

News Briefs

October 9, 2024 | Franklin Press, The (NC) Section: News Briefs | 272 Words Page: A2 OpenURL Link

Public meetings The Franklin Tourism Development Authority will meet at 5:30 p.m. Monday, Oct. 14 in the board room on the lower level of Town Hall. The Macon County Board of Education will meet at 6 p.m. Monday, Oct. 14 at South Macon Elementary School. The board will hold a work session on Friday, Oct. 18 following the 10 a.m. groundbreaking for the new Franklin High School.

Missing man found A 68-year-old man with dementia missing since Sept. 29 was found in the Little Tennessee River in Franklin on Friday, Oct. 4. Keith Max Arvey had been missing from his Lake Emory Road home for over five days when his body was found on Friday following a water and aerial search. Franklin Police Department and North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission conducted the search along the Little Tennessee River and Lake Emory.

"FPD was able to locate Mr. Arvey, who was deceased, with the use of a drone," said FPD.

Franklin Fire and Rescue, Cowee Volunteer Fire and Rescue and Macon County Sheriff's Office assisted in the search.

Food Lion Feeds Through Oct. 31, Food Lion customers can make a donation at the register to assist with storm recovery. Through the Food Lions Feeds Charitable Foundation, the company is donating \$1.5 million to support communities impacted by Hurricane Helene. Funds will be directed to partner feeding organizations and an emergency donation has been directed to support the American Red Cross and the World Central Kitchen. In additional to monetary support, Food Lion is providing nonperishable snacks, water, gift cards and other supplies to shelters and emergency support services, including 280, 000 pounds of food and water.

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God can help us comfort others

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2 Corinthians 1:3-4 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

When I composed last week's Musings, I had no idea of what was to happen in Western NC and beyond. I hope all reading this are now doing well and that you survived Helene and the preceding rains without much damage. Our mountainside neighborhood fared well. We were without power for a few days, and we'll need some small landslides repaired, but we are resilient. The storm brought many people together. We had folks from near and far checking on us as we checked on others. I used the word "discombobulated" in one of my daily Musings to describe how I felt. It resonated with many. We felt a little lost; not quite sure what was to happen and how we could begin to help those so much worse off than we were. Like many, I've seen God in this middle of this tragedy. It was heartwarming to see folks put aside differences and come together to help others.

Pictures of devastation on the internet are now accompanied by photos of food and supplies piled up at various collection points. Private pilots came in with helicopters, others brought in trailers of pack mules that took supplies into places inaccessible by vehicles. Private and government help arrived from all directions. Unlike some friends, I've never experienced a hurricane. I've seen stories about their devastation on television and was on a work team to help after Katrina, but that was years after the storm, so most was cleaned up. I think we now have greater empathy for others who have or will experience devastating natural disasters. And this empathy, accompanied by God's indwelling spirit, will help us know better how to offer help and to offer comfort to those who suffer. As always, when tragedy strikes, look for the helpers, and look for God's presence working through His beloved people. Lord, we continue to pray for those who have lost so much. Guide us that we may give or receive help as needed. Amen. Paige Pritchard can be reached at paigepritchard@icloud.com.

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Planning Board recommends change to allow RV parks

October 9, 2024 | Franklin Press, The (NC)

Author: Thomas Sherrill reporter@thefranklinpress.com | Section: News | 1509 Words

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Despite a recommendation from the Water Quality Advisory Committee against it, the Macon County Planning Board voted 4-3 to recommend amending the Macon County Watershed Protection Ordinance to allow RV parks to be built along Franklin's and Highlands' drinking supply watersheds.

The recommendation would strike from the ordinance the sentence "recreational vehicle parks shall not be eligible for a SNIA," within the watersheds along Cartoogechaye Creek that supply the Town of Franklin's drinking water, and Big Creek, Houston Branch and Rattlesnake Branch in and around Highlands. An SNIA is a Special Non-Residential Intensity Allocation and is required to increase the built-upon area as specified in the Watershed Ordinance.

Vice Chair Lee Walters included a request to the County Commissioners "to review and further strengthen RV park permitting for septic systems to meet or exceed any commercial or residential requirements."

The vote at the Oct. 3 meeting was 4-3, with Walters, Marty Kimsey, Chair Jean Owen and Barry Breeden voting in favor. Town of Franklin Planner Justin Setser, Town of Highlands Planner Michael Mathis, and Ben Laseter voted against. Larry Lackey, Mark Berry, Ben Ledford and Luke Jakushev were not present.

The proposed change now goes to the Macon County Board of Commissioners. Since the commissioners held a public hearing on this proposed ordinance change and a proposed change to the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance in July, a second public hearing might not be required.

Due to the quick turnaround to the Oct. 8 commissioners meeting, the watershed ordinance change was not on the agenda published on Oct. 4. The next regular commissioners meeting is Nov. 12.

A proposed amendment that would change the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance to allow up to 25% outside fill per acre in a floodplain was unanimously tabled until the next Planning Board meeting.

The Planning Board was revisiting the proposed change after it was pointed out a recommendation from their board was required before the commissioners could act on it. Also, the towns of Franklin and Highlands asked to be involved in the process since any changes could possibly affect their water supplies.

The Macon County Planning Board voted at their last meeting on May 2 to table all proposed ordinance changes until they could be reviewed. Yet the commissioners had moved forward with discussion on the changes and held public hearings in July.

To start the Oct. 3 meeting, Commissioner Josh Young said there are misconceptions about this issue, saying it has nothing to do with RV parks in the floodplain. Young said people think this is coming from a place of money and greed, but he believes this is a way to help people out. Young also pointed out that he was driving down the road earlier that day and saw people breaking ordinances.

Highlands Biological Station Associate Director Jason Love presented a slideshow on behalf of the Water Quality Advisory Committee. The slideshow had reasons to allow (housing crisis, campgrounds for outdoor recreation and private property rights) versus reasons to not allow (putting RVs in flood-prone areas, more impervious surfaces, higher density areas and possible septic/waste disposal issues).

Overall, the Water Quality Advisory Committee recommended that RV parks remain ineligible for a Special Nonresidential Intensity Allocation (SNIA). But if the board chooses to allow RV parks in these watersheds, they strongly recommended that they not be placed in floodplains, they should have robust waste effluent systems in place and follow the guidelines set forth under cluster developments.

Love also told the Planning Board their committee said the entire ordinance needs to be addressed, such as typos, making sure the watershed designations are consistent with the updated state designations and taking a look at some of the activities allowed in drinking watersheds. That includes the application of treated sewage sludge (residuals) in these watersheds. Love said residuals can have high metal content and PFAs (forever chemicals).

During public comment, Nathan Pannell chided the board for taking up these ordinances right after Hurricane Helene. Sarah Johnson said after Helene, other WNC towns and cities would rethink their ordinances about watersheds and floodplains if they could and urged the Planning Board to take their time. Walters responded to Johnson, saying a house being washed away is the same thing as an RV being washed away.

The meeting became an open dialogue forum with the crowd, at the encouragement of Young, who said they can't have this at a commissioners meeting, and said he was willing to talk with the public after the meeting.

Phillip Gibson, a French Broad Riverkeeper, said there's enough science to say don't build in the watershed, saying forested landscapes help address pollutants.

Bill McLarney said events show county governments should do everything feasible to limit impervious surfaces and add more forest cover.

Katie Price, who is on the Water Quality Advisory Committee said she spent the previous few days cleaning RV debris from Fontana Lake, including septic tanks.

"Just because it's secure doesn't mean it won't be in the water," Price said. Walters and Kimsey asked most of the questions and did the most talking among the board members. Kimsey said he could argue there are commercial developments worse than RV parks allowed in watersheds and called out the hypocrisy of how the county didn't allow an RV park at the Parker Meadows site and then bought the property and used outside fill dirt to build the ballfields.

In response to going over the entire watershed ordinance, Walters said the Planning Board was tasked with looking over one sentence.

County Project Manager Jack Morgan said people aren't busting down doors to build RV parks and said in his opinion there's not a lot of fairness in the watershed ordinance.

Kimsey said it seems like RV parks are unfairly targeted in the watershed ordinance, saying they're less egregious than other types of buildings. Johnson said if there are worse monsters out there that could be built in watersheds, then the county should tackle those issues as well.

