

Asphalt poured for new Macon Middle School track

October 23, 2024 | Franklin Press, The (NC)

Author: Thomas Sherrill reporter@thefranklinpress.com | Section: News | 763 Words

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To the delight of the school board members, asphalt was poured last week at the Macon Middle School track complex, signaling a big step forward in the project. "As of 11:05, they had rolled eight trucks out there," Macon County Schools Grounds and Facilities Director Todd Gibbs said at the Oct. 14 Macon County Board of Education meeting. The paving finished last week and it will take 28 days to cure. Gibbs said he wasn't sure about the last step, applying the polyurethane track surface, being done in November due to possible cold temperatures. That final step could be delayed until the spring, he said.

The MMS track and field project has been under construction since late July, starting several weeks late due to the track's builder, GeoServices, not having the manpower. GeoServices was awarded the MMS track project for \$930, 180 in May.

The project hit another snag in September due to organic material being found under the track. GeoServices said they wouldn't give the school system a 10-year warranty on the track unless the organic materials were removed to a certain depth. A \$130, 153 budget amendment to remove the "organic materials" was passed by the commissioners, but rain and Hurricane Helene halted work.

Highlands soccer field update Board member Hilary Wilkes wants to create a non-public committee to discuss ideas for the Highlands soccer field amongst the community.

The field is plagued by constant muddy conditions due to it being over an old lakebed and "swamp muck" several feet below. The muck clogged up a drainage system installed over a decade ago. The long-term solution is to dig down, remove the muck and replace it with a dry mixture. It's also the most expensive solution, with other cheaper options available.

Wilkes said there are a lot of different perspectives on what should be done and wants to get Highlands people together to talk about it sometime in the next week to 10 days. Wilkes wants to make sure the project is "thoroughly vetted before bringing it to the county commissioners."

Wilkes wishes that the meeting not be public, so it would just be her and other people, possibly including Town of Highlands elected officials and Commissioner John Shearl. Wilkes said a plan would be brought to the school liaison committee before going to the school board and/or the county commissioners. Wilkes said the school liaison committee has not met this month. The liaison committee meetings have previously not been publicized; however, in September, school board attorney John Henning pledged to notify local media of those meetings going forward.

Nantahala wastewater In the continuing saga of trying to replace the Nantahala School wastewater plant, a new request for qualifications asking for "what is feasible" will go out in December.

Gibbs told the board of the plan after two requests for qualifications for an underground septic system went unanswered, the most recent one in September.

The new request would ask for anything to replace the current above-ground wastewater system that discharges water. The current system is well past its life and is in danger of failing. A failure could close the school or force the county to spend a lot of money bringing in a pumping truck every day for several months. Board member Missy Evans, a Nantahala resident, said the school population grew this year and if the current system goes down, it would be at least six months before a new one is installed.

The board again expressed frustration at the project dragging on. January will mark two years since the school system declared the Nantahala wastewater system an emergency. The school board had a bid in 2023 from Black and Veetch for a replacement system, but the school liaison committee nixed the plan before it got to the county commissioners, with Commissioner Paul Higdon wanting an underground system instead. Wilkes asked about maybe getting a special allocation through the state since Nantahala is a geographically isolated school. Henning suggested asking Dogwood Health Trust for a grant.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Thomas Sherrill reporter@thefranklinpress.com, 'Asphalt poured for new Macon Middle School track', *Franklin Press, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 9A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C62D3C586289D8



Rants & Raves (Call 369-0568 after 5pm)

October 23, 2024 | Franklin Press, The (NC)

Section: News 832 Words

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A big thank you to all the 4-H ladies who are taking time out of their busy schedules to teach young people how to knit and sew! You are investing in our youth in a positive way, and it is much appreciated. ··· There are many reasons to be prepared in these uncertain times, and it was great to see the mayor of Highlands encouraging people to become preppers in his latest letter to the public. ··· The Board of County Commissioners is a threering circus and the com- missioner from Highlands is the ring master.

- ··· This message is for wildlife control, and for whoever it is that is poisoning deer, fox, skunks and anything else they can seem to poison with food in the Clarks Chapel area. It needs to be stopped. A deer and a doe both got poisoned no shots were seen on them; they were poisoned. So whoever is doing it, you'd best stop it, and I hope wildlife finds out who it is and gets 'em.
- ··· How is it that the Nantahala Library does not have a meeting room for the library to continue to conduct their programs like the children and adult art class, the very popular senior exercise class, and the ongoing Wednesday potluck lunches? There's no place for this to happen in the new building. Why is the extra space kept under lock and key? Please, commissioners, give us an answer to this.
- ··· The only unhinged thing around here is the push by certain county commissioners to weaken the floodplain ordinance and the water supply protection ordinance, after Helene has shown us how important those regulations really are. County commissioners were the ones being criticized for their lack of energy in securing the backup power source for our emergency service building, which has been flooded.
- ··· Several times on the Letter to the Editor page, there has been a reference to eggs being \$12 a dozen. I have never purchased them for anywhere near that price, nor would I, nor have I seen them for this price in the stores I patronize. I work too hard for my money not to be a smart, thrifty shopper.
- \cdots I am glad that they booted her out of the meeting. I know this lady. And guess what I'm gonna go vote today. Yay!
- ··· Just what Franklin needs another vape shop.
- ··· Why would local medical providers on Iotla Street prevent tourists from parking in their lots during PumpkinFest? That doesn't seem welcoming at a time when Macon County needs a boost from tourism.
- ··· What's with all the illegal campaign signs? Signs in the public right-of-way are limited to two by three feet and 42 inches above the ground. Candidates, remove your illegal signs. Why should I vote for someone who cannot follow a simple law?
- ··· Be careful who your hire to do work for you. Just be aware.
- ··· It's 20-plus years later, millions of dollars, numerous contractors, and still no hospice house in Maple Street. Will we ever have one? What's going on?
- ··· Why is it that the bar for her is so high and the bar for him doesn't exist? He really could shoot someone on Fifth Avenue and his supporters would still worship him. I doubt if he will ever be held accountable for his atrocities.

- ··· Besides certain politicians' unwillingness to prioritize border security and inflation, Democrats believe they have the moral high ground to control disinformation on the internet. This is a blatant attack on First Amendment rights that cannot be tolerated.
- ··· There's a reason why Republicans attack history, science, education and journalism. It's because even the slightest bit of critical thinking or historical context exposes them for what they really are.

The reason people believe conspiracy theories is because so many have eventually come true. Local writers and politicians should focus less on being smug about conspiracy theories and more on the victims of flooding instead.

- ··· I'm so perplexed at all the Trump signs I see. Do these people ever listen to the TV about all the disgusting things he says, or are they just too embarrassed to admit they were fooled by him? It would be so dangerous for him to be elected.
- ··· Currently, I have seen more Trump signs for his election to President than I have seen street signs.
- ··· Vice President Kamala Harris wants to do away with our right to own and bear arms. It's much like that old saying that guns kill like spoons made Rosie O'Donnell obese. ··· The proposed Constitutional amendment on our ballot is unnecessary. The North Carolina Constitution already says that persons born in the United States or naturalized persons may vote in North Carolina. Since 1924, every state has had a law allowing only citizens to vote, in the results of a federal law preventing noncitizens from voting. What a waste of time and money. Doesn't our General Assembly have better things to do? Rants & Raves Call 369-0568 after 5 p.m.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

'Rants & Raves (Call 369-0568 after 5pm)', *Franklin Press, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 1A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C62D3C241CB488



Football outduels Tuscola

October 23, 2024 | Franklin Press, The (NC) Author: Will Woolever sports@thefranklinpress.com| Section: Sports | 881 Words Page: 4B OpenURL Link

Panther football remains unbeaten following a game with their best opponent yet. Just four days after routing North Henderson in the Panther Pit's final Homecoming, on Tuesday, Oct. 15 the team traveled to Tuscola for a tougher test. In a 35-21 win Franklin improved to 6-0 overall, alone atop the Mountain Seven standings at 3-0 in the conference.

Anderson Terrell and Brock Bradley shot out of the gate for the Panthers, connecting on a 42-yard completion on the second play from scrimmage. Facing third-and-18 from Tuscola's 29 Braydon Hervey kept the chains moving, catching a short Terrell pass to the left and outrunning defenders to the 5. On secondand-goal from the 4 Terrell capped one of his best drives of the season, following blockers to his right for a touchdown carry. Franklin's defense stood tall on Tuscola's first drive, getting tight coverage from Braylen Dezarn on third-and-8 to force a three-and-out. Minutes later Terrell and Hervey combined for another huge third-and-long play, when the sophomore found the senior wide open for a 53-yard score. Daniel Riddle's extra point put Franklin up 14-0 just seven minutes in.

After a third-down sack from Avery Carpenter forced another Tuscola punt, Franklin's offense went back to work at their own 39, getting two key thirddown plays from Addix Sutton to move the chains. On fourth-and-6 from the Mountie 35 Sutton came through in the clutch once again, following a convoy of blockers up the middle for a screen pass touchdown reception.

Down 21-0 Tuscola finally gained some traction, mounting a nine-play, 67-yard touchdown drive to cut their deficit. The Mounties' defense carried their momentum into the next drive, applying tight coverage on a deep pass attempt to Dezarn to force a three-and-out.

