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Samaritan's Purse, Alliance Bible Fellowship establish disaster response site

October 2, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC)
Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com | Section: Local | 593 Words
OpenURL Link

BOONE — Samaritan's Purse and Alliance Bible Fellowship have partnered to establish a disaster response site on the church's property, 1035 North Carolina Hwy 105 Bypass in Boone.

Beginning on Sunday, Sept. 29, scores of volunteers have been gathering at the church. Samaritan's Purse has been organizing teams to go out into parts of the county and surrounding area to deliver supplies and respond to those who have lost their homes. SP began taking work orders on Monday.

Samaritan's Purse is accepting volunteers daily. Those interested can show up at the church at 7:30 a.m. and 12 p.m. for a volunteer orientation and debrief before heading to local impact areas.

Michael Talley, discipleship pastor with Alliance Bible Fellowship, said much of the volunteer work is being focused on people whose homes were impacted due to the storm.

"Their main thing is to get people back into homes and get driveways restored," Talley said. "They're clearing out driveways, mucking out houses, all of that. They're the ones organizing it."

Moreover, Talley said through Samaritan's Purse's extensive network of volunteers, people are coming in from across the country to help with the cleanup effort. The church is helping to house the overnight volunteers.

On Sunday, teams of volunteers were driving as far as they could to impacted areas and hiking in supplies the rest of the way to places where residents could not get out.

"We want to be able to mobilize people to meet the need," Mike Shellman, outreach and assimilation pastor with ABF, said. "We'll feed them, and they'll bring food with them when they go out to people in the community."

The church also received a $25,000 donation to go toward water bottles. Talley said people with prayer needs are welcome to come by, pray and pick up a case of water. Other groups, such as The Rock Church, have also pitched in to provide meals to the volunteers.

"It's good to see the community come together," Talley said.

Since response efforts began, Samaritan's Purse has continued its relief work in Watauga County, which is home to Samaritan's Purse international headquarters. The communities surrounding Boone have been particularly hard hit by toppled trees, flooding, road damage, and a lack of power and water. This response extends to include neighboring counties in Ashe and Avery and Johnson County in east Tennessee.

According to Samaritan's Purse President Franklin Graham, the Christian humanitarian aid organization responds to disaster areas across the globe but is now responding to the needs in its own backyard.

"Hurricane Helene slammed western North Carolina and the surrounding area, as well as Georgia and Florida. Homes have been flooded and some even washed away. Trees are down, and tens of thousands are still without power. We would be grateful for your prayers for all those affected by this storm," Graham wrote in a social media post.

SP is also assisting three area hospitals: Charles A. Cannon, Jr. Memorial Hospital in Avery County, Ashe County Hospital and Watauga Medical Center. In Avery County, SP has deployed a 20-bed emergency field hospital

designed as an emergency room triage unit.

SP search and rescue teams are currently scouring Avery County and expect an influx of injured people. In Watauga and Ashe counties, SP has established a field unit to provide oxygen for patients who are without power at home.

High Country SP operations also involved airlifting food and water to Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, as the university worked to respond to student needs and airlift them to safety in the wake of the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

For more information on volunteer opportunities with Samaritan's Purse, visit spvolunteer.org.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com, 'Samaritan’s Purse, Alliance Bible Fellowship establish disaster response site', *Watauga Democrat, The* (online), 2 Oct 2024 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFA11C51E7BD80›

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Watch out for scammers as recovery efforts move forward

October 2, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC)
Author: Ben McNeely | Section: Local | 379 Words
OpenURL Link

Attorney General Josh Stein declared the state's price-gouging law in effect ahead of Hurricane Helene making landfall. The law, activated when the governor or General Assembly declares a state of emergency, is intended to keep businesses from unreasonably raising prices during a crisis.

As of Sunday, the N.C. Department of Justice has started to receive price-gouging complaints from across the region, mainly on gas, water, and hotel prices.

Stein said the bulk of the complaints are coming from the Boone area, where some hotels are charging between $1,000 and $1,500 a night for a room.

The Justice Department has a hotline to call if you suspect a business of price gouging. Call the Consumer Protection Division at 1-877-5-NO-SCAM (1-877-566-7226) to leave a report. Residents can also file a price gouging complaint online at ncdoj.gov/file-a-complaint/price-gouging/.

The price gouging complaint line a "see-something, say-something" system, Stein said. Once they receive a complaint, investigators in Raleigh will start gathering evidence to build a price gouging case.

"The vast majority of businesses are working so hard to try to meet the needs of their community, and it's a shame when some companies try to exploit some people's desperation to try and make a quick buck," Stein said. "When we identify those companies, we will not hesitate to hold them accountable."

When it comes to repairing damage, Stein said residents should do research on contractors before they hire them to do work on their property.

He recommends the following:

Call the 211 helpline to find reputable contractors.Get as many quotes in writing as possible before choosing a contractor.Make sure the contract is in writing, laying out the full scope of work to be done.Don't pay with cash upfront. Use a credit card when you can because you can challenge the charge later if need be.

Residents outside of western North Carolina should also be wary of charity scammers that prey on people's benevolence, and end up stealing their money, Stein said.

The state has activated the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund, which is managed by the United Way, to get donation money to reputable organizations.