Kimsey put forth a motion to recommend the proposed change and ask the commissioners to send back the watershed ordinance for "further changes for the safety of RV parks in floodplains and other recommended changes by the Water Quality Advisory Committee." The vote failed 2-5, with Kimsey and Breeden in favor.

Then Walters made his motion to recommend passing the change in question and review and fully strengthen RV park permitting so septic systems meet or exceed any commercial or residential requirements. That passed 4-3.

Where are RV parks allowed?

Several speakers mentioned the confusion surrounding the proposed change to the Macon County Watershed Protection Ordinance. Even though the change strikes one sentence out, it's impossible to know what that one

change affects just from reading the ordinance.

According to the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, there are different types of designated water supply areas, from Water Supply I to Water Supply V. The first four types of Water Supply watersheds (I to IV) are "for drinking, culinary, or food processing purposes."

Water Supply I (WS-I) is on land in public ownership and located in underdeveloped watersheds.

Water Supply II (WS-II) is roughly the same as WS-I but is in "predominately undeveloped watersheds."

Water Supply III (WS-III) are waters "generally in low to moderately developed watersheds." Water Supply IV (WS-IV) are waters in "moderately to highly developed watersheds."

Water Supply V (WS-V) are generally upstream to WS-IV waters and are "waters used by industry to supply their employees with drinking water or as waters formerly used as water supply."

There are no WS-IV or WS-V waters in Macon County. Each of those types of watersheds is either a critical area or a protected area. Critical areas are adjacent to a water supply intake or reservoir. Protected areas are adjoining and upstream of the critical areas.

The Macon County ordinance allowed Special Nonresidential Intensity Allocations (SNIA) to build on up to 70% of an approved area in a WS-II Balance Area, WS-III Balance Area and Watershed-EQW (Excellent Quality Waters). The SNIA is an increase from the 12% built-upon area allowed for a WS-II Balance Area and 24% for a WS-III Balance Area. SNIAs aren't allowed for Critical Areas.

The ordinance does not explain where those watersheds are in Macon County. The NC DEQ divides the water supplies into "Critical Area" and "Protected Area." The definition between the DEQ's "Protected Area" and Macon County's "Balance Area" is somewhat the same, as the area adjoining and upstream of the critical area. However, a Balance Area is upstream of a WS-II or WS-III watershed, while a Protected Area is upstream of a WS-IV watershed.

According to the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, Macon County has a 29, 329-acre WS-III Protected Area and a 170.69-acre WS-III Critical Area for Cartoogechaye Creek, which serves the Town of Franklin's drinking water.

In the Highlands area, there are six designated watersheds: a 4, 953.71-acre WS-III Protected Area and a 935.73-acre WS-III Critical Area for the Cullasaja River/Lake Sequoyah, a 2, 982.85-acre WS-II Protected Area and a 167.39-acre WS-II Critical Area for Big Creek, a 113.35-acre WS-I Critical Area for Houston Branch and a 109.89-acre WS-I Critical Area for Rattlesnake Branch.

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Letters to the Editor

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Appreciation for library staff I would like to express by profound appreciation of the staff at Macon County Public Library, especially the staff in the children's section. For over seven years, visits to the library have been an important part of time I have spent caring for my grandchildren while their parents work.

The only agenda fostered by these professionals has been encouraging a love of reading and learning. From storytime to educational programs, my grandchildren have been exposed to creativity, inclusivity and a sense of community. They have learned appropriate behavior in a group setting, cooperation and sharing - skills that have prepared them for a classroom setting. Just this summer, we attended programs about dinosaurs, folk tales and didgeridoos, just to name a few. Children learn so much beyond reading at the library, and I want to thank the staff from the bottom of my heart.

Kim Leister Franklin Planning Board vote 'astounding and depressing' This past week we all witnessed one of the worst disasters in modern Western North Carolina history, and though we had our problems here in Macon County, we came through it comparatively unscathed.

It was astounding and depressing that on Thursday. Oct. 3 the Macon County Planning Board voted to amend the Watershed Protection Ordinance so that RVs will be allowed in the floodplain upstream from the town's drinking water intake. This meeting was at the direction of the County Commissioners, who realized last month that before they could move forward independently to make said amendment that the Planning Board had to vote on a recommendation.

One would think that in light of the record flooding, devastation, deaths, and obvious impacts last week across Western North Carolina in all of our floodplains that such a proposal would never see the light of day again.

Such a proposal should have died a quiet death, yet the Planning Board, in a 4-3 vote, moved to recommend allowing RV parks in the floodplain, with the caveat that they would have to install septic systems that meet the same requirements as commercial and residential dwellings. This vote occurred after the Macon County Water Advisory Committee, also appointed, recommended the opposite - that given the risks to drinking water, damage incurred following flooding, risks to human life, that no RV parks should be allowed in the floodplain.

Had we been hit as hard as areas east of here, would they still have met and voted this way? Hurricanes grow in numbers in strength each year it seems, and if we were truly preventative and thoughtful about what could and likely will happen again, these proposals to weaken our current floodplain ordinances would never happen.

Everywhere in Macon County, the damaging results of floodplain development were extensive and apparent, and there was no way to leave this meeting with any faith left in these decision makers. Not all of them, but some of them are guided by self-interest and private property rights, over the rights of citizens who deserve clean water and a higher commitment to public safety. Not to mention the health and beauty of our rivers and streams and all of the creatures who are dependent upon them. There is nothing wrong with RV parks, and for many people today it is where permanent affordable housing has to be made, given our lack of it. They can be built anywhere in Macon County, but do we want them in our floodplain? Hurricane Helene showed us all what type of storm is possible in these mountains. The best thing our decision makers can do for our community is to make our floodplain and watershed protection ordinances stronger, not weaker.

Considering all perspectives I agree with the title of "You Can't Not Vote," (Sept. 25) but why should I vote for Kamala Harris?

Everyone is talking about why you should not vote for Donald Trump in November, but no one has given me any precise reasons why I should vote for Kamala Harris.

From my perspective, as someone that considers all perspectives, while Donald Trump was president, we had lower number of illegal immigrants crossing the border, lower inflation, lower interest rates, lower food bills (I know this to be a fact as I do the grocery shopping), lower gasoline prices, lower energy prices, more money in my pocket, no wars.

Under the Joe Biden-Kamala Harris administration, very large number of illegal immigrants coming across the border, inflation is through the roof, interest rates are at a point not seen in decades, grocery prices are crazy (remember when a dozen eggs were \$12?), gasoline prices got near \$4 a gallon or higher depending on grade, propane and electricity prices have increased dramatically, Have less money in my pocket, wars and rumors of new wars all over, (Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Hamas (Iran), China threatening Taiwan, Russia teasing our border in Alaska).

I watched both national conventions, from that what I can say is that Donald Trump listed exactly what he plans on doing if he wins in November. He listed a number of policies that he plans to put in place. Donald Trump and JD Vance are out meeting with the citizens of the country and has done about 60 rallies across the country.

On the other hand, Kamala Harris did not really say anything about what she plans to do if she wins. She kept attacking Trump and saying that he is the threat to Democracy. Together Kamala Harris and Tim Walz have done maybe 20 rallies and interviews. Again, no real discussions or answers to any questions that have been asked of her. Now she has decided to pivot away from all of her previous beliefs that got her where she is today and move to the middle. She has even gone so far as to take policy initiatives that Trump announced months ago as her own, ie: no tax on tips, build the wall. She's had 3.5 years to do some of the things she is now promising she will do on day one. Why has she not done anything to date? Joe and her have the power. So why should I vote for Kamala Harris over Donald Trump? Debra Lab Franklin

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Community Calendar

October 9, 2024 | Franklin Press, The (NC) Section: Community Calendar | 1098 Words Page: B1 OpenURL Link

OCT. 10 Tech Time Have a question about your computer, smartphone or other technology? Get assistance at Tech Time offered each Thursday from 10-12 a.m. at the Macon County Public Library. Free and offered on a first come, first served basis. Information: 828-524-3600. Location: 149 Siler Farm Rd.

Thursday Painters Bring your project, supplies and a bag lunch and join the painters group on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Uptown Gallery. All skill levels and mediums are welcome. Information: 828-349-4607 or 28734pm@gmail.com. Location: 30 E. Main Street.