Tuscola went for broke on the first play of their ensuing drive, completing a 46-yard pass up the right side to the Panther 12. They found the end zone on the next play to cut Franklin's lead to 21-14.

With five minutes left in the half Tuscola's defense stood tall again, forcing another Panther three-and-out. Junior Aiden Pitts soon returned the favor however, intercepting a Mountie pass on the drive's first play at his own 40. Having been in danger moments earlier of watching their three-score lead evaporate, Franklin defended their advantage until halftime.

Both defenses stayed sharp throughout the third quarter, trading third-down stops including a deep pass defensed from Lance Parker and a sack from Maveric Waldroop. Terrell kicked Franklin's offense back into gear early in the fourth, gaining 20 yards with a quarterback keeper on the first play of the drive. He added completions to Dezarn and Hervey to set up firstand-goal at the 10, then kept the ball again for a nine-yard touchdown run moments later.

Down 28-14 with just seven minutes to play, Tuscola's offense doubled their efforts on the next drive, completing a 37-yard pass to the Panther 3. Despite a first-and-goal run stop from Hervey and Parker, the Mounties scored on second-and-goal with 4:36 remaining.

Terrell stayed cool under pressure on Franklin's next drive, finding Parker past the line to gain on a crucial thirdand-8. On secondand-7 moments later Sutton broke the Mounties' backs, finding a hole between right guard Bryson Gibbs and right tackle Mac Sinclair for a nearuntouched 60-yard touchdown run.

Down 35-21 with just over two minutes to play, Tuscola mounted a desperate drive from their own 31. After excellent passes defensed from Dezarn and Hervey, senior Aiden Sizemore put the final nail in the coffin,

intercepting a Mountie pass at his own 45. Franklin's offense then ran out the clock for the conference win.

"I saw a great fight. I saw us beat a good team - a team that stretched us in ways we hadn't been stretched this year, with them throwing the ball down the field and everything else," said head coach Josh Brooks after the game. "We got pushed in a threeday prep, but we answered it and made the plays that we had to make when we had to make them to win the game. I'm proud of our guys - just a great road win. This right here, what we call 'Between the concrete' is a tough place to win, so any time you can come here and win it's a big deal."

"It feels really good," said senior Josh McGaha. "We fought really hard. It was a long game, and a really tough battle. They threw on us and had a pretty successful few drives, but it turned out really good."

As part of a dominant defensive line along with Waldroop, Carpenter, Caryll Cook, Thai Carver and others, McGaha has played a key role in Franklin's success. Eying an unbeaten regular season with just three conference games remaining, he credited the unit's success to a simple formula. "Playing technique, being coached up, and keeping that want-to-get-better drive," he said. "Just really being coachable, and wanting to do more to get better." Having modified their schedule after missing two weeks due to Hurricane Helene, the Panthers had a long break following Tuesday's game, with 10 days to prepare for a trip to West Henderson Oct. 25. The 6-0 Panthers ended the week as the fourth-ranked team in the 3A West Region.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Will Woolever sports@thefranklinpress.com, 'Football outduels Tuscola', *Franklin Press, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 4B https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C62D3C70FE4068



Letters to the Editor

October 23, 2024 | Franklin Press, The (NC) Section: Letters | 1120 Words

Page: 5A OpenURL Link

Will you really vote for a convicted felon? Several weeks ago I passed a man wearing a MAGA cap and was inclined to ask him, "Are you really going to vote for a felon?" Without a word, I continued my journey. With the impending vote for our Chief Executive, President of the U.S., it is time to speak publicly, directly with conviction, in a civil manner, about the candidate who has been convicted of 34 felonies by a New York jury. As a reminder, Trump was charged with 34 counts of falsification of business records with intent to defraud in the first degree - a felony in New York. The case has often been referred to as the "hush money case." In addition to Michael Cohen's testimony, there was documentary evidence as to the method of repayment to Cohen in the amount of \$130, 000 paid to Stormy Daniels in exchange for her silence regarding an affair between her (Daniels) and Trump. The jury, in convicting Trump, was also required to find that Trump intended to "commit another crime." The other crime as concealment of the affair from the public, or more specifically, from those who voted for president. Also remember that Trump abandoned his constitutional right to speak in his own defense at trial. Neither time nor space permits the consideration of many disqualifying issues such as the following: Trump's interminable lies; Trump's utter disdain for military personnel and their families; the statements of numerous advisors and cabinet members from Trump's administration who tell us that he is dangerously unfit for office. Our democratic allies are looking forward to continued global leadership from the United States. Briefly, the following are our principal allies: Finland, the Baltic states; the Scandinavian countries; central and western Europe; Mexico; Canada and significant numbers of countries in Central and South America; in the northern Pacific Ocean - Japan, South Korea and Taiwan; in the southern Pacific Ocean - The Coral and Tasman Seas, Australia and New Zealand; and India in the Bay of Bengal. These countries, from many reports, do not want a second Trump administration. Perhaps it is Trump's admiration for "strong leaders," tyrants, dictators and thugs and their tendencies to flatter (and manipulate Trump?) that persuade our allies.

I say loudly, with conviction, to all within hearing and to those who have read the words above: Are you really going to vote for Trump, a convicted felon. Milo R. Beran Franklin Make an educated vote How did America get to the political climate we are in? Starting about 40 years ago, the Supreme Court case Citizens United allowed virtually unlimited political contributions permitting the rich/corporations to influence politics. They first used it to cause distrust in government and then to segment the media into right and left. Because of the natural inclination of citizens to watch media that already supports their view (confirmation bias), Americans became polarized and intolerant of opposing views. Next came the boldface lies, misinformation, and conspiracy theories that, when repeated often enough, somehow resembled truth. Though manipulated by media, Americans knew things were amiss (rich became insanely richer as the middle class suffered). However, a strange alliance between the rich, evangelicals, media-misinformed, and conforming neighbors (bonded by the strong need to belong) was cemented with money and misinformation. The manipulative playbook that was used 90 years ago still works today: extreme nationalism, hatred of minorities/elites, macho image, ignoring facts, victimhood, urban prejudice, and idealized history. Creating fear and hate, corrupting/vilifying institutions, creating an intimidating cult, and claiming to be the savior are such a leader's favorite tools. Since the dichotomy is so firmly entrenched, how can we patch up the rift in America? Unless Americans become more informed (curiosity), exhibit more empathy toward others (understanding), and demand integrity (fact-checking), we will be stuck in a failing spiral with no end in sight, and democratic. institutions will go the way of Russia, China, and Middle East countries. Educate yourself before you vote! John Shackleton Topton & Atlanta, Georgia Turning attention to presidential race Even as WNC is recovering from Hurricane Helene's destructive forces and much energy is rightfully being directed there, we have to turn our attention to another critical matter: the presidential election.

Our people are proactive to respond to critical needs and so much lies in the outcome of this election that we have to respond in kind. So here is a question to consider: If you had an urgent health issue that needed surgery and you

had to choose between a surgeon with an excellent success rate but perhaps overbearing personality (in your view), or a more mellow surgeon whose history is unsuccessful, who would you choose? I think most of us would choose the first and overlook the personality flaws. I believe we are faced with that very choice in the election coming up on Nov. 5. Though, unfortunately, a lot of Americans dislike Trump (and he has been the focused target of his enemies), an honest assessment of his ability to run this country will show that he was successful at it. I agree with Debra Lab's letter to the editor on Oct. 9 that we were far better off with Trump at the helm than we are today. She listed in detail why: lower inflation, lower interest rates, lower food and gas prices, lower energy prices, more money in her pocket. I just want to add that it is unrealistic that Kamala Harris will solve the problems Joe Biden created and she cheered on. For example, under Trump we had 1.4% inflation; we now have over 9%. She says she wants to support the border patrol, yet she is unwilling to tighten the border. As a result, there has been a rise in drug addiction. The uncontrolled entrance of millions of unvetted immigrants, including criminals and known terrorists, to our country is a huge financial burden we cannot afford and a security threat we cannot risk. Grocery prices are 20% higher today than when Trump governed. She wants to tax corporations, but they in turn will pass the costs on to the consumer, so in the end, the little guy pays the price. And her proposed programs will add trillions to the already unsustainable federal deficit. There is a saying "The proof is in the pudding." It would be wise to go with Trump who has a proven success record. The right choice is critical to preserving what is left of our Democracy. I pray we all choose wisely. Loretta Hastings Franklin Send Letters to the Editor to editor@thefranklinpress.com Letters are published in the order they are received. Letters should be no more than 500 words and cannot contain offensive, racist or hateful language.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

'Letters to the Editor', Franklin Press, The (online), 23 Oct 2024 5A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C62D3C414CFE18>



Major western NC tourist site to reopen next month - Biltmore Estate grounds ravaged by flooding

October 23, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Jacob Biba and Christopher Cann; USA TODAY NETWORK | Section: News | 446 Words Page: A9 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – More than three weeks after remnants of Hurricane Helene ravaged western North Carolina, Biltmore Estate, one of the area's most popular tourist attractions and largest employers, announced it will reopen on Nov. 2.

Helene's historic flooding ravaged portions of the Biltmore grounds, including its entrance and multiple low-lying buildings, the Citizen Times previously reported. Several of the estate's animals were killed in the storm, according to a statement the estate released on social media, adding the vast majority of the animals were safe and accounted for.

