and 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday at 4209 Old Charlotte Highway, Monroe. Furniture inside is no longer needed and is being offered to the communities for pennies on the dollar. Any money raised from the yard sale will go back into the college's general fund. Only cash will be accepted. Buyers must take their purchases with them on the same day and are also responsible for loading and transporting their purchases.

Fairview Fall Festival: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Oct. 5 at Fairview Park, 7402 Concord Highway, Monroe. The Town of Fairview will put together their sixth annual Fall Festival. Music, vendors, food, and activities will be available to people of all ages.

Patch of Pink Pumpkins: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Oct. 5 at 200 E South Main Street, Waxhaw. The Waxhaw Woman's Club will host their third annual Patch of Pink Pumpkins. The club partnered with DeAngelo Williams' foundations to donate 100% of the proceeds to The DeAngelo Williams Foundation. There will be unique pink pumpkins, pumpkin bread, pumpkin pies, and bracelets.

Holiday Craft Show: 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Oct. 5 at 2325 Hanover Drive, Monroe. The Monroe Aquatic and Fitness Center will host its 23rd annual holiday craft show. Various items on display will be jewelry, pottery, baked goods, hand-poured candles, and holiday decore.

Music in the Park: Noon-5 p.m. Oct. 5 at Marshville Municipal Park, 118 E Union Street, Marshville. The Union County Community Choir, Latin Heritage Dance Company, Sticks and Stone, and Robsol are featured in the performance lineup. Food vendors will be on site.

Hearts with hands disaster relief: 2-9 p.m. Oct. 6 at Home Brew Taproom and Tunes, 215 S Main Street, Monroe. Local singers will provide tunes and accept donations for Hurricane Helene relief. The restaurant will donate \$1 per draft beer to Hearts with Hands.

Monroe Car Cruise-In: 6 p.m. Oct. 11 on Main Street, Monroe.

Angelic Riders' Walk-a-thon: 10 a.m. Oct. 12 at 820 Forest Hills School Road, Marshville. The Angelic Riders will host their 19th annual Walk-a-Thon, which is the non-profit's biggest fundraiser of the year. The riders will walk around the scenic farm through pastures and trails.

Autumn Treasures: Noon-6 p.m. Oct. 12-13 at the Waxhaw Downtown Park at Givens Street, and the Downtown Waxhaw Association, at 115 McDonald St., Waxhaw.

Monroe Fall Fest: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Oct. 12 on Main Street at Downtown Monroe.

Museum of the Waxhaws Haunted Trail: 7-10 p.m. Oct 12 and Oct. 19 at 8215 Waxhaw Highway, Waxhaw. \$10 per person.

Senior Appreciation Day and Luncheon: 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Oct. 15 at 3230 Presson Road, Monroe. The Union County Sheriff's Office will host their 27th annual senior appreciation day luncheon.

Fox's Alley Bowling Boo-ling for Candy: 2-4:30 p.m. Oct. 26 at 1901 Skyway Drive, Monroe. The business will hold a indoor trunk or treat. Local businesses will pass out loads of candy on the lanes.

Unionville Elementary BBQ: Nov. 1 at Unionville Elementary School, 4511 Unionville Road, Monroe. The Town of Unionville will celebrate 75 years of its annual barbecue tradition.

Union County Farmers Market: 8 a.m.-noon Saturdays April through December at 805 Skyway Drive, Monroe. The Donation Station table is open every third Saturday each month; the next one is Oct. 19.

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Spartans' offense powers past Mavs

October 1, 2024 | Enquirer-Journal, The (Monroe, NC) Author: Michael Wayne O'Neill mwoneill@theej.com| Section: Enquirer Journal| 585 Words OpenURL Link

MONROE, N.C. — Sun Valley shook off its first quarter jitters and used a steady offensive production to knock off the Marvin Ridge Mavericks, 21-7.

The win gave the Sun Valley Spartans, now 5-1, their first victory over the Mavericks since 2018 when Sun Valley High 2019 graduate and record-setting quarterback Sam Howell played his final regular season game at Marvin Ridge. The game was played on Monday, Sept. 30 because of issues from Tropical Storm Helene.

"Nothing more I can ask for other than my line protecting me," said Sun Valley junior quarterback Noah Lineberry.

"The receivers stepped up. The running backs stepped up. Everybody just played big time ball."

In Monday's game, both teams forced three-and-outs in their first ever non-conference game. The teams exchanged punts in the first quarter.

"That first quarter was kind of more on me," said Sun Valley head coach Ryan Smith. "I didn't really put them in good spots. I felt in the second quarter, we started trusting our guys to make plays. When we do that, we're a pretty good team, and they do a good job of making plays."

Sun Valley first emerged defensively at the end of the first when Braylon Reynolds intercepted Marvin Ridge senior quarterback Braydon Rediger. Rediger finished the game with 106 yards passing.

Rediger's favorite target, junior wide receiver Alex Voss, was held to just 17 yards receiving on the night.

Marvin Ridge came close to scoring the first touchdown of the game in the second quarter. Defensive lineman Manny Lewis served as a running back on a fourth-and-goal situation, but was stuffed by Sun Valley linemen.

Andrew Doody, Brandon Creech, Christian Oats, and Terrence Burke came together to stop Lewis from scoring on the play with 4:23 left in the first half.

"That stop fired the team up," Oats said. "We wanted to win the game and we wanted to show them we are not the same old Sun Valley. We didn't want them to score and we know they were going to come right at us. We had to man up and make a play."

On Sun Valley's next offensive possession, Lineberry found senior Jaiden Morrow-Jones for a 19-yard touchdown to end the first half.

Lineberry then found his twin brother, Wyatt, for a 49-yard touchdown pass in the third quarter. He finished with 78 yards receiving.