Bear program The Nantahala Hiking Club will hold a program on bears at 6 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 10 at the Macon County Public Library. Tanya Poole from the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission will share best practices to avoid bears and how to handle an approach by a bear. You do not have to be a member of the club to attend. Location: 149 Siler Farm Rd.

Macon Chips meeting Macon Chips wood carving club meets each Thursday from 6-7:30 p.m. in the Franklin High School woodshop. All skill levels welcome. The club also meets from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays at the Macon County Public Library. Information: 828-349-6109.

NAMI support group meeting The NAMI support group for individuals and family members dealing with mental illnesses meets from 7-8:15 p.m. every Thursday at First United Methodist Church Outreach Center. Information: Marcia, 828-332-1635 or Perry, 828-200-3000. Location: 66 Harrison Ave. Free English Class Jesus Zamora and friends are teaching a free English class on Tuesdays and Thursdays, beginning at 7:30 p.m. in the chapel at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Location: 33 Pine Ridge Dr.

Old-time dance for children An afternoon session of traditional Appalachian Dance featuring basic square, circle and contra dance movements will be held from 3:30-4:40 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 10 at the Macon County Public Library. Dance teacher and caller is Harrison Keeley. This free event is geared to elementary school-age youth and their families. Beginners are welcome - the easy-to-learn dances will be taught. Wear comfortable clothes and shoes; no sandals, please. Presented by the Arts Council of Macon County. Information: 828-524-ARTS or arts4all@dnet.net. Location: 149 Siler Farm Rd. OCT. 11 Open Mic Night Open Mic Night at Cowee School Arts & Heritage Center will be from 6-8 p.m. the second Friday of each month. To sign up, email openmic@coweeschool.org. Location: 51 Cowee School Dr.

OCT. 12 Morning yoga A morning yoga class will be held at 9 a.m. the second and fourth Saturday on each month (through October) on the lawn at Yonder Market. Instructor: Ashley Russell. Suggested \$10-15 donation. Location: 151 Hillcrest Ave.

Bradley family reunion The Rev. Bill Bradley and Deborah Roberts Bradley family will hold its reunion on Saturday, Oct. 12 at Oak Grove Baptist Church. Signin starts at 11:30 with potluck lunch at noon. Location 28 Lakey Creek Rd.

Midday Music Mike Yow will perform for Midday Music from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 12 at FROG Quarters. Mike is a singer/songwriter playing the best in his own tunes and a wide range of Americana music. Free admission. The gift shop and coffee shop will be open for purchases to support Friends of the Greenway. Location: 573 E. Main St.

Free chili dinner Burningtown-lotla Fire & Rescue invites everyone to attend their annual community appreciation event which includes a free drive-thru chili dinner on Saturday, Oct. 12 beginning at 3 p.m. until sold out. The free

dinner includes a healthy bowl of chili, (beef or vegetable), crackers, drink and dessert. Raffle tickets will be available on chances to win a new Henry.22 Magnum Rifle, a Barnett XP385 Crossbow and a LEGO Firehouse Kit for the kids. Information: 828-369-8885. Location: 2016 lotla Church Road.

Benefit for cancer patient A benefit fundraiser for Debbie Carver will be held at 5 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 12 at East Franklin Elementary School. Debbie works in the cafeteria at East Franklin and is battling cancer. There will be a chili supper with cornbread dessert and drink, live music, raffles, cake walk and live auction. Location: 100 Watauga St. Information or donations: text 828-332-1083 or 828-347-5332.

Pickin' on the Square Carolina 441 will be playing southern rock for Pickin' on the Square beginning at 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 12 at the gazebo on Main Street. Free admission. This will be the last concert for the 2024 season. Bring a chair. In case of rain, an announcement will be posted on the Franklin Events Facebook page.

OCT. 13 Karaoke Night American Legion Post 108 hosts Karaoke Night at 4 p.m. the second and fourth Sunday of the month. The canteen is open for drinks and snacks will be served. Location: 614 W. Main St.

OCT. 14 Battle of Sugartown Chapter meeting The Battle of Sugartown Chapter, NSDAR, meets at 11:30 a.m. the second Monday of each month at the Robert C. Carpenter Community Building. Information: Vicki Baker, battleofsugartowndar@gmail.com. Location: 1288 Georgia Rd.

Quilters Guild meeting The Smoky Mountain Quilters Guild meets the second Monday of each month at Cowee School Arts & Heritage Center. Meet and greet begins at 9:30 a.m. and the meeting at 10 a.m. All are welcome. Location: 51 Cowee School Dr.

Clarks Chapel Community meeting The Clarks Chapel Community Development Club meets at 7 p.m. the second Monday of each month at the Clarks Chapel Community Building (at the fire department). Information: copresidents Jeff Runken, jrunken@frontier.com or Joe Doster, joedoster17@yahoo. com. Location: 270 Fulcher Rd.

OCT. 15 Republican Women's Club meeting The Macon County Republican Women's Club will meet Tuesday, Oct. 15 at Fat Buddies BBQ restaurant. Please arrive at 11:30 a.m.; the meeting will begin promptly at 12 noon. The guest speaker will be Danny Reitmeier, candidate for Macon County Board of Education District 4. For those who are able, we are asking for donations of personal items such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, deodorant, women's personal products, body wipes, dry shampoo etc., for those affected by Helene.

Cancer detection Learn about the early detection of cancer, the types of medical imaging available and the differences between them. Radiology specialists from Angel Medical Center will present this free program at 4 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 15 at the Macon County Public Library. Location: 149 Siler Farm Rd.

Democratic Women meeting The Democratic Women of Macon County will meet at 5 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 15 at the Democratic Headquarters, 144 Carolina Dr.

OCT. 17 Drumming program Sonia Brooks will provide a drumming program for children ages 8-12 at 3:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 17 at the Macon County Public Library. The program will last 45 minutes and is limited to 28 children. Preregistration required: call 828-524-3600. Location: 149 Siler Farm Rd.

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FEMA administrator blasts disinformation

October 9, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Sudiksha Kochi; USA TODAY| Section: News| 375 Words Page: A9 OpenURL Link

WASHINGTON – FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell pushed back Tuesday against former President Donald Trump's false claims about recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene and indicated she was disappointed in the misinformation he was spreading.

Trump has spread baseless claims about hurricane relief efforts, including allegations that there are "no helicopters, no rescue" in North Carolina and that the federal government is giving only \$750 to those who have lost their homes. FEMA has addressed misinformation on its website and social media.

Hurricane Helene ravaged Southeastern states including North Carolina and Florida, killing more than 200 people, destroying buildings and leaving millions without power.

"I would say just because you don't see somebody in a FEMA shirt on the ground doesn't mean FEMA is not here, and FEMA is one part of the team – our urban search and rescue teams, the Army Corps of Engineers," Criswell said in a press call Tuesday.

The \$750 figure has also been misrepresented, she said, explaining that that money is going out first to individuals in the most impacted areas. As more information is collected about the individuals and their housing situation, they will get additional assistance as needed, she said.

She said she thinks the disinformation being spread during recovery efforts in the wake of Hurricane Helene is causing harm to both volunteers on the ground and impacted families.

"It's creating distrust in the federal government, but also the state government. And we have so many first responders that have been working day and night to go out and help these communities," Criswell said. "It's just really demoralizing to them. It hurts their morale when they've left their families to be able to come in here and help people."

Criswell added that bad actors are "misrepresenting the types of programs that FEMA offers."

"It's creating fear in some of the individuals, and so I worry that they won't apply for assistance, which means I can't get them the necessary items they need to support them," she said.

Asked about whether she thinks Trump is playing politics with the hurricane response, Criswell said, "I'm frankly disappointed that we're still having to have this conversation."

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Mount Holly bridge damaged, repair timeline uncertain

October 9, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Chloe Collins; Gaston Gazette | Section: News | 230 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

Mount Holly officials say they've received several inquiries as to when the bridge over Dutchman's Creek on Highland Street will be reopened.

According to an update recently posted to one of the city's social media pages, the bridge cannot be reopened until the North Carolina Department of Transportation approves it.

Flooding caused by Hurricane Helene damaged the bridge, leading to its closure.