Many of the attraction's other facilities, including the Gilded Age Biltmore House, the conservatory, winery, gardens and the estate's hotels, received minimal or no damage.

The reopening, which was announced in a company statement, will mark the beginning of the holiday season for the 8,000-acre estate, which employs approximately 2,400 people.

While the Biltmore House, restaurants and other estate attractions will be open to visitors, the company is still cleaning up roads and wooded areas ravaged by the deadly storm. The company said its trails and outdoor adventure center will remain closed until further notice.

"We are incredibly grateful for the outpouring of support for our community and the determination of our first responders, utility workers and community volunteers," Bill Cecil Jr., president and CEO of Biltmore, said in a statement. "As recovery unfolds, welcoming guests back to Biltmore not only means we can open, but also brings critical support to our region's economy to aid area employees, local businesses and friends."

No storm-related deaths were reported among staff, Marissa Jamison, a Biltmore spokesperson, said in an Oct. 19 email to the Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA TODAY Network. All staff have been accounted for, though several employees lost their homes in the storm, Jamison said.

Some are also out of work, at least temporarily.

Citing "a significant decline in tourism that is expected to persist in the near term," Biltmore, one of the largest employers in Buncombe County, furloughed an unspecified number of employees, according to Jamison.

But the furlough is temporary, she said, and staff members will return to work "in phases after reopening."

Helene made landfall along the Gulf Coast of Florida on Sept. 26 before it barreled inland, carving an immense trail of destruction across the Southeast. The storm wrought billions of dollars in damages and killed at least 228 people, making it the deadliest hurricane since Katrina in 2005.

Jacob Biba reports for Asheville Citizen Times; Christopher Cann reports for USA TODAY.

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Jacob Biba and Christopher Cann, USA TODAY NETWORK, 'Major western NC tourist site to reopen next month - Biltmore Estate grounds ravaged by flooding', *Gaston Gazette, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 A9 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C636E6F2623D38



Western North Carolina - Animal hospital still accepting donations

October 23, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Chloe Collins; Gaston Gazette | Section: News | 464 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

In the week following Hurricane Helene's destruction in Western North Carolina, a Dallas veterinary hospital began working to send pet supplies and other donations to the impacted areas.

Dr. Caitlin Rubow and other staff members at Applewood Animal Hospital collected several loads of supplies, and they are not done yet, according to Applewood employee Renee Beasley.

Immediately after the devastating event, Rubow said, people were mostly thinking of the immediate danger posed to families in WNC.

After a couple of days, though, they started to realize that the people who have lost everything may have been able to save their pets, she said.

Rubow said she believes that for those who did not lose them, holding onto their pets might be giving them a little hope.

In light of the destruction, Rubow said herself and other staff at Applewood, like many other businesses in Gaston County, felt moved to collect items for donation.

Rubow started by taking multiple loads of supplies to the Lincolnton airport where they were put on planes for distribution to the heavily impacted areas, she said.

While searching online for opportunities to connect with other veterinarians in the affected areas, Rubow said she came across a post created by a veterinarian in Louisiana who was looking for someone in the Gaston area to take animal supplies and deliver them to WNC.

While Applewood never limited people to only donating animal supplies, Rubow said they began to focus on those donations around the same time, so she reached out and offered to take the items.

On Oct. 12, she and her parents loaded a truck and trailer with the items and drove them to the Western North Carolina Regional Livestock Center, she said.

The family waited in line for hours along with others dropping off supplies and some picking up what they needed, according to Rubow.

"It was a beautiful thing to see, so many strangers ... all came together," she said.

Applewood staff recently drove their fourth load of supplies directly to a drop-off center in Asheville, where they learned that the needs are shifting toward accommodating cold weather, she said.

According to Beasley, Applewood is shifting their focus to include items that will help keep people warm.

They ask that people donate fencing supplies, generators, warm clothing, and other items that can be used to heat homes or keep people warm ahead of colder weather.

She added that it is hard to contact some of the veterinary clinics in the impacted areas to find out which ones are

still able to operate, but the clinic is grateful for the community support allowing them to aid in relief efforts.

"We're still willing to collect ... we're not going to turn anyone away," Beasley said.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Chloe Collins, Gaston Gazette, 'Western North Carolina - Animal hospital still accepting donations', *Gaston Gazette, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 A1 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C636E70CDAC198



Vice President Harris campaigns in Greenville

October 23, 2024 | Goldsboro News-Argus, The (NC) Author: Janet Conner-Knox News Argus correspondent | Section: Mo | 966 Words OpenURL Link

GREENVILLE — Marsha Lyndell and Shenelle Howard met each other in the long winding line, waiting to get into Minges Coliseum on the East Carolina University campus to see Vice President Kamala Harris on Oct. 13.

The venue, which has 8,000 seats, was full and there were more people than seats.

People got in line as early as 10:30 a.m. Harris spoke for 24 minutes around 4:20 p.m. But those who came did not seem to mind waiting for hours and they sang and danced as they waited.

Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, spent much of the weekend talking to North Carolina residents about her plans for the country, if she is elected president. North Carolina is one of seven states that have almost equal support from both parties, making them battleground or swing states. Harris and former President Donald Trump have concentrated a lot of their attention on these states, campaigning heavily as Election Day approaches a few weeks away.

It turns out, both Lyndell and Howard wanted to hear Harris speak and hopefully give them an idea who they would vote for.

Lyndell, a lifelong Republican, voted for Trump the first time he ran. She voted for Biden during the last presidential race and is unsure what to do this time around.

"I am not happy with Republicans and the things they are willing to say. I don't know when my party got so extreme in their views. No decency., " she said. "I am not happy with Democrats, either. I just don't know what to do."

Howard, a lifelong Democrat, said she no longer believes Democrats will keep promises.

"There are heads of households here who still make \$8 an hour and have the same burdens anybody else has, but not enough money to live," she said. "There is no housing for the working poor and many of them are African-American women. Nobody speaks to us, but they want our vote."

If they do not hear what they need, both Lyndell and Howard say they may not vote for anyone for president but will vote on the rest of the candidates down the ticket. For example, both favor Democrat Josh Stein over Republican Mark Robinson in the governor's race.

It is the undecided voter like Lyndell and Howard that can turn North Carolina and other swing states either blue or red.

As Harris spoke, she began by talking about how the damage from recent hurricanes is a nonpartisan issue, saying her prayers are with everyone who has been impacted by the storm.

"I am focused on those states and those officials, both Republican and Democrat, to let them know we will be with you every step of the way," Harris said. "In times like this, we stand together as one nation. That is who we are."

She warned the enthusiastic crowd, the race to the presidency will be a tight race.

"We have hard work ahead of us, but we love hard work," Harris said. "We will win."

Harris took the time to point out the differences between her and Trump, her Republican opponent, saying their visions are very different.

"One — his, is focused on the past," Harris said. "The other, ours, (is) focused on the future."

Working families across the country, by bringing down the cost of living, investing in small businesses and reproductive choices for women, is what Harris said her campaign is focused on.

"None of that matters for Donald Trump,' she said. "Instead from him, we are hearing from that same old tired playbook."

Harris said Trump has no idea how to help middle class families but is only focused on himself. She pointed out how all of the presidents have done sit down interviews with CBS "60 Minutes" and released their medical health reports from doctors. She pointed out that Trump has not done either and challenged him to do so.

"He is unwilling to meet again for us to debate," she said.

Harris said it makes people wonder if Trump's unwillingness to debate again would show people he is weak and unfaithful.

"For these reasons and so many more, it is time to turn the page and chart a new way forward," Harris said.

Harris promised to work for all Americans by keeping the Affordable Care Act, and having a \$6,000 credit for families with children. She also promised a tax credit for people who are caregivers for family members.

Harris pointed out throughout her career she has only had one client, and that is the people. She believes it is why she has support from Republicans and Libertarians in this race.

While she says she has nonpartisan support, Democratic presidential candidates have not won in North Carolina since 2008. Additionally, Harris' poll numbers are down in comparison to both President Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton at the same time in October during their races.

Harris acknowledges the challenge, but told her supporters they must work for a North Carolina win.

U.S. Rep. Don Davis, D-N.C., also spoke and encouraged those in attendance to vote early.

"The road to the White House goes through eastern North Carolina," Davis said. "We can do it. We can win."

N.C. Sen. Rachel Hunt, a Democrat who represents Mecklenburg County and daughter of former governor Jim Hunt, was also at the rally and asked voters for their support in her bid for lieutenant governor.

Harris arrived in North Carolinaon Oct. 12 and met with Black leaders at The Pit Authentic Barbecue restaurant, in Raleigh, before she joined volunteers who were there to pack bandages, baby formula, baby wipes, pain relief pills and other items for victims of Hurricane Helene, which tore through western North Carolina last month.

On Sunday, Oct. 13, the vice president spoke during a church service at Koinonia Christian Center in Greenville prior to the campaign rally on the ECU campus.

The weekend trip was her second to the battleground state after it was struck by Hurricane Helene.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Janet Conner-Knox News Argus correspondent, 'Vice President Harris campaigns in Greenville', *Goldsboro News-Argus, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?

p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C63AD49A3D2DA8>



They lost their homes to - Helene - but still want to stay

October 23, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)

Author: Lexi Solomon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1318 Words

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Avery County, N.C. In the three weeks since Hurricane Helene tore through Western North Carolina, it's not yet clear how many of the more than 3 million people in its path can go home, in some cases to communities where their families have lived for generations.