Spartans backup quarterback Grayson Hensley found Morrow-Jones for a 55-yard touchdown a minute later. Morrow-Jones weaved through Marvin Ridge defenders to reach the end zone.

Marvin Ridge avoided what would have been their first shutout loss since 2013 when they scored in the fourth quarter. Running back Zach Lee powered his way for their only touchdown in the final minutes.

Both teams will begin Southern Carolina Conference play this Friday night.

Sun Valley will host Cuthbertson and Marvin Ridge, now 3-3, will travel to Porter Ridge.

Smith said the Cuthbertson game is "gonna be really physical."

"They want to run the ball," Smith said. "I think they do a good job. They got a couple good backs that we got to make sure we game plan for. We got to make sure that we get our bodies ready. It's gonna be tough on a short week getting ready for a physical team like that."

Wyatt Lineberry, however, said they are not backing down on the challenge.

"A lot has changed in the last few years," he said. "Our fire and competitiveness as a team proves we're not willing to lose games like that. We're winners and we want to go out there...and do all we got to do to win."

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Yellow Jackets hold off Comets

October 1, 2024 | Enquirer-Journal, The (Monroe, NC) Author: Michael Wayne O'Neill mwoneill@theej.com| Section: Enquirer Journal| 338 Words OpenURL Link

MARSHVILLE, N.C. — Forest Hills scored 27 unanswered points in the first half and held on for a 30-21 home win over North Stanly.

The game was played Monday, Sept. 30 after delays because of Tropical Storm Helene.

The Comets outscored the Yellow Jackets, 21-3, in the second half, but Forest Hills' defense found ways to end the game on their terms. The home team forced a turnover on downs after North Stanly had the ball with under two minutes left in the game.

"We kept our focus and composure," said Forest Hills senior Rodney Smith. "This win means a lot for me and our team."

The Yellow Jackets' run game showed out in the first quarter with two rushing touchdowns. Junior running back Jansen Rivens and sophomore Kylan Polk each had one rushing touchdown in the first quarter.

Both were inside the North Stanly 10-yard line.

In the second quarter, Smith scored Forest Hills' third rushing touchdown before senior wide receiver Jerel Bolder caught a 65-yard touchdown from senior quarterback Zach Dilworth.

Smith also recorded an interception against North Stanly with two minutes remaining in the first half. He said he was not pleased with the run game.

"We need to have more focus when it comes to protecting the ball," Smith said. "The passing game was pretty good (Monday). Wide receivers were very focused and locked in."

Bolder was also pleased with Forest Hills' offense and the playcall the coaching staff set up for them.

"When I saw things click, it made me realize that we still have a little work to do in the couple of days and get our bodies back healthy," Bolder said.

As North Stanly attempted their furious rally, Forest Hills senior kicker Sam Mullis kicked a 35-yard field goal in the fourth quarter to increase their lead.

Forest Hills, now 3-2, will get ready to host conference foe Monroe on Friday, Oct. 4. An upset against the Redhawks would give the Yellow Jackets their first win against Monroe since 2006.

"I know it would give us a lot of bragging rights," Bolder said.

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Helene leaves mountain community like no-man's land, firefighter says

October 1, 2024 | Enterprise, The (Martin County, NC) Author: Bobby Burns | Section: Across Carolina | 531 Words OpenURL Link

A former photographer for The Daily Reflector who is now a volunteer firefighter in western North Carolina said people need to know about the isolation and devastation brought by Hurricane Helene to rural mountain communities like his.

Will Stricklin moved to Bakersville in Mitchell County in northwest North Carolina in 2022 and joined the Mitchell County Volunteer Fire Department along with his wife about six months later. He has been on duty since the hurricane began pelting the region on Friday and was able to make his first calls out on Monday after an emergency cellular connection was established.

"Our 9-1-1 dispatch went down at 6 p.m. on Friday. The cells went out, too. We had no communications from Friday until today," said Stricklin, who also was able to send a few photos and video he shot during his department's early response in hopes of publicizing the damage. (He hopes to share more in the coming days.)

The small contingent of local first responders based in Bakersville — the Mitchell County seat and a town of 500 between Asheville and Boone — was cut off and worked to reach stranded neighbors with personal vehicles and chainsaws. Stricklin said microbursts from the storm snapped acres of pine trees and nearly 30 inches of rain swelled creeks into raging rivers.

The Iraq War combat veteran who covered news and sports and shot Scene Around party pics for the Reflector from 2011-17 compared the damage to scenes captured in images from World War I.

"It's like no-man's land where all the trees are snapped off at 10 to 15 feet high, where artillery burst above them. It's like that," he said. "It's like the craziest thing I've ever seen. I've done hurricane duty with the National Guard, I've been to war, and this is the craziest thing I've ever seen."

A dozen or so firefighters worked with sheriff's deputies and a handful of other first responders to check on the welfare of neighbors they knew were at risk since nobody could call for assistance. The firefighters cleared trees from roads so emergency crews could travel from one mountain community to another.

Many homes still remained inaccessible, however, and Monday was too early to guess about the extent of property damage and loss of life, Stricklin said.

State-coordinated search and rescue teams began the work of accounting for lives and damage on Monday when the first heavy vehicles arrived and a large helicopter dropped supplies in the middle of town, Stricklin said. People are missing but no deaths have been confirmed, he said.

Isolation caused tension and worry between Friday and Monday, he said.

"We didn't know what was coming, we had no idea," he said about the help they needed to rescue friends and neighbors, wishing it had been there sooner. When it came on Monday, "it just showed up."

He said he hopes sharing details and images from the disaster will focus state and federal authorities on the dire situation of a community that already struggles with poverty.

"There is help rolling in now, but this help's going to be needed for a long time," he said. "If there is any attention that can be brought, then let's get these people some long-term aid."

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