"There's a possible void underneath the road at the southwest corner of the bridge, and a significant amount of logs and debris have accumulated at its base," the post said. "As this is not a city-owner road, the North Carolina Department of Transportation decides when the bridge will be opened."

The first step to repair will be clearing the debris surrounding the bridge base so professionals can inspect the structure.

"The NCDOT needs to remove this debris before they can fully inspect the underwater columns to ensure they're safe and undamaged," the post said.

"This process may take some time as there are many other bridges across the state that were also impacted by the storm," it said. "As soon as the necessary repairs are made or NCDOT confirms the bridge is safe, we will reopen the road."

Drivers are encouraged to use alternate routes around the bridge including:

N.C. 273 onto Sandy Ford Rd then onto Lowland Dairy Rd to Old N.C. 27 to Hawthorne Street

N.C. 273 to Lucia Riverbend Highway to N.C. 16

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Red Cross in need of blood donations

October 9, 2024 | Goldsboro News-Argus, The (NC) Author: Sam Dietrich| Section: Local | 570 Words OpenURL Link

The American Red Cross is experiencing a blood shortage following the impact of Hurricane Helene.

The organization is seeking blood of all types from Wayne County residents to restock its supply to help people with urgent medical needs.

Kaitlyn Connolly, American Red Cross regional communications manager, said Tuesday the organization is continuing to work on restocking critically needed blood products due to Hurricane Helene's impact on western North Carolina.

Since Hurricane Helene made landfall almost two weeks ago, the storm and its aftermath have led to the cancellation of more than 100 blood drives, causing thousands of blood and platelet donations to go uncollected, Connolly said.

Connolly said the American Red Cross lost about 2,500 units of blood due to the canceled blood drives.

"We are at a deficit when it comes to having blood on the shelf," Connolly said. "We encourage people to help replenish the blood supply."

The American Red Cross will host blood drives in several counties across the state, Connolly said.

Along with Wayne County, other counties hosting blood drives include Brunswick, Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, New Hanover, Pender, Robeson and Scotland.

The Wayne County American Red Cross held a blood drive in Goldsboro on Tuesday at the Wayne County American Red Cross building, at 600 N. George St. and will host another one on Oct. 23, from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

In Mount Olive, a blood drive was held on Wednesday from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. at Snow Hill Free Will Baptist Church, 1224 Red Hill Road.

Cassie Kornegay, a Snow Hill Free Will Baptist Church member, said that after the church opened on Wednesday, 13 people had signed up online, and all came to donate blood. Five people walked in and signed up.

Kornegay said the staff was able to work with four people at a time.

"We're a really small community," Kornegay said. "I help to coordinate the blood drives. Some people walk in, some sign up here."

Mark Hobbs, a Snow Hill Free Will Baptist Church pastor, said he has donated blood for more than 40 years.

Mount Olive resident Stacey Singleton said she did the Power Red donation.

A Power Red donation is similar to a whole blood donation, except a special machine allows the donor to safely donate two units of red blood cells during one donation while returning the donor's plasma and platelets, according to redcrossblood.org.

Singleton said she was given a stress toy to squeeze so her arm's blood flow could return to normal after donating.

Singleton also said she and her daughter, Kaylee, donated blood together Wednesday afternoon.

"I heard about the blood drive from the church," she said. "This is my main church I go to."

More blood drives are being scheduled across Wayne County.

The Goldsboro Wayne County Association of Realtors building, at 1108 Ash St., will host a blood drive on Oct. 30 from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. On Oct. 31, Eastern Wayne High School, 1135 New Hope Road, will host a blood drive from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

On Oct. 17, two more blood drives will take place in Mount Olive. One will be held at the American Legion Post 103 building, 709 N. Chestnut St., and another at the Beautancus Community Club building, 1728 Beautancus Road.

Both blood drives will run from 1:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Another blood drive will be held at Southern Wayne High School, at 124 Walter Fulcher Road, on Oct. 15 from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

For more information about the blood drives, visit redcrossblood.org.

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Unexpected tragedy brings people together

October 9, 2024 | Goldsboro News-Argus, The (NC) Author: Janice Sasser Verses and Vittles | Section: Mo | 734 Words OpenURL Link

"Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed." — Psalm 57:1

Friday Sept. 27, 2024, changed the lives for many unsuspecting people. I am sure that the people in the western N.C. area had no idea a few days ahead of storm Helene that things would change for them so quickly. We have all been in shock and worry since the storm passed and we began to see horror stories in this area that has broken our hearts. I saw so many people worried about friends and loved ones that they could not contact and the pain they felt because they didn't know if they were OK or not. Phone communication was becoming something that was next to impossible in some areas. I had a cousin that had a son in this area, and she cried out for help through Facebook for information and also for prayers that he would be found. Fortunately, she did finally make contact with him and we were all so happy for her and her family. Another friend had a brother and 91-year-old father that lived in the mountains and she nor her brother could get in touch with her father. Fortunately, they finally had contact with him and found out that he was without power and water, but he was OK, and he had neighbors looking out for him.

The stories go on and they have each touched me deeply as they have everyone. What has come out of this tragedy is that we are all closer together than we even imagined. Churches, organizations, planes, cars, trucks, linemen, and the list is so long of people and organizations that have started collecting items and money needed to go this area to help. People are getting to them in every way that is possible to help them recover. They are showing compassion and joining together to help their neighbors. Just writing this I feel the tears welling up in my eyes and my heart pumping with compassion for all of them and for the many people that have reached out and will continue to reach out to help them until they recover as much as they can from Helene. Will they ever fully recover, maybe one day but it will be a long time coming. The recovery from losing loved ones and the fear they have felt as they struggled to survive will never heal. What they will keep close to them though is the love that has been shown to them each day as they re-build their life.

This is what God wants, it sums it all up in this one tragedy. Not just this tragedy but every day He just wants us to show compassion and grace just like He does. In closing I just want to say, "Thank you Lord for bringing us together and showing us that we are really one and this tragedy has made that happen again." There are so many ways you can help, even if you can only pray that is OK because that is an important part of this healing process for everyone involved.

PRAYER: In the midst of devastation and chaos, we pray for your peace to reign in western North Carolina. We ask that you bring calm to hearts, unity among neighbors, and an overwhelming sense of community as people come together to support one another. May your love be the light that shines through the darkness and the hope that binds the broken, in Jesus' name, amen.

Strawberry Fluff Salad

- 1 (3.4 oz.) package instant vanilla pudding mix
- 1 (20 oz.) can crushed pineapple, undrained
- 1 (8 oz.) container whipped topping, thawed
- 1 (10 oz.) package frozen strawberries, thawed and drained

Mini marshmallows, to taste

Fresh strawberries, for garnish (optional)

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the instant vanilla pudding mix and the undrained crushed pineapple until well combined. Fold in the thawed whipped topping until fully incorporated. Gently stir in the thawed and drained frozen strawberries until evenly distributed. Add mini marshmallows to the mixture, to taste, and gently fold them in. Cover the bowl and refrigerate the salad for at least 1 hour before serving to allow the flavors to meld together and the salad to chill. Serve the chilled Strawberry Fluff Salad garnished with fresh strawberries, if desired (Family Cook Recipes).

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Leaders in agriculture honored with awards

October 9, 2024 | Goldsboro News-Argus, The (NC) Author: Sam Dietrich| Section: Local | 771 Words OpenURL Link

A family-owned agriculture business based in Goldsboro was recognized as the 2024 Agriculture Producer of the Year, while the Wayne Community College Applied Animal Science Instructor was named 2024 Agriculture Advocate of the Year during Tuesday's agriculture breakfast.

The breakfast was hosted by the Wayne County Chamber of Commerce and was held at the Maxwell Center.

Along with the presentation of awards, Chamber President Scott Satterfield interviewed Wayne County Commissioner Chris Gurley and Wayne County Planning Director Barry Gray, leading to discussions on key issues for the local farming community.

Satterfield said agriculture remains the top industry for Wayne County, providing an estimated 9,000 jobs and an estimated \$1.3 million into the county's local economy annually.

"Agriculture is big business," Satterfield said. "As a community, we must ensure that we are working alongside the county's largest economic industry. Agriculture is the foundation of not just our own economy, but any stable economy.

"Food will always be important. Where it comes from will always be important."