As residents in mountain communities survey the destruction, shock has given way to anger and frustration for some. People are staying where they can, some even in tents, at a time when temperatures are dropping. Yet there's resilience in the face of the seemingly insurmountable.

Some Avery County residents interviewed by The News & Observer still aren't certain of the full scale or cost of damage done to their homes.

Joyce and David Lyons lived in their Avery County mobile home on the Elk River since 1992, then watched it bob downstream like a toy after barely escaping with their lives.

"It just looked like a child had picked it up," David Lyons said while sitting outside the American Red Cross shelter on Shady Street in Newland.

They lost all possessions except for David's 60-pound oxygen tank, which Joyce hauled out during their escape, and the clothes on their backs. Not even Joyce's engagement ring survived the storm.

With the road to their property destroyed, the couple hadn't returned since Helene. They stayed with a neighbor for two nights, then left there on a raft manned by a swift water rescue team.

After that, they called the shelter their home, then a motel in Banner Elk paid for by FEMA. It wasn't easy being in an environment where you have so little control, especially after losing so much.

The shelter's bathroom cleaning products aggravated David's COPD, leaving him coughing many nights.

A FEMA worker floated the idea of buying a camper. But there's no way to tell what they'll be able to purchase until FEMA can assess the damage to their trailer - wherever it ended up - and calculate how much aid they'll receive.

They hoped it would happen within days, Lyons said, though assessments were briefly delayed earlier this month after workers had to pull out of the field because of threats.

'I don't understand it'

For Paul Laws, 52, there's no question as to what he and his family want, but it's unclear whether they can have it.

Though their little blue house on the street named after his father is still standing in Avery County, Helene rendered it unlivable. Laws, a former prison guard and law enforcement officer, shared the home with his wife, a pharmacist at a local hospital, and their 15-year-old daughter.

The powerful waters of the Elk River carried his teenager's brand-new car, a gift for when she got her license, and his beloved pick-up truck 500 yards down the gorge, crushing them among trees and rocks. Those same waters swept through the home Laws built from scratch in 2016, taking furniture and treasured belongings with it.

Initial assessments indicate the home's foundation, flooring, insulation, drywall, cabinetry and trim all need to be repaired or replaced, Laws said. The family also lost most of their furniture to the flood.

Disappointment that aid from FEMA won't cover repairs to all the damage done to homes is adding to the anger and frustration, say some in Avery County.

"We're barely going to get \$31,000," Paul Laws said he was told.

"FEMA is here to help; the man we had was really nice, and it's not the FEMA representatives that are the problem. It's the regulations that are the problem," Laws said.

Laws said he can't understand why North Carolina's members of Congress aren't rushing to increase funding for FEMA, which has provided \$129 million in assistance to North Carolinians as of Monday.

He reached out to Rep. Virginia Foxx, who grew up in Avery County and lives in Banner Elk, more than a week ago, he said, but never heard back.

"I don't understand it, and why our representatives and legislators haven't said a word about more FEMA funding is beyond me," he said.

'This is where their entire lives are'

Heather Bender, 42, didn't lose her home, but knows many in Avery County who did, including five of her coworkers at Wheels Contracting. Since the storm hit, she's handed out supplies at Spear Country Store in Newland, and what she hears from community members has been consistent.

"They're gonna stay," Bender said. "This is where their entire lives are. This is where generations of their family have been."

In a county with a 14.8% poverty rate, it's sometimes not so much a choice as a reality, she noted.

"When they say evacuate or go somewhere else, these people don't have that option," Bender said. "They don't have that luxury. They can't go and get a hotel somewhere else."

And even if they could, many wouldn't want to.

David and Joyce Lyons, for example, are intent on staying in their community where they've lived for most of their 39-year relationship.

"I want to go back to Elk River," David Lyons said. "I love it down there."

To try to help people return to their homes, locals and many others from beyond the storm's path have pitched in. In Avery County, a van filled with volunteers from Michigan crossed the county, offering to help people clean up.

Laws is working with the Wake Forest-based Living Stone Building Company, which is soliciting donations to help his family repair their home for free.

That kind of generosity has been a balm as Laws and others in Avery County combat the uncertainty of the future.

"That's who I would really like to thank. God bless them, because they didn't hesitate," Paul Laws said.

Stevie Thomas, 42, lost the tiny home she shared with her boyfriend in Minneapolis. She works at the Baxter IV fluids factory in North Cove, which was damaged in the storm, keeping her and her coworkers out of work for

several weeks.

The company has paid her and other workers, she said. But instead of spending her time looking for housing, she's been organizing the handout of winter coats, portable heaters and other needed things at a makeshift distribution center that three local churches set up in her town.

"This community is amazing," Thomas said. "Everybody comes together and works together."

"It's our town," she said, tearing up. "We grew up here."

Grieving what was lost before Helene hit

Looking forward, Paul Laws is frustrated by what happened before the most extreme local flooding in his lifetime.

Flood insurance would have provided additional financial help, and Laws had it for several years before it became inaccessible to him, he said. He canceled after payments skyrocketed from \$500 to \$2,700 a year around 2019, he said.

"I tried my best to insure it, I did, but we could not afford it," Laws said. "It went up so much."

As of June, only 17 households in Laws' ZIP code had flood insurance, and just 155 households in Avery County were insured, FEMA data shows.

"Considering the worst hurricanes we ever had were Hugo and the one in '04, [where] the water was 40 yards from ever even getting close to our house, it was nothing to worry about at that point," Laws said. "It was really nothing to worry about until now."

State flood plain maps sat his property in a spot with only a 1% annual chance of flooding.

"I think nobody really knew just how bad this was gonna be," Laws said.

News & Observer photojournalist Ethan Hyman contributed to this reporting.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Lexi Solomon, Staff Writer, 'They lost their homes to Helene - but still want to stay', *Herald-Sun, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 1A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C667DC1E2A8CA8>



Western NC's largest DMV driver's license office reopens three weeks after Helene

October 23, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Richard Stradling; Staff Writer | Section: News | 278 Words Page: 8A OpenURL Link

Western North Carolina's largest state driver's license office reopened Monday for the first time since the remnants of Hurricane Helene blew through the region over three weeks ago.

The DMV office on Patton Avenue in Asheville closed after the storm because of a lack of water. Helene badly damaged the city's utilities, leaving tens of thousands of customers without water for drinking, bathing, cooking and flushing.

The DMV office has water service again, though the city's boil advisory means customers and employees can't drink it, said agency spokesman Marty Homan.

"But you can flush toilets and wash your hands," Homan said, which is good enough to reopen the office.

Two DMV driver's license offices remain closed because of the storm. The Burnsville office in Yancey County still does not have water, Homan said, while the part-time office in Spruce Pine in Mitchell County needs new flooring before it can reopen.

On Sept. 27, the day Helene moved through Western North Carolina, 25 driver's license offices and 28 privately-run license plate agencies were closed. Only one of the license plate agency offices, in Marshall, remains closed.

The Asheville DMV office in Buncombe County is by far the largest and busiest in the region and was the only one operating in the county of 275,000 residents. A smaller express office on Tunnel Road across town was already closed while the building's roof and HVAC system are replaced.

The DMV has asked for authorization to waive late fees and provide no-cost duplicate licenses and IDs for people who lost theirs in the storm, Homan said. The agency is waiting for Gov. Roy Cooper to issue an executive order to make that possible, he said.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Richard Stradling, Staff Writer, 'Western NC's largest DMV driver's license office reopens three weeks after Helene', *Herald-Sun, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 8A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C667DBD7CEC9A0>



Helene destroys Helen's, Bakersville's oldest restaurant

October 23, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Melissa Oyler; Staff Writer | Section: Living | 1722 Words

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Bakersville When the brand-new owners of Helen's Restaurant, Donna Stafford and her mom, Mary Stafford, posted a sneak peek of the Bakersville diner's remodel in July 2023 on Facebook, they couldn't have known that just over a year later, it would all be gone.

Of course they couldn't. None of us could.

Bakersville is a small town - population 1,757, per the 2020 census - in Western North Carolina. Its nickname is the "Gateway to Roan Mountain," and it is the county seat of Mitchell County.

The town has experienced flooding before - including the infamous Flood of 1977 and the Flood of 1998 - but it had never experienced anything like it would with the devastation of Hurricane Helene.

Decades of memories at Helen's Restaurant

There are only a few restaurants in Bakersville, and Helen's was its oldest.

In our first conversation, Donna couldn't remember which year it opened - she would have to look at the newspaper article framed on the restaurant's wall to confirm - and that's not an option anymore.

She then texted the daughter of the owners who sold her the restaurant (yes, Helen's daughter), who confirmed the restaurant opened in 1956. The Mitchell County Historical Society said it started as a drive-in.

Helen Hopson, along with her husband, Wiley, owned and operated the restaurant from 1961 until she died in 1996. It was a town fixture for decades - and for a time, it was the only eatery in town, Donna said.

Helen's sits along NC-226, one of those winding mountain roads surrounded by lush green fields, houses on hills and peaks off in the distance. Take a left at the flashing light in downtown if you're coming in from Spruce Pine, then you've found it - it's on your left.

Behind the restaurant, a walking path runs along Cane Creek, which feeds into North Toe River. It's part of the town's Creekwalk project, which also includes a playground, sports fields and more.

Renovating a relic

Donna and Mary purchased Helen's Restaurant in 2023, then got to work.

"We completely remodeled the restaurant with focus on maintaining a cozy, small-town community vibe, keeping the counter barstools," Donna said.

They were putting in 16-hour days. Mary is 80. And Donna, who is 60, became ill just before the restaurant's reopening. She was diagnosed with Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Lyme disease, meningitis, Bell's palsy, myocarditis and other co-infections.

But all the labor felt worth it. The Stafford family goes back several generations in Mitchell County. Donna was born here; her brothers, too. It wasn't just the town's legacy they were investing in - it was personal.

Helen's reopened in August 2023

With the community cheerleading their efforts the whole way, they reopened the restaurant in August 2023. A Rhododendron Dining Room with a collage wall celebrated Bakersville's annual Rhododendron Festival. A black bear on a clock proclaimed the restaurant was "on mountain time." Joe Cole, a Mitchell County native who worked at Helen's in 1965, gifted the restaurant a signed dulcimer that he made using locally sourced wood.

For the next 13+ months, the restaurant served up hearty meals, including impressively sized double cheeseburgers, hot ham and cheese sandwiches and Southern chopped steak. Breakfast was available on the weekends, and Saturdays were for live music.

At times, Helen's needed to close unexpectedly due to staff illness, including Donna's. These short-notice closings were posted to the restaurant's Facebook page, and customers would comment with well wishes and shares, getting the word out.

"We were just past our first year of operations and were not making a profit yet, putting every dime towards salaries and food vendors," Donna said.

The week of the hurricane

On Wednesday, Sept. 25, a powerful storm came through. "The basement flooded like never before," Donna said.

Photos of the damage show freezers knocked on their sides, food spilled out and covered in sludge. A crumpled cardboard container in a puddle on the floor of the basement displays "KEEP FROZEN" in block letters under a layer of cracked mud. Fresh broccoli florets in bags surround other food, including a bread-and-butter pickles jar. Boxes lie everywhere, mud lines are on the walls and splattered on the side of the stairs. A mop bucket has surrendered, turned on its side and coated in the slushy mess.

The basement flooded 4-5 feet that day, Donna said. "We obliviously closed Thursday and spent the day throwing away the lost food and scooping out as much water and mud as possible."

When she went to bed Thursday night, she knew Helene was on its way, and she figured there would be more flooding. "I was exhausted and already devastated from our losses from Wednesday's storm."

She pulled up her restaurant security cameras from home, where she watched helplessly as the basement flooded, again. She watched her freezers fall over, again. The outside cameras showed the water even higher than Wednesday.

She watched until she couldn't watch anymore - until 5:30 a.m. Friday, Sept. 27, when her power went out.

Then Hurricane Helene arrived.

Hurricane Helene

Hurricane Helene was particularly hard on Bakersville. Roads were decimated. Tornadoes ripped through the area. Flash floods destroyed everything the water could reach. The park was demolished and so were the playground and soccer fields. Downtown was completely flooded, along with the businesses there.

And Donna was trapped in her home, which had also been damaged in the storm. "I had no way of getting my car out and no means of communication."

Three days later, her brother was able to make his way to her. He had stopped to check on the restaurant and showed her photos of its damage. A wall of the restaurant's lower level was gone, along with six freezers, all the

food, a washer/dryer and a walk-in cooler.

Even the supports holding up the two-story building were gone.

Three days after that, Donna was finally able to get her car out and go see her businesses - and her town - for herself.

"It was shocking. It still is. My shock set in even before I arrived at the restaurant. Roads are gone, forests are no longer forests as trees are all lying down in a tangled mess. Electricity poles are broken in half and lying on top of what is left of homes, buildings and roads."

And without its support beams, the restaurant's building could collapse at any time.

On Oct. 5, Helen's Restaurant was officially condemned. "We are no longer allowed to enter the building. Praying for us all," the Staffords wrote on Facebook.

Donna said inspectors told her she will never be allowed inside again - it's not safe. That means the newspaper article about Helen's and its opening date will forever hang on the wall, but with no more diners to read it while waiting for their orders of biscuits & gravy or chicken & dumplings.

Donna's nephew started a Go Fund Me campaign for the Stafford women, asking for a modest \$5,000 to help them recoup just a tiny bit of their life savings, which they had poured into the restaurant renovation just a little over a year ago. "Hopefully in the future, they will be able to rebuild but unfortunately it will not be in this same building," her nephew wrote.

Some of the town's other local restaurants were also damaged or closed temporarily due to lack of power and water, including Mammie's Breakfast Barn and Southern Ridge Cafe. Bonnie & Clyde's, which has been open since the 1970s and is also on NC-226 closer to North Toe River, experienced flooding. "The restaurant is still standing; however, the cleanup needed is overwhelming," its Go Fund Me campaign stated.

What happens next at Helen's Restaurant?

The truth is, Donna told us doesn't know what will happen next.

If she gets anything from insurance, she told us it may only be enough to pay off her mortgage, she said.

But even if she could rebuild Helen's Restaurant, it could not be on the same property, she said. What would that look like? She would need funds to buy land, build a new restaurant, purchase new equipment, replace lost food ...

And on top of all of the damage: "I am very ill so not sure how the future looks."

Right now, Donna is spending her days trying to cope with the day-to-day tasks that Helene made difficult, including figuring out a massive amount of paperwork, all while battling her illnesses. She had no power, water or internet until a few days ago. She communicated with CharlotteFive from the fire department or a showering and laundry facility.

"There are times when I begin to let anxiety reach onto my soul," she said. "How am I going to survive financially? I can't work a normal job somewhere else now because I'm bedridden some days and won't be able to show up for another job. How will I get my medications? How will I pay for my doctor appointments? How will I pay my rent, electric, Wi-Fi, phone, car insurance, gas or food?

But right now, the neighbors, like in all of the small towns across Western North Carolina, are taking care of each other. On week one, a woman who was new to the area walked up to Donna's house to check on her, which is how they met for the first time. They became fast friends.

This is a community, among many other communities, that have lost so much.

And in Bakersville, North Carolina, one of those permanent losses may ultimately end up being the 68-year-old restaurant.

"But then I pray and am reminded of the losses that are so much greater than mine. Loss of life. One of my employee's grandfathers was swept away," she said. He didn't make it.

"Another employee's parent's house was washed away, and she and her parents are sleeping in a tent. So many in the community lost lives and so many more are still missing."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Melissa Oyler, Staff Writer, 'Helene destroys Helen's, Bakersville's oldest restaurant', *Herald-Sun, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 1C https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C667DC32C94C08



In NC tour, Trump targets FEMA, rallies Christians, says votes could 'save America'

October 23, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Mary Ramsey, Nora O'Neill, Kyle Ingram and Josh Bergeron; Staff Writer Section: News 790 Words Page: 4A OpenURL Link

Former President Donald Trump spent nearly all of Monday in battleground North Carolina as he surveyed Hurricane Helene destruction, spoke with faith leaders and urged people to vote as election day looms just two weeks away.

The Republican nominee began in Swannanoa in Western North Carolina to see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene before holding a rally across the state at East Carolina University's campus in Greenville. He ended the day by heading back west, addressing faith leaders at an invite-only meeting in Concord. At each stop, he reiterated similar claims and urged people to vote for him to "save America."

"With your vote this November, we are going to fire Kamala Harris, we are going to save America and we're going to restore the greatness of our nation," Trump said in Greenville.

Trump was accompanied by U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards, N.C. House Speaker Tim Moore and other officials in Western North Carolina, where he said he wished FEMA was doing more for victims of the storm. He repeated the same conspiracy theory in Swannanoa, Concord and Greenville that FEMA allocated funds to migrant services rather than Helene aid, a claim FEMA has called false.

"Our hearts are with you and we are praying for you, and we will come back, and we will be here on Jan. 20," he said in Greenville of those affected by the storm. "You didn't get the proper support from this administration - they spent their money on illegal migrants."

In Greenville, at the Williams Arena at Minges Coliseum, Trump spoke to rally attendees about his plans for a mass deportation of immigrants if elected, as well as his belief that Vice President Harris taking President Joe Biden's place as the Democratic nominee for president was akin to overthrowing a U.S. president.

The coliseum is the same venue where Harris held a rally a week ago. Trump was joined by Laurie Buckhout, the Republican candidate for Congress in northeastern North Carolina, and Rep. Dan Bishop, the GOP candidate for state attorney general.

His last visit of the day took place at the Concord Convention Center where he, along with his son Eric Trump and Ben Carson, the former U.S. secretary for Housing and Urban Development, addressed religious leaders. Trump spoke about his commitment to keeping discussions of race, gender and sexuality out of schools while fighting to protect religious freedom in education.

As one of the battleground states likely to determine the outcome of this year's presidential election, North Carolina has won significant attention from both the Trump and Harris campaigns.

Last week, Trump's running mate, U.S. Sen. JD Vance, campaigned in Wilmington and Harris' running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, visited Durham and Winston-Salem alongside former President Bill Clinton.

Clinton continued on a bus tour of Eastern North Carolina, making stops in Wilmington, Fayetteville, Wilson, Greenville and Rocky Mount.

Trump on religion, assassination attempt

In Concord, Trump spoke about growing up going to a Presbyterian church in the New York City neighborhood of

Jamaica, Queens. Trump said his faith "took on a new meaning" when he survived the assassination attempt in July.