The two recipients of awards this year were being recognized for what they have done for agriculture is "a highlight" of the year, Satterfield said.

Jennifer Johnson, lead instructor of the Wayne Community College Animal Science Program, was named Agriculture Advocate of the Year. The award is presented each year to someone who promotes agriculture in a positive way, Satterfield said.

"For nearly two decades, her former students have found success as industry leaders, teachers, veterinarians, community leaders and fellow agriculture advocates," Satterfield said.

Johnson has had a life-long dedication to agriculture in Wayne County, and has taken on extra responsibility to help further the agriculture industry. This includes her positions as Wayne County Chamber of Commerce Agriculture Committee chairman, a coordinator for the Agriculture Expo and a board member for the Wayne County Livestock Department, Satterfield said.

"We are blessed to be in a county that supports agriculture," Johnson said. "We are very fortunate to have what we have here in Wayne County."

The Agriculture Producer of the Year award was presented to Daw Farms for its use of innovative or sustainable practices to enhance operations.

Daw Farms is a family-owned agriculture business based in Goldsboro, at 653 Hare Road. The farm specializes in crop production and livestock farming to produce high-quality products to the community.

"This farm has always been an integral part of the farming landscape of Wayne County," Satterfield said. "They truly define the term 'farmer.'"

Daw Farms has served Wayne County through several partnerships, including the Wayne County Cooperative Extension, the Wayne County Farm Bureau Board of Directors, and the Wayne County Farmers Association Board of Directors.

Daw Farms has been recognized for its role in advancing many local and state-level agriculture businesses,

Paul Daw, Daw Farms manager for nearly three decades, accepted the Agriculture Producer of the Year award on behalf of the business.

Daw thanked everyone on behalf of his family, saying he was "appreciative" because events organized to recognize and honor farmers like him were not around much in his earlier years in the business.

"You can't have agriculture without a farm," Daw said. "As a farmer, I thank you for just being recognized. I thank you and my family thanks you."

After the awards were presented, Satterfield held a panel discussion with Wayne County Commissioner Chris Gurley and Wayne County Planning Director Barry Gray about important issues that impact agriculture in Wayne County.

The topics included farmland preservation, developing a county or regional sewer system and how it will impact agriculture, and solar energy facilities and how they may impact local farms.

Gurley said agriculture is the "number one industry" in Wayne County and is critical to its success.

"I'm just here as a supporter," he said.

Gray said agriculture is key to not just at the local level for Wayne County, but also key for eastern North Carolina in general.

Gray said when it comes to farmland preservation, he claimed that a lot of land in Wayne County is being used for a variety of purposes, including residential development and solar utility facilities.

"As properties develop, there's no going back," Gray said. "We do need to consider our agricultural land, if we can never get that back."

Satterfield also spoke about a newly formed local nonprofit called, We Need N.C.

He said the nonprofit is working to get food to people in need in western North Carolina.

"If you don't know the impact of food, you start taking some to people who don't have any, and we realize the impact of food," he said.

Gurley also became emotional when he spoke about Wayne County's impact on delivering food donations to people living in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina.

"It makes me proud to serve in Wayne County," Gurley said.

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Storm damage 'unbelievable'

October 9, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Author: KEVIN GRIFFIN Staff Reporter Section: Main 622 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

Greensboro Water Resources crews have been working in western North Carolina communities to help restore water and service following the destruction brought by Hurricane Helene.

The department currently has 19 employees working in western North Carolina. Patrick Smith, an operations manager in the department, has been among those assisting with the recovery.

He said workers replaced a main distribution line into the town of Black Mountain and had moved onto working in the town of Bakersville, about 60 miles north of Asheville, where Smith said the team was rebuilding water and sewer systems demolished by the storm.

Smith said the conditions in western North Carolina are "unbelievable when you see it with your own eyes." He likened it to a war zone and a movie set.

He also said the devastation was a testament to the destructive power water can have.

He recalled seeing a water line buried nearly 6 feet in the ground that had been completely uncovered and broken by the storm.

"It just washed out so much dirt and rocks from different places," Smith said. "I'm talking about 5-, 6-foot-deep as far as your eye can see. It's, like, amazing to see that type of force at work."

He said the people affected by the storm expressed gratitude for the assistance.

"The people are hanging on best they can," Smith said. "They are very appreciative of everyone coming in, volunteering, helping them out."

He said the areas the crews worked in were "flooded with people from all over the country," including public and private entities and personnel from as far away as Oklahoma.

Smith said some of the workers pulled an American flag out of Cane Creek and draped it over their truck.

"It's just a sense of pride to be able to help people in need because I would like to think if we needed that help in the Triad that other places would come in and help us," Smith said.

Water Resources is not the only department helping out west. The Greensboro Fire Department had 26 personnel working in the region as of Tuesday.

There are no Greensboro police officers currently working in western N.C., Greensboro Communications and Marketing Director Carla Banks confirmed Tuesday. The Greensboro Police Department sent an initial 36 officers, including members of the department's all-terrain vehicle (ATV) Team to help in Asheville on Sept. 29. Banks said the officers returned to Greensboro on Sunday.

Banks said the city receives reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for the hours employees work on hurricane response efforts.

Greensboro officials have pledged their continuing support for western North Carolina communities ravaged by Helene.

Last week, Mayor Nancy Vaughan suggested the possible use of the former American Hebrew Academy as a shelter for people displaced by Helene.

The property has been earmarked as a site for housing immigrant teens who come into the country without their parents, but the site is currently unoccupied.

U.S. Rep. Kathy Manning has said her office is in talks with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services about the potential of using the site.

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Vote planned on Helene relief funding

October 9, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Author: RICHARD CRAVER Staff Reporter | Section: Main | 901 Words

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Republican legislative leaders said Friday that next week's scheduled one-day session will include a vote on an initial disaster relief package to launch the state's funding response to Hurricane Helene.

When the regular part of the 2024 session was adjourned, the legislature established specific dates to return to address certain pending legislation and to hold potential veto override votes.

The next date is Wednesday, which was expected to involve veto override votes of House Bill 10, which features Republican priorities of \$460 million in K-12 Opportunity Scholarship funding for the 2024-25 school year, and would require all sheriffs to cooperate with federal ICE officials.

A joint statement from Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, and House speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, said "we are still working to determine what needs to be included in that legislation."

There is about \$5 billion in the state's so-called "rainy day fund" that has been a set aside funding priority of Republican legislators toward natural disaster relief efforts.

"Over the past week, we've heard directly from residents in Western North Carolina and have seen the devastation firsthand," the legislative leaders said.

"Our hearts are broken for the communities that have been ravaged by Hurricane Helene. Despite the destruction, it has been incredible to see how North Carolinians have stepped up to help. We cannot let up on those efforts or forget about the small communities that have been effectively closed off because of this storm."

Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper and state and federal officials also are awaiting initial damage assessment in order to request Federal Emergency Management Administration assistance.

President Joe Biden has approved a federal emergency declaration for North Carolina, which provides federal financial reimbursement for response actions by government entities and some non-profits. Biden visited this week parts of western N.C. with Cooper and state and federal relief officials.

House Minority leader Rep. Robert Rieves, D-Chatham, said "House Democrats are thinking of and praying for the residents affected by Hurricane Helene, especially in Western North Carolina, but also in Eastern North Carolina where a tornado tore through Rocky Mount."

"We are committed to doing whatever it takes to help rebuild the region over the long term. We have to begin planning for the long-term recovery, which will take time. House Democrats have begun working on a package of relief measures and look forward to working with our Republican colleagues and the governor's team to help get it done.

"We stand ready to do this work in one of our regularly scheduled sessions or during a special session - whatever is necessary."

Mitch Kokai, senior policy analyst with conservative think tank John Locke Foundation, said "it's important to note that the statement referenced an initial disaster relief package."

"No one knows at this point how state government ultimately will need to respond to the storm's damage. We might not have those answers before a new General Assembly convenes in 2025."

Kokai said lawmakers "can take steps now to free up money for items that can be addressed in the coming weeks."

"Since lawmakers are already scheduled to return to Raleigh again in November and December, it's likely that more hurricane-related legislation could be considered at those sessions as well."

Neither Berger nor Moore's office could be immediately reached for comment on whether veto override votes still were planned. Neither chamber have posted their planned agendas for Wednesday.