"I now recognize it's been the hand of God leading me to where I am today," Trump said. "I like to think God saved me for a purpose and that's to make our country greater than ever before."

He was told after the attempt how lucky he was to avoid the bullet. The event strengthened his and his sons' faith, Trump said.

In Greenville, much of Trump's remarks centered on stopping illegal immigration and sending migrants to other countries.

"When I win on Nov. 5, the migrant invasion ends and the restoration of our country begins," Trump said.

"The United States is now an occupied country, but on Nov. 5, 2024, we will be a liberated country."

"I will launch the largest deportation program in American history," Trump said later. "I will rescue every town across America that has been invaded and conquered."

Trump also called for the death penalty "for any illegal immigrant that kills an American citizen."

Democrats preempted Trump's visit Monday by saying he's "spread disinformation and lies that put recovery workers at risk."

"Donald Trump gutted FEMA and blocked disaster relief funding as president and continues to put politics over getting people the help they need," said Dory MacMillan, communications director for Democrat Kamala Harris' North Carolina campaign. "As North Carolinians work to recover in the aftermath of Helene, a second Trump term would be even worse - his Project 2025 agenda would further slash disaster funding and make it harder for the government to respond to disasters."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Mary Ramsey, Nora O'Neill, Kyle Ingram and Josh Bergeron, Staff Writer, 'In NC tour, Trump targets FEMA, rallies Christians, says votes could 'save America", *Herald-Sun, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 4A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C667DC95E67200>



Lawmakers seek answers - on Helene misinformation

October 23, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)

Author: Virginia Bridges; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1625 Words

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Three United States representatives from North Carolina requested a national intelligence briefing on the spread of online misinformation hindering efforts to support and rebuild parts of Western North Carolina washed away by Hurricane Helene.

"This information is dangerous to saving life and property right now, and we need to get to the bottom of whoever might be disseminating it, manipulating it and manipulating our citizens," U.S. Rep. Deborah Ross, a Wake Democrat, told The News & Observer Saturday.

In the Friday, Oct. 18, letter, Democratic U.S. Reps. Ross, Wiley Nickel and Kathy Manning, wrote to Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines they are concerned about foreign governments involvement in spreading and promoting misinformation to undermine the public trust in government and hamper response efforts.

"Given the significant impact that such disinformation can have on public safety, morale, and the overall effectiveness of recovery initiatives, it is critical to address these threats in a timely and transparent manner," the letter states.

The letter is the latest sign of frustration among federal officials, elected leaders and some members of the public about what is turning into a troubling trend of misinformation spreading online after natural and other disasters. They are particularly concerned about the amount of false and misleading information following recent hurricanes Helene and Milton.

President Joe Biden, Gov. Roy Cooper, American Red Cross officials and leaders from federal, state, county and local governments have criticized and debunked the circulating misinformation, emphasizing people should only rely on trusted sources.

"It's absolutely the worst that I have seen," FEMA administrator Deanne Criswell told reporters Oct. 8, The New York Times reported.

But the rumors continue to spread and recently forced federal officials to temporarily suspend canvassing door-to-door in North Carolina after reports of a militia targeting workers, The Washington Post and Associated Press reported.

The militia never materialized, but a Polk County man was linked to the threat and charged with going armed to the terror of the public after he was found armed with a handgun and a rifle. News & Observer and Charlotte Observer journalists have been reporting on misinformation related to Helene's devastation in Western North Carolina.

Helene made landfall in Florida Sept. 26 as a Category 4 hurricane before drenching Western North Carolina in the days that followed. The storm claimed the lives of at least 95 people, ages 4 to 89, in North Carolina.

Many died from drowning and landslides, and it took rescuers more than a week to recover some of their bodies.

Are foreign adversaries sowing distrust?

Ross said there could be a mix of motivations for the steady deluge of misinformation, from politicians and influencers seeking support to foreign adversaries using this opportunity to be disruptive.

Ross pointed to a recent article in the Tampa Bay Times quoting research from social research media analytics company Graphika and misinformation tracking company NewsGuard. They said there is evidence that China and Russia amplified misinformation, just as foreign countries did after wildfires consumed Maui, Hawaii, in 2023 and a container ship destroyed a Baltimore bridge in March.

Foreign adversaries succeed when they sow discontent, but they also collect personal information when individuals click on their links, Ross said.

"Since it's happened in the past, we need to find out if it's happening now. We need to protect the public," said Ross, who is running for re-election to represent Congressional District 2. Lawmakers hope the intelligence office will respond next week and plan to follow up if there isn't one.

Nickel wants answers before the election

Nickel, of Cary, said he's concerned foreign influence from countries like China, Russia and Iran are trying to sow chaos with an ultimate goal to interfere with the upcoming elections in favor of Republican candidate Donald Trump.

"That's a big part of the goals," said Nickel, who isn't seeking re-election in his recently redrawn congressional district, but plans to run for a U.S. Senate seat in 2026.

Nickel said he hopes the national intelligence director will share a "candid assessment" about any work Russia, Iran and China are doing to undermine the election.

"This is information that the American people should know before election day," Nickel said, adding that such reports have been historically shared after the election.

Misinformation: A new consequence of disasters

Misinformation seems to be finding its way into key American events, Ross said, but the ongoing effort targeting recovery after hurricanes is the most pressing and dangerous at the moment.

The spread of misinformation during contentious or vulnerable events are becoming constants in U.S. culture. But evolving technology, shifting algorithms and the sharpening of artificial intelligence tools have fueled the spread, Ross said.

Western North Carolina residents, many of whom turned to local and hurricane-entered social media groups for information and advice before, during and after the hurricanes, pay the price, elected officials said.

"We are seeing the dark side of social media, and I wish that people were more disconcerting in how they consume not just social media, but all media," Ross said.

Republican U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards also spoke out about the misinformation, while debunking rumors such as Helene was geo-engineered to seize lithium deposits in Chimney Rock and that FEMA might run out of money or diverted disaster response to the border or foreign aid.

"I encourage you to remember that everything you see on Facebook, X, or any other social media platform is not always fact," wrote Edwards, who represents far Western North Carolina.

Letter to Facebook, X, TikTok, YouTube and more

A week ago, Ross, Nickel, U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor of Florida and Rep. Nikema Williams of Georgia sent a letter to executives at Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, X, Discord and Snap.

"In the aftermath of Helene, we have witnessed a troubling surge in misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and scams that are hindering recovery efforts and exploiting vulnerable individuals and families," states the letter.

Misinformation also followed Hurricane Milton, which made landfall on Oct. 9 on Florida's central west coast, elected leaders said. The misinformation trend is becoming "a troubling fixture," of social media after natural disasters, states the Oct. 11 letter to social media sites.

"Misinformation about Hurricane Helene recovery efforts is making it harder for those impacted by the storm to get the help they need," U.S. House Rep. Kathy Manning of Florida posted on X Friday.

The information, which sometimes includesAI-generated images or recirculated images, covers a range of topics, putting experts and assistance organizations at risk and scamming storm victims of their time, money and effort to find shelter and resources, North Carolina and other leaders have warned.

Meteorologists threatened

The lies, scams and conspiracy theories circulating on social media compromise climate scientists and rescue organizations work, and put Americans at risk, the U.S. representatives said.

Some of the posts encouraged hurricane victims to seek fake Federal Emergency Management Administration relief programs and shared misleading information about where to find shelter and resources, the letter states.

A series of posts on Facebook and X took advantage of families in distress by falsely claiming FEMA offered a new grant for immediate cash assistance, sowing more mistrust and delaying efforts to seek help from legitimate programs, the letter said.

Posts on Instagram, TikTok and Discord spread conspiracy theories that government actions created Helene and Milton.

"It was particularly disturbing to see that, prior to Hurricane Milton's landfall, meteorologists experienced harassment and even received death threats from users on X," the letter states.

Nickel said he was particularly worried about X as the company is now owned by Elon Musk, who has given \$75 million to support Trump, NPR reported.

Trump and his allies have also made and amplified misinformation. Trump said Cooper and Washington Democrats blocked help and aid for those impacted by Helene.

Copper called the claim "a flat-out lie," The News & Observer reported.

Social media companies respond

The News & Observer reached out to the social media companies on Friday evening and Saturday morning.

An X spokesperson wrote in an email that they are looking forward to responding to the letter. The company, which has been the target of some of the misinformation criticism, contends the site's system does not promote the spread of misinformation.

On Oct. 9, X's profile for Community Notes, which allows users to write and rate notes on posts, shared that Community Notes "related to recent weather events are showing on hundreds of posts and have already been seen well over 44 million times."

Posts with notes are reshared less and more likely to be deleted, another X update states. Poynter, a nonprofit media institute, recently reported on a rise of misinformation since Musk purchased the platform nearly two years ago.

YouTube's approach to Hurricane Milton included "focusing on helping people access timely and credible news and information," according to the companyowned by Google.

"As with many breaking news events, we are prominently surfacing content about Hurricane Milton from authoritative sources, like local and national news outlets, at the top of search results with our Top News panels," according to the social media company.

To address climate information, generally, the company also raises up content from "authoritative sources," in search results and recommendations, and includes information panels under relevant videos to provide viewers with more information.