The Republican supermajority passed HB10 on Sept. 12. The Opportunity Scholarship language in HB10 allows North Carolina parents - no matter how much they make - to get vouchers to help cover tuition for K-12 private or religious schools for their children.

It's likely both chambers will override the veto, as they have seven of Cooper's eight vetoes this session.

It's not clear whether the legislature will look to divert the Opportunity Scholarship funding for 2024-25 school year to disaster relief efforts, or just draw from the rainy day fund.

Cooper has declared a state public education emergency in response to the proposed Opportunity Scholarship expansion, saying "we need to put a moratorium on destructive private-school vouchers until North Carolina's public schools are fully funded."

More than relief?

Berger and Moore did not indicate in their joint statement whether they intended to address any other pending legislation or call for a special session to do so.

In December 2016, the Republican super-majority held its third special session to pass a bill to provide \$200.9 million in disaster relief to 49 eastern counties affected by Hurricane Matthew and two tropical storms, as well as five western counties affected by wildfires.

However, rather than end that session and go home outside of scheduled joint oversight meetings, the General Assembly was called into a fourth special session protested by House Democrats.

Two bills were passed during that fourth session and quickly signed into law by Republican Gov. Pat McCrory. The bills surrendered gubernatorial appointee authority - held for decades - that Republican legislative leaders claimed allowed them to not have to go to court to enforce their reclaiming of authority.

For critics, McCrory's signing of the two bills demonstrated another example of a lack of political will and unwillingness to butt heads with strong Republican legislative leadership over potentially unconstitutional legislation.

The decision by McCrory not to hold a press conference or bill signing ceremony encapsulated his reputation as a go-along-to-get-along executive more in tune with being mayor of North Carolina than its governor.

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Helene cast a pall over the Blue Ridge Mountains

October 9, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Section: Main | 819 Words

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CAMDEN, S.C. - "Chill" is the word that comes to mind when thinking of Asheville, North Carolina, the center of Hurricane Helene's devastation last week. A hub for musicians, artists, writers, chefs, animal lovers and entrepreneurs nestled among the Blue Ridge Mountains at a temperate 2,134-foot elevation, Asheville today is bordering on a nervous breakdown. So is the Southeast, generally. For generations, the Blue Ridge Mountains have provided a summer refuge for people from all around the Deep South. My family has been among the fortunate who could escape to higher climes during insufferably hot and humid summers. Mornings there were often cool enough to justify building a fire. (This is rarely true now, as the world becomes warmer.) It seems almost everyone knows someone who lives in "the mountains," and nearly everybody else spends time there. We expect hurricanes and tropical storms to visit our coastline and Lowcountry, but who could have imagined that one could become a threat to towns hundreds of miles from the ocean? Helene was a tropical storm by the time it reached the Carolinas, but it was still so big and so powerful that its lashing rain and winds reached South Carolina's Midlands, and people across the region are feeling the storm's pain. When Mark Edens, a friend and part owner of a popular antiques store here in Camden, saw me the day after the storm, he skipped any greeting and went right to, "How bad are you hurting?" His despair was palpable. "You know, I physically live here," he said, "but my soul lives in the mountains. It was just too much. It broke me." "Soul" is another word that fits the Blue Ridge. Something about the mountains nourishes the soul. It's the cooler air as you climb higher with each turn of the road. It's also the aroma of millions of trees that remind you of Christmas. Some might say when you're in the mountains, you're closer to the angels. Asheville's fortunate location at the junction of two rivers, the French Broad and the Swannanoa, proved to be its undoing when Helene blew through and the waters rose to depths of massive destruction. If there were an apocalyptic film named "Helene," the soundtrack would have to be Rhiannon Giddens's "Swannanoa Tunnel." The song, sometimes called "Asheville Junction," was first sung in the late 19th century to the sound of hammers pounding steel. It tells the story of the railroad tracks built by wrongfully imprisoned Black people who were labor for the Western North Carolina Railroad. Towns along that rail line, including Swannanoa, Black Mountain, Ridgecrest and Old Fort, were almost completely destroyed by the storm. In Asheville, little was spared - certainly not the River Arts District, a mile-long oasis for artists and collectors that includes galleries for 240 artists and 23 converted warehouses offering art, food, music, breweries and what's understood as the Asheville vibe. Artsy, laidback, cool and dog-friendly, it's a flannel-and-flip-flops mecca for hikers, mountain bikers, foodies and culture connoisseurs. One of my favorite haunts was the Marquee, a 50,000-square-foot emporium of fantasy and over-thetop sensory stimulation. Architectural elements, paintings, vintage furniture, jewelry, clothing, olive oil - it's all there. Or was. On one of my frequent visits, I fell in love with a 1950s-era television set that was converted into a terrarium. I'm sorry I didn't buy it. Another time, I broke down and bought a blue Huffy Nel Lusso cruiser bicycle that I was able to ride throughout the gallery. All gone now. In the immediate wake of the storm, the Asheville vibe was fully engaged, as neighbors and strangers helped one another by any means available. My son, John, who lives in Asheville, saw people going out of their way to share what others needed. But the novelty of shared catastrophe cannot last forever. "A week later, now that so many have cleared out, the neighbors-helping-neighbors vibe has subsided somewhat," he texted me, "and it just feels like one of the bleakest places I've ever been." I asked him what the area smells like, because the mountains usually smell so fresh and clean. "Mildew," he said. "It's not so much the smell as the ambiance. It feels like a bomb went off. Very empty and quiet, except for the occasional siren or helicopter every 20 minutes or so." Businesses are closed, except the odd gas station or grocery store with lines outside. Many people are going without power and water. It's hard to imagine how long it will take for the Blue Ridge to recover and rebuild. At least the birds are singing, John tells me. And the bears, who had been displaced by overdevelopment, are back to wandering the neighborhoods and downtown. John saw one walking down his street Thursday morning, probably scouting abandoned houses for leftovers. Chill, it seems, isn't just for people. Let's hope it lasts.

Parker writes for The Washington Post.

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Anguish in Ashe County

October 9, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Author: SUSIE C. SPEAR Staff Reporter | Section: Main | 1917 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

WARRENSVILLE - Loss is all too familiar to Gloria Graybeal.

As night fell Thursday evening, she propped her shovel against the wall and rested in a portable chair inside the modest used car dealership her dad opened decades ago on N.C. 88, the main riverfront roadway in Warrensville, population 1,400.

Outside, a fleet of sedans, compact cars and trucks all bear distinct muddy water marks etched above their doors to define the flood that washed over this Ashe County burg over a week ago.

All are likely a total loss, with floorboards and upholstery caked with sludge from the unprecedented surge of the North Fork of the New River - the end result of countless inches of rain dumped by Hurricane Helene in just 72 hours. The violent storm sent water 40 feet up a grassy bank to road level, then another five feet high inside Graybeal's dealership and on across N.C. 88.

Just opposite the auto lot, across N.C. 88, stands a cross unmoved by the deluge - a marker signifying Graybeal's greatest loss. That of her precious son.

In February 2021, Ethan Seth Shrader, 21, passed away after his motorcycle crashed into the side of a frame building that sits along the curve. It's a pain Graybeal can't speak about.

In the wake of the storm, she's taking comfort from friend Tony Severt and boyfriend Chris Roland, both helping clear debris with Graybeal and cranking engines to see which cars may sputter to life.

"I'm doing the best way I know how," Graybeal admitted. "I'm just digging up mud and doing what we can to start over."

Like nearly every business owner in the area, Graybeal lacks flood insurance. She'd always felt secure being positioned so high on a hill, she said.

But this once-in-a-lifetime event caused a universal shock to the region.

"We're so deep in the hole," said Graybeal, growing emotional. She wiped her eyes. "I don't know what to do, but we're gonna try to get back."

Graybeal's stoicism is not uncommon for residents in these Blue Ridge Mountains. They come from a legacy of self-reliant people, intrepid folks who carved out their lives in the rugged hills, knowing their winters would be more harsh, their plow rows more steep and resources for their homes and farms more scarce. They established a network of neighbors to help mend fences, dig wells and tend to the sick.

And now, that very kind of support system is in full force as this area, like many other enclaves in the rural counties of North Carolina and Tennessee, makes do with help from volunteer relief groups until more state and federal aid arrives.

Lansing, an Ashe County town of 128, brimmed with activity Thursday as shop owners and residents directed volunteers with loaded trailers to the most remote reaches of the area where people were still without food and water.

Johnny Burleson delegated traffic and resources at Command Central, a portable trailer set up by the Wilkes County Rescue Squad.

"We organized our own emergency response team," said Burleson, who lives in the nearby Horse Creek community.

Earlier Thursday morning, he greeted Gov. Roy Cooper and top administrators with the state's Department of Health and Human Services when they arrived by helicopter to assess the damage.

"They spent a few hours and saw firsthand what is going on, and we felt very good about their response," Burleson said.

Problems are so vast, they are nearly unfathomable, Burleson and others explained. With fences washed away, livestock are roaming and often in roadways.

Once they're corralled, farmers will need hay to replace what has been lost. That need will be most keen in about three weeks, locals said.

Infrastructure damage is staggering. Roadways leading in and out of communities are dangerously eroded by the assault from the storm surge.

Steep curved roads in many areas have been reduced to one lane because the shoulders collapsed. The asphalt appears to have been bitten away by jaws of a monster.

Yellowjackets blanket trash scraps and have become a hazard for children and adults. For that reason, residents are pleading for donations of EpiPens and Benadryl for those who suffer anaphylactic shock from bee stings and lesser reactions.

Bridge after bridge is destroyed and laden with felled trees and other debris. In fact, some volunteers have used drones to drop food to people who cannot be reached by plane or ATVs.

Cornfields are laid flat and burned blonde, as if folded down like sheets of paper by wind and water.

Automobiles float in the North Fork of the New River.

Every mile or so, you see the foundation of a riverside house - then glimpse the splintered remains snagged in trees downstream.

Clothing, tin roof panels, toys and bikes hang in chalky vines by the river.

The front yards and carports of houses are heaped with mildew and the soggy contents of once-cozy homes.

And in some yards, salvaged homemade quilts are stretched to dry in the welcome sun - flags of optimism.

So far, one woman has been confirmed dead in the Rich Hill area, according to Lansing Fire Chief Jeff Venable. The unnamed woman was trying to escape a flooded Jeep with the aid of her husband, but perished in the rushing river.

Watching his house wash away was more than one man in neighboring Grayson County, Va., could bear, according to Venable. He knew the tradesman personally.

"He said he was too old to start over and went to his truck and shot himself," said Venable with a sober nod.

Like many, Venable has a timeline events from Helene seared into his mind's eye.

"We lost two of our fire trucks," he recalled. "And Christy Matkins, who was trying to help us with dispatch the day of the flood, got caught in the building when the water started rising. The water rose all the way to her neck and stopped. She was lucky."

People in a nearby Lansing building, caught off-guard by the swift rise of water, were forced to "punch through" ceiling tiles to get to rooftops, Burleson said.

Other casualties may still be discovered in the northern-most part of the county, Burleson said, though no official numbers of missing persons was available.

A military crew was conducting a foot search in remote areas throughout the day on Thursday.

Rene Shuford lost everything in floodwaters, including a treasured box car from the historic "Virginia Creeper" train that once ran from Abingdon, Va., to Elkland. The train car had long rested on the lawn of her Tuckerdale community home.

"We don't know if it's livable," she said of her still-standing 114-year-old historic frame house on Big Horse Creek near Lansing. Houses that flanked it were lifted from their foundations by the flood water, Shuford said.

"I was at my house until 9 a.m. on Friday (Sept. 27). Then I took my dogs up the road and stayed at my neighbors, and the water came way up the road," she said. "The next morning, the house that had been to the right of mine, was moved to the left of my house."

She lamented the fact that two businesses located in a building she owns in downtown Lansing also lost everything when water rose 8 feet in their antique and barber shops.

Like most, Shuford's building lacked flood insurance. "It's so expensive, you can't afford to get it," she said.

For now, working among other people helps her move forward, said Shuford, a Boone native.

"Whatcha gonna do? We're obviously gonna be super busy."

At Riverview Community Center near Creston, a hamlet of 855 folks, a troupe of helpers from across the state trudged through the mire to get foodstuffs, cleaning supplies and other essentials to a staging room.

Greg Aldridge and his wife, Annette Aldridge, drove in Thursday morning from Monroe to help. "It's my birthday," she said, toting bananas and Gatorades to workers and state troopers directing traffic. "But I'm right where I want to be."

Around 2 p.m., the rhythmic roar of helicopter blades drew the attention of dozens at the community center. An Army National Guard chopper full of much-needed supplies had arrived in a nearby field.

Juanita Bledsoe of Three Top Road ran toward a crew member, who ducked out in helmet and fatigues. Bledsoe threw her arms upward and said, "My Jesus sent this!" She hugged the guardsman tight.

Courtney Eldreth, a medical assistant from Creston, was feeling lucky Thursday as she packed her side-by-side with supplies for neighbors who lost homes. She lost only power, the 27-year-old said.

"Three or four more feet and we would have lost everything. We are so fortunate. It's been such a shock," said Eldreth, who watched the "creek become a river" in her yard and from her front window counted 32 tires float by last Saturday.

"I don't know if people even have words for it yet. We knew it was gonna be bad, but this is complete devastating shock."

E.H. Farmer remembers building the ranch-style brick house for his family in 1968. His wife was expecting and life for the couple was just starting out.

On Thursday at dusk, Farmer and his son, Eric, who inherited the house, cleaned debris from the yard and assessed the gutted structure.

A sheet of bricks along the front had buckled and an aluminum carport lay twisted on the front lawn.

"I was born in 1969, and I was in the house as a baby," the younger Farmer said. "They kept me in that house in a dresser drawer as a baby."

On that treacherous Friday, he and his wife left their house around 11 a.m. as water rose inside. They were able to rescue two of their three dogs - Lexi and Haichi, but lost beloved hound Simone.

"I don't know if the county will let us build back, but we want to," said Farmer, an industrial engineer. "The river is so beautiful 95% of the time. It's just that 5% of the time that it's a mess."

Tears welled in his eyes. "You just have to have faith that the good Lord saved me because he had another purpose for me."

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Main

October 9, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Section: Main | 85 Words

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Many homeowners hit by Helene lack flood insurance NEWS, A6

Lawmakers seek to honor 'Miracle on Ice' SPORTS, B3

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Price-gouging complaints up in wake of hurricane

October 9, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Author: RICHARD CRAVER Staff Reporter | Section: Main | 481 Words

Page: 3A OpenURL Link

Nearly 200 complaints about price gouging have been reported in North Carolina in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, including three in Guilford County and one in Forsyth County, the Attorney General's Office reported.

The vast majority of the 196 complaints come from western North Carolina and most involve groceries (primarily water) at 44%, hotel costs at 26% and fuel at 18%.

The majority of complaints involve businesses in Buncombe, Cleveland, Madison and Mecklenburg counties.

For the 14 counties in the Triad and northwest North Carolina, there were 22 price-gouging complaints: 11 in Watauga, four in Randolph, two in Ashe and one each in Alamance and Wilkes. The AG's office did not provide a breakdown of types of complaints by county.

North Carolina's law against price gouging, or charging too much in times of a crisis, goes into effect when the governor or the legislature declares a state of emergency.

In some cases, businesses and industries that are heavily impacted by the incident causing the state of emergency have a reasonable need to increase prices in order to resupply, but they should disclose these increases so people can make informed purchasing decisions.

Businesses cannot, however, unreasonably raise the price of goods or services to profit from a state of emergency. Price gouging complaints can be submitted at 877-5-NO-SCAM or www.ncdoj.gov/pricegouging.

"I have seen firsthand the devastation people in western North Carolina are facing," Attorney General Josh Stein said.

"The people I've spoken with have more than enough to worry about as they recover and rebuild. The last thing they need is a scammer coming in to take advantage of their desperation.

"If you see price gouging or any other scam, please report it to my office so we can investigate and take action."

The office provided several recommendations for those affected by Helene-related damage.