YouTube prohibits scams and deceptive practices and "rigorously enforce" policies through human review and technology.

Recommended changes for social media companies

The representatives' letter urged the companies to:

Increase monitoring and rapid removal of misinformation related to discovery efforts.

Enhance fact-checking partnerships with local and disaster relief organizations.

Strengthen algorithms to prevent the spread of conspiracy theories.

Increase safeguards against scams that prey on natural disaster victims.

Ross said Saturdaythey haven't heard from the social media companies yet.

The letter urged quick and decisive action. "You have the power and the responsibility to improve the digital spaces where millions of Americans both seek and promote information during crises, including natural disasters," the letter states.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Virginia Bridges, Staff Writer, 'Lawmakers seek answers on Helene misinformation', *Herald-Sun, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 1A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C667DC258B9A50



You can get free admission to the NC State Fair while helping Western NC. Here's how

October 23, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)

Author: Chyna Blackmon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 415 Words

Page: 14A OpenURL Link

If you've been searching for a way to support storm victims hit hard by Hurricane Helene, you'll have the opportunity to do so at the N.C. State Fair.

Once again, the fair will be hosting its annual donation drive on Thursday, Oct. 24 to offer free admission to those who donate non-perishable food items.

But this year, all food collected that day will be sent to Western North Carolina for those still struggling weeks after Helene swept through as the deadliest storm in the state's history.

"Hunger was a serious crisis in Western North Carolina long before Hurricane Helene, and our friends in the region have been absolutely devastated by the damage from this storm," said Charlie Hale, Interim CEO for Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina. "Donations during Smithfield Foods' Hunger Relief Day are incredibly important as food banks across the state work together to meet these challenges head on."

Donate these nonperishables to the NC State Fair

As cleanup continues in communities hit hard by the storm, the food bank is asking fair goers to donate six non-perishable food items, with victims most in need of:

Peanut butter and jams (larger plastic jars)

Chicken, tuna, or salmon (in pouches or pop-top cans)

Ravioli and other ready-to-heat meals (in pop-top cans)

Crackers (boxes or sealed containers)

Dried or canned fruit (sealed containers or pop-top cans)

Granola or protein bars (boxes with individually-wrapped contents)

"I want us to have a record year to make a big impact and help those in need in Western North Carolina," said Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler.

"Please consider bringing six of the food items the Food Bank has told us are most needed. When fairgoers come to any gate, they'll have an easy opportunity to give back, and they'll know the Food Bank will help their donations do the most good."

Last year's donations totaled more than 253,000 pounds of food, equivalent to 315,547 meals, according to the Department of Agriculture.

Donate money to hurricane relief while buying tickets

Along with the annual food drive, the state fair team also launched a "N.C. State Fair Cares" donation tab for those buying tickets online with all proceeds benefiting MANNA FoodBank of Asheville.

"Many people have asked about doing something for Western North Carolina and this will give those who would like to donate an easy way to do that when they purchase their advance ticket," Troxler previously said in a statement. "The need is great in Western North Carolina and MANNA FoodBank will continue to work to meet those needs despite the setback."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Chyna Blackmon, Staff Writer, 'You can get free admission to the NC State Fair while helping Western NC. Here's how', *Herald-Sun, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 14A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C667DC6A12FF00>



In Raleigh on Sunday, Bill Clinton boosts Harris and issues warning about Trump

October 23, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Virginia Bridges; Staff Writer | Section: News | 518 Words Page: 5A OpenURL Link

As the big, bright blue Harris-Waltz bus carrying former President Bill Clinton pulled into a parking lot near downtown Raleigh, the DJ played Isaac Hayes' and David Porter's "Soul Man" to mark Clinton's arrival.

A crowd of hundreds, many wearing Harris-Waltz shirts, cheered and raised their phones up high, excited to video the 42nd president take the stage in a parking lot next to Smith Temple Baptist Church on South East Street. Clinton, who later walked out wearing jeans, a plaid button-down shirt and a blue blazer, said he's studied many presidential elections.

'I think you got to win Wake County big, and get the registered Democrats in Mecklenburg voting at higher rates than they normally do and win the east," Clinton said, in his signature raspy voice.

Clinton, 78, is one of many high-profile officials visiting North Carolina, one of seven swing states, in the walk-up to the Nov. 5 presidential election.

Clinton hit North Carolina's campaign trail Thursday with a bus tour across Eastern North Carolina, campaigning for Vice President Kamala Harris and targeting rural voters across the region.

Before heading east, Clinton and vice presidential candidate Tim Walz spoke in Durham Thursday, the first day of early voting.

Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff also plans to travel to the Research Triangle Park area Tuesday. Former President Barrack Obama plans to stump for Harris in Charlotte on Friday.

And former President Donald Trump will hold a 3 p.m. rally Monday in Greenville and another one in Greensboro at 7 p.m. Tuesday.

Bill Clinton visits Raleigh

In Raleigh, Clinton's 25 minutes of comments at an event billed as a get-out-the-vote block party, started out by poking fun at avid Trump supporter U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene. Clinton focused on Greene's contention that Trump critics control the weather, resulting in Hurricane Helene harming Western North Carolina.

"Well, I agree with Bill Maher," Clinton joked. "Anybody who can control the weather, we want them to be president."

Clinton went on to say that a second Trump presidency would threaten democracy, and Harris' supporters safety, before praising Harris.

"She has the intelligence, the knowledge, the experience, the guts and the common sense to be a first-rate president," he said.

Clinton also discussed the divided country and tainted news and information systems, but said Harris is offering a new way forward. And that's why everyone needs not only to vote, but drag everyone they know to vote, Clinton said.

'Drive them to the polls'

Before Clinton took the stage, local and state leaders, and candidates, spoke, including Raleigh Mayor Mary-Ann Baldwin, City Councilman Cory Branch, and Rep. Wesley Harris, who is running for state treasurer.

Their messages included that the path to the White House is through North Carolina, and that everyone needs to make a plan to vote and check on their neighbors' and their friends' plans.

"Drive them to the polls if you have to," said N.C. House Rep. Ya Liu, a Wake democrat.

Make sure you don't just don't vote for president, others said, but for Democrats up and down the ballot.

"The eyes of the whole country are on North Carolina right now to see if we can deliver for Harris," Liu said.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C667DC477A9CA0>



Our choices for NC treasurer, labor and agriculture

October 23, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: the Editorial Board | Section: Editorial/Opinion | 637 Words Page: 9A OpenURL Link

Voters have strong candidates to consider in the race to replace North Carolina treasurer Dale Folwell, who ran unsuccessfully for governor. Democrat Wesley Harris has a Ph.D in economics and has worked in international tax accounting, and he's a three-term member of the NC House. Republican Brad Briner is a member of the UNC Board of Trustees and a retired financial investor with a quarter-century of financial and investment experience.

Both candidates have run refreshingly non-partisan campaigns, and both believe North Carolina's pension fund has underperformed under Folwell. Briner's vision for the office is more narrowly focused on growing investments without taking on unnecessary risk, and he offers a meticulous blueprint on how he would get there. Harris wants the treasurer to take on a more active role advocating for state employees and laying out an economic vision for the state.

We share Briner's vision for the office, and we believe he brings a deeper experience and a more sophisticated knowledge in the financial and investment sector. We recommend Brad Briner for NC Treasurer.

Labor commissioner

Voters are choosing between two Commissioner of Labor candidates who would bring distinctly different backgrounds and approaches to the job.

Republican Luke Farley is a Wake County lawyer who works with companies cited by the state labor department for workplace safety violations. "I'm going to always approach this job with balance," he told the editorial board.

Democrat Braxton Winston, a former Charlotte City Council member and mayor pro tem, is a union member and a stagehand and grip by trade. "I think it's high time we had an actual worker be an advocate for workers across the state," he told the editorial board.

Farley touts the endorsement of former labor commissioner Cherie Berry, and like Berry, he would approach the job with a more business-centric focus. He told the Editorial Board that what's good for businesses is also good for the workers they employ.

Winston wants the department to perform more inspections and hold businesses accountable for workplace safety. He also wants to expand the reach of the office with a "whole worker approach" that calls for collaborating with other agencies on issues such as affordable housing and transportation.

This board appreciates Winston's intent with his whole worker approach, but we believe the commissioner and his staffing-challenged department should instead concentrate on its core, constitutional responsibilities. We also believe that the labor department, particularly under Berry, was too aligned with businesses on workplace issues and unfair wage practices. We were disappointed that Farley, in his conversation with the editorial board, so fully embraced Berry's tenure and her endorsement.

Winston's experience as a worker would be transformative to an office that needs change. We endorse Braxton Winston for labor commissioner.

Agriculture commissioner

The Democratic and Republican candidates for agriculture commissioner would bring vastly different experience to an office that maintains and protects the state's agribusiness industry and regulates food, animal health, the state fair and other areas.

Republican Steve Troxler is hoping for a sixth term as agriculture commissioner. He's long had a strong rapport with farmers and success in promoting North Carolina's diverse agriculture industry, which is contributing more than \$100 billion to the state's economy in 2024. His experience and relationship-building also is valuable in challenging times, as he's shown with his leadership in marshaling resources to help farmers and others in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

Democrat Sarah Taber has worked with family farm holdings and helped launch a series of vegetable greenhouses and indoor farms that are now worth over \$4 billion. She told the editorial board that the agriculture commissioner should more actively advocate for diversifying what we grow in North Carolina.