If a storm damages your property, you may need repairs. Be sure to get a written estimate from contractors before rushing into a deal. Check out a business's credentials and visit Better Business Bureau or call our office to make sure the company does not have complaints against them. Do not pay upfront. Some companies may pressure you to pay the full cost up front before they start the work, but then will fall short of what was asked of them. Pay your contractors as you go, once you are satisfied with the work they have done, and hold back a percentage until the job is done. Be wary of limited-time assistance. Some businesses may offer special "now or never" deals to your family following hurricane damage. A lot of these offers might come directly to your door, with out-of-state companies showing up at your doorstep and offering to do work immediately. If the deal seems too good to be true, it probably is. Don't sign unless you've done your research.

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Main

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Moved to tears

I am rarely moved to write to compliment the News & Record. The article by Susie C. Spear, "Anguish in Ashe," (Oct. 7) provided such an occasion.

This in-depth piece by your staff writer is an example of what journalism could be. It was an insightful, well-written account of the harsh realities facing High Country communities in the aftermath of Helene. I was moved to tears by the interviews, and the stories of perseverance by these often-overlooked people.

Steve Arnett

Greensboro

A double standard

Thanks to the writer of the letter "The gnat vs the camel" (Oct. 6). Well-done!

I, too, am struggling to understand how the bar for integrity and character seems to have found a ground floor for Mark Robinson, a known quantity even before he became a candidate for governor. Yet, it is still an elusive moving part for the former president whose history is long and blistered with damning convictions, infractions of integrity and a severe lack of character.

If there is now a final low to that bar we have applied to Robinson with the CNN report, why is there still a moving bar that can't seem to drop low enough for a candidate for president of this country we know to lack any kind of moral compass? How many times does it need to be tested?

And this is who we want to make decisions and represent us in the world and to be the model you want your children to emulate? As he makes this national test of a bar too low, the whole country gets dragged with him. I refuse to go! VOTE!

One other question: Why will presidents need to take an oath of office if they are protected by immunity for their conduct while in office?

Marty Outlaw

Greensboro

Inform your vote

Down-ballot offices have more impact on our daily lives than those at the top of the ticket, yet most voters know little about them. Resources are available.

The League of Women Voters (LWV) publishes the voter411.org website, which provides a candidate comparison

tool for every race on your ballot based on the voter's address and the candidates' responses to a LWV survey. At the end of this voter tool, you can print out your choices.

You can follow the money on congressional races by visiting OpenSecrets.org and clicking on the box in the upper right corner. Learn how much a candidate's campaign raised, (as of June 30 at the time of this writing), what percentages of the funds came from donors giving \$200 or less, the top contributions and the leading industries from which their donations came. Campaign financing sheds a light on whose interests a candidate will serve in Congress.

Please vote "No" to the amendment that would revise the N.C. Constitution to say that only a citizen can vote. The state constitution already requires citizenship to vote. Who knows what mischief such a change could cause?

Also, please vote "Yes" to the $\frac{1}{4}$ of a penny increase in the local sales tax, which will support the compensation of Guilford County Schools' teachers and support staff, who are woefully underpaid.

Early voting begins on begins on Oct. 17. Find the schedule and locations on the Guilford County website. Vote early, all the way down the ballot.

Margaret Villani

Greensboro

Avalanche of lies

I'm feeling despair for the current state of our political discourse and tribalism. I miss the simpler, less techy time when we had respectful political dialogue. Even if we disagreed on policies and positions, we never questioned our mutual reverence for our democratic institutions, the core tenets of the Constitution, and the rule of law. Honesty and decency were prerequisites for our leaders. These days, watching the Trump and MAGA movement willfully spreading an avalanche of lies, inciting fear and division, has been distressing. Absorbing their nonstop demonization of immigrants beyond any responsible or justifiable proportion, showing zero compassion, is heartbreaking and confounding.

Now, they are spreading misinformation on a tragic storm, even as the response by FEMA is praised by Republican governors and senators, using fabrications as fodder for political purposes, generating more pain for the people who are already suffering.

As the election nears, the cruelty, deceptions and stoking of fear continue at an ever-escalating rate. Yet, millions claiming to be "people of faith" and "patriotic" eat it up and cheer on the manipulative, hateful screed, seemingly unaware of the massive destruction they themselves are causing to the foundational democracy they claim to love and cherish.

We are standing in the breach this election cycle. It's up to us, regardless of political party, to protect the foundation of our democracy and ensure that America remains on the path to fulfilling its promise for future generations by voting for Kamala Harris and the full slate of Democratic candidates.

Brian Goldberg

Greensboro

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

October 9, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

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Wednesday's letters: This Helene story moved a reader to tears

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Blaming immigrants isn't policy. It's racist.

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On Friday, we learned that the U.S. added 254,000 jobs in September, bringing the unemployment rate down to 4.1%. When President Barack Obama was elected, the Great Recession had pushed the rate to 7.8%. President Donald Trump inherited a rate of 3.6%, and he gave President Joe Biden a mishandled pandemic and 6.4% unemployment.

The next president is likely going to inherit an economy that is strong, even if many Americans aren't feeling that way. The next president will also bring with them a narrative about the economy. In the case of Trump, it's a story we've heard far too many times: Blame the minorities.

Over the eight years of the Obama administration, wages went up and unemployment reached historic lows, but the subprime mortgage crisis that began in 2007 left a lasting mark on housing. How could it not, when home ownership fell to its lowest point since 1965? Construction slowed, but demand for housing did not, and that's how we ended up with the affordability crisis we have now.

Trump wants voters to blame desperate migrants for the shortage of affordable housing, but it was his friends on Wall Street who began this cycle.

Just as it was his intentional downplaying of the pandemic during the first few months - something he said he did to prevent panic - that left Americans misinformed and sent the economy into a tailspin. Instead of preparing us, Trump told us to blame China. That rhetoric sparked a wave of anti-Asian hate crimes.

During the Obama administration, more than 2.5 million immigrants were deported. That's more than any other administration had forced out before, and Americans were still losing their homes - because that housing crisis was caused by corporate greed, not by illegal immigration.

Trump fared well in 2016 by blaming desperate Black and brown people as the root cause of housing problems and any other economic issue, neatly avoiding any context about Wall Street's role. And because this helped get him to the White House the first time, I understand why there's a temptation for his campaign now to couch this rhetoric as policy - to claim, for instance, that deporting people will ease the housing shortage or that disaster relief money for victims of Hurricane Helene was diverted to migrants at the border.

But it's not policy.

It's just racist.

And we need to just call it out for what it is.

Last week, the Trump campaign sent out a press release that read "Kamala's Open Border Jeopardizes FEMA's Hurricane Response." It was in response to Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas reiterating that the Federal Emergency Management Agency may not have enough funds to make it to the end of hurricane season in November. The agency initially raised concerns at the beginning of the season in June, and the Biden administration overhauled aspects of FEMA relief to get funds out quicker. From Hurricane Katrina in 2005 through 2021, FEMA has spent more than \$12 billion a year. From 1992 to 2004, it was \$5 billion.

It was weather, not immigrants, that forced more than 3.3 million Americans out of their homes in 2022, nearly half

that number for more than a month. However, the Trump campaign didn't mention climate change, perhaps because the former president still thinks it's a hoax. But the data show more funds were needed in response to the sweeping damage caused by natural disasters, not because of any trend in immigration.

And yet, the Trump campaign's press secretary said: "FEMA has run out of money for the rest of hurricane season because Kamala Harris used the funds for free giveaways to illegal immigrants."

That's not true.

During the vice-presidential debate, Sen. JD Vance took every opportunity he could to fault migrants and immigration for economic issues, echoing his boss. For his part, Trump's comments about immigrants "poisoning the blood of our country" echoed Adolf Hitler. No wonder Vance compared Trump to Hitler in 2016 before switching allegiances.

Now the two of them are floating "mass deportation" as a solution ... to problems caused by corporate greed. Never mind that deportations would aggravate many problems, including food costs and housing shortages.

In 2019, more than half the farmworkers in the country - 450,000 - were immigrants. In addition to the billions it would cost for the Trump-Vance deportation plan, what do you think would happen to food prices? And to housing availability if a huge percentage of construction workers were deported? In Texas, half of the industry's laborers undocumented.

Blaming Black and brown people might be red meat on the campaign trail, but it just isn't sound economic policy.

It's just racism.

LZ Granderson is a columnist for the Los Angeles Times.

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