We believe Troxler should be open to new ideas that might help slow the farmland loss our state is experiencing. But Troxler is a capable leader and advocate for North Carolina agriculture. We recommend Steve Troxler for another term.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

the Editorial Board, 'Our choices for NC treasurer, labor and agriculture', *Herald-Sun, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 9A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C667DC569524A8



Letter writer: United Way went above, beyond in Catawba County

October 23, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Letters | 320 Words

OpenURL Link

In the wake of Hurricane Helene, western counties in North Carolina faced tremendous challenges. As director of Catawba County Social Services, I witnessed firsthand the devastation left in its path and the critical needs that arose in the storm's aftermath. While our department worked closely with state and local authorities to ensure essential services like food assistance and shelter were provided, one individual and his organization stood out for their extraordinary efforts: Mark Bumgarner, Executive Director of Catawba County United Way.

While disaster relief was not a formal part of his role, Mark went above and beyond, stepping up in ways that words can scarcely convey. For the past three weeks, he has tirelessly coordinated the collection and distribution of essential supplies, including water, food, diapers, and other necessities, across some of the hardest-hit disaster areas. His dedication and leadership have been nothing short of remarkable, working seven days a week, often with little sleep, to ensure that the needs of our most vulnerable residents were met.

Under his leadership, the United Way quickly became a lifeline for so many families, filling gaps in services and providing comfort in a time of crisis. The impact of his efforts, and those of United Way's dedicated volunteers, donors, and partners cannot be overstated. They have helped to restore hope, dignity, and stability to countless families when it was most needed.

This outpouring of generosity and selflessness exemplifies the very best of our community spirit. Mark has shown that true leadership is not about position or title but about the willingness to roll up your sleeves and do what needs to be done, even when it falls outside your job description.

On behalf of our agency and the many families who have benefited from his extraordinary service, I want to publicly thank Mark and United Way for their profound contributions during this difficult time. Our community is stronger because of them.

Sincerely,

Karen Harrington

Director, Catawba County Social Services

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Writer, 'Letter writer: United Way went above, beyond in Catawba County', *Hickory Daily Record* (online), 23 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C650CC168E6A00



Alabama letter writer: NC voters can learn from Hurricane Katrina

October 23, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Letters | 392 Words OpenURL Link

I was raised in Lexington, North Carolina, and graduated from Wake Forest. I lived most of my life in New Orleans and retired to coastal Alabama.

But my heart has never left North Carolina, and it breaks over the devastation caused by Helene. In 2005, I experienced Katrina and learned several things that may help you now.

The first is that Ronald Reagan was wrong — the federal government is there to help you. They're slow, but the only organization with the size and resources to rebuild the critical infrastructure like roads, bridges, and dams. Taxes paid throughout the country can and will support you. You're not on your own.

The second part was the unprecedented need for laborers. The United States has been at near-record full employment for the past few years, so where will you get the labor? A high percentage will be immigrant labor. That was true in Katrina and in this situation. It's a necessity or else it will take decades to finish the work.

Next, this was a flood and wind event caused by a named storm. Most home purchases in New Orleans require flood insurance, so insurance money eventually came for most. I doubt many in Western NC have flood coverage, some will find their homeowners coverage has wind exclusions, and I suspect all have high deductibles for a named storm. Therefore, many people are going to need direct financial assistance. Where will this come from, if not from the federal government?

Lastly, I learned from Katrina that you can and will get through this, but you'll need help.

Growing up, whenever I wanted something, my parents taught me to think about it and to always contrast that with what we needed. I hate bringing up politics but think about what you need. Many of you may not want Kamala Harris as your president. For the sake of your recovery, you need her, as opposed to someone who would defund FEMA and deport most of the immigrants.

All of us need national insurance reform to better handle future risk from the climate change that one candidate doesn't believe exists. I suspect most of you believe it exists now. For those who have not been so inclined, I urge you to swallow your pride and vote for Kamala Harris for President. Western North Carolina's fastest and strongest recovery depends on it.

Ed Leonard

Foley, Alabama

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Writer, 'Alabama letter writer: NC voters can learn from Hurricane Katrina', *Hickory Daily Record* (online), 23 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C650CC0DC880E0



Hickory Kiwanis Club installs officers

October 23, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: FROM STAFF REPORTS | Section: Local | 124 Words OpenURL Link

The Hickory Kiwanis recently installed new officers for the 2024-25 Kiwanis Year, which begins on Oct. 1 each year.

With the Kiwanis meeting place at First United Methodist Church closed on Oct. 1, Hurricane Helene caused the installation to be postponed. Former Carolinas District Lt. Gov. and Hickory Kiwanian Steve Aaron then performed the installation duties at the Oct. 8 meeting for the Kiwanis Club of Hickory's 104th board of directors.

Aaron spoke of the history and accomplishments of the club for over 103 years and then proceeded to thank the retiring board members for their service in the past Kiwanis year. He then called up the newly elected and appointed officers by the membership and board of directors to be recognized and officially installed.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

FROM STAFF REPORTS, 'Hickory Kiwanis Club installs officers', *Hickory Daily Record* (online), 23 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C690A7EBF9C060



Early voting underway in Triad, NC

October 23, 2024 | High Point Enterprise (NC) Author: Paul B. Johnson PAXTON MEDIA GROUP | Section: News | 327 Words OpenURL Link

TRIAD — Early voting began last week for the fall general election, giving people a chance to cast ballots on races ranging from president to county offices about three weeks before Election Day on Nov. 5.

Launched 24 years ago as an experiment with casting ballots, in-person early voting has steadily grown as an option.

"In-person early voting has been the most popular form of voting in recent general elections, and we expect that will continue in 2024," said Karen Brinson Bell, executive director for the N.C. State Board of Elections. "In 2020, for example, 65% of North Carolina voters chose in-person early voting as their voting method. And back in the presidential election of 2016, 62% of NC voters chose to vote early."

Randolph County has five sites for early voting. The polling place for the northern part of the county will switch back to the Randolph Community Services Building at 213 Balfour Drive in Archdale from the Braxton Craven gymnasium in Trinity.

Weekday hours for Randolph County early voting locations will be 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. There will be four weekend days for early voting — Saturday, Oct. 19, Saturday, Oct. 26, and Saturday, Nov. 2, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and Sunday, Oct. 27, from 1 to 5 p.m.

Voters have to cast a ballot during early voting in the county where they reside.

People who aren't registered to vote can register on the same day and vote during early voting.

Statewide, 419 early voting sites will be used across North Carolina. The N.C. State Elections Board recently implemented changes for voting procedures in about two dozen western North Carolina counties to cope with the disruption of Tropical Storm Helene.

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Election offices

For more information about voter registration or questions about voting, call your local board of elections office: Guilford County Board of Elections offices in Greensboro at 336-641-3836 or High Point at 336-641-7895. Randolph County, 336-318-6900. Davidson County, 336-242-2190.

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Paul B. Johnson PAXTON MEDIA GROUP, 'Early voting underway in Triad, NC', *High Point Enterprise* (online), 23 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6961E17707148



Old Fort library closed due to water damage from Hurricane Helene

October 23, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Mike Conley | Section: Government Politics | 416 Words OpenURL Link

The Old Fort branch of the McDowell County Public Library is closed after it was flooded by Hurricane Helene. Crews are working to repair the water damage.

Almost all of the branch's collection survived the floodwaters, Library Director Marlan Brinkley said.

During Hurricane Helene, which hit McDowell County as a tropical storm on Sept. 27, floodwater got into the branch at 65 E. Mitchell St. in Old Fort. As of Tuesday, Foothills Cleaning and Restoration personnel are working to remove the carpet, some drywall and furniture that received water damage due to the storm, Brinkley said on Tuesday.

"I'm happy to share that, aside from a small handful of books, nearly all of the collection survived. It was a miracle," Brinkley said. "We're looking forward to reopening and providing access to library resources as soon as possible, but I'm afraid we don't know when that will be."

Brinkley said he was told an insurance adjuster is coming this week to check out the damage.

"My hope is that this means we'll be able to move forward and get repairs started sooner rather than later," he told The McDowell News. "Overall, considering the damage and devastation around it, the Old Fort branch library was very lucky."

The Old Fort branch has four employees, two full-time and two part-time. The employees will work at the Marion library until the Old Fort branch can reopen. "So, folks coming to the Marion library from Old Fort may see some familiar faces," Brinkley said.

"First and foremost, my biggest worry was library staff and their well-being," he said. "With I-40 closed down, the only way I could check in with folks was through texting. Fortunately, I was able to reach everyone and, as you can imagine, they were either helping out at the EOC (Emergency Operations Center) or helping out in their own neighborhoods."

During that time of uncertainty, Brinkley said he didn't know the status of the Old Fort branch library, and he thought for sure that the Marion library's local history room and staff offices, located in the lower level, were flooded. As it turns out, they were not.

"Thankfully, the Marion library received no water damage at all," he said. "Our public works director, Dewayne Riddle, was able to get tarp and sandbags in place and keep the Marion library completely dry. For what it's worth, the Old Fort branch library's water damage came through the walls rather than the doorway — so no amount of sandbags would've been able to prevent the water coming in."

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Mike Conley, 'Old Fort library closed due to water damage from Hurricane Helene', *McDowell News, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C651630ECECD50