The price gouging law expires when the state of emergency expires. The Justice Department says that is 30 days after declaration unless it is terminated earlier. If the state of emergency is extended, price gouging prohibitions remain in effect.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  Ben McNeely, 'Watch out for scammers as recovery efforts move forward', *Watauga Democrat, The* (online), 2 Oct 2024 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFA11C475FF468›

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STORM RECOVERY: Carbon Monoxide Safety

October 2, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC)
Author: Staff Writer | Section: Local | 440 Words
OpenURL Link

Widespread power outages due to damage from Hurricane Helene are making it necessary for the community to use alternate methods to cook, heat and power homes and businesses. Boone Fire wants to educate the public to the dangers of Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning from fuel burning appliances and equipment.

A generator should only be used in a well-ventilated location outdoors away from windows, doors and vent openings.Do not run a vehicle or other fueled engine or motor indoors, even if garage doors are open.Gas or charcoal grills produce CO — and should only be used outdoors.

Often called the invisible killer, carbon monoxide is an invisible, odorless, colorless gas created when fuels (such as gasoline, wood, coal, natural gas, propane, oil, and methane) burn. In the home, heating and cooking equipment, and generators that burn fuel can be sources of carbon monoxide.

Facts

Carbon monoxide poisoning is one of the leading causes of death after storms in areas dealing with power outages.A person can be poisoned by a small amount of CO over a longer period of time or by a large amount of CO over a shorter amount of time.According to the CDC, each year more than 400 Americans die from unintentional CO poisonings, more than 20,000 visit the emergency room and over 4,000 are hospitalized due to CO poisoning.CO enters the body through breathing. CO poisoning can be confused with flu symptoms, food poisoning and other illnesses. Some symptoms include shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, light headedness or headaches. High levels of CO can be fatal, causing death within minutes.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and Boone Fire Department recommend these simple Carbon Monoxide Safety Tips to protect you from CO poisoning or death.

CO alarms should be installed in a central location outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home and in other locations where required by applicable laws, codes or standards. For the best protection, interconnect all CO alarms throughout the home. When one sounds, they all sound.Follow the manufacturer's instructions for placement and mounting height.Choose a CO alarm that is listed by a qualified testing laboratory.Test CO alarms at least once a month; replace them according to the manufacturer's instructions.If the audible trouble signal sounds, check for low batteries. If the battery is low, replace it. If it still sounds, call the fire department.If the CO alarm sounds, immediately move to a fresh air location outdoors or by an open window or door. Make sure everyone inside the home is accounted for. Call 911 for help from a fresh air location and stay there until emergency personnel declare that it is safe to re-enter the home.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  Staff Writer, 'STORM RECOVERY: Carbon Monoxide Safety', *Watauga Democrat, The*(online), 2 Oct 2024
  ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFA11C565C8878›

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Outage restoration continues with more than 400 personnel in the field, 25,583 remain without power

October 2, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC)
Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com | Section: Local | 267 Words
OpenURL Link

More than 300 line technicians consisting of Blue Ridge Energy crews and crews from sister cooperatives, contractors, plus more than 100 personnel from tree and grading teams, are working around the clock to restore power to its service area affected by catastrophic damage from Hurricane Helene. More assistance continues arriving daily from up and down the East Coast.

Damage to the electric cooperative's system can be categorized as catastrophic. In many cases, infrastructure has to be completely rebuilt from the ground up. Crews continue sawing their way into areas devasted by massive vegetation loss and other communities remain cutoff from the world.

All Blue Ridge Energy staff are currently tasked with restoration efforts or supporting restoration efforts in the field. The cooperative is working diligently to complete work on three-phase lines, which are the main energy arteries, across our service territory. Work has begun in mass to fix damaged tap lines, which are the lines typically seen closer to homes and neighborhoods.

Crews are also making extensive efforts to repair redundant lines – or lines that typically backfeed areas in the event of an outage in an effort to get as many members restored as quickly as possible.

Even with hundreds of crews working 24/7, some of the hardest hit areas will take another week or longer to restore. Other areas the cooperative hopes to restore sooner as crews continue making progress.

Blue Ridge Energy serves some 80,000 members in Caldwell, Watauga, Ashe, and Alleghany counties as well as parts of Avery, Alexander and Wilkes counties. Learn more at www.BlueRidgeEnergy.com or on the cooperative's social media on Facebook, X and Instagram.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com, 'Outage restoration continues with more than 400 personnel in the field, 25,583 remain without power', *Watauga Democrat, The* (online), 2 Oct 2024 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFA11C59A3FAE8›

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Searches underway as Helene deaths pass 150 - Searches underway as Helene deaths pass 150

October 2, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)
Author: Associated Press | Section: A | 174 Words
Page: 6
OpenURL Link

SWANNANOA, N.C. - Cadaver dogs and search crews trudged through knee-deep muck and debris Tuesday looking in the mountains of western North Carolina for victims of Hurricane Helene, days after the storm carved a destructive path through the Southeast.

With Helene's death toll passing 150, searchers fanned out across the region, using helicopters to get past washed-out bridges and hiking through wilderness to reach isolated homes.

Many who lived through the storm were left without electricity or a way to reach out for help. Some cooked food on charcoal grills or hiked to high ground in hopes of finding a signal to call loved ones.

"Communities were wiped off the map," North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said at a news conference Tuesday.

The devastation was especially bad in the Blue Ridge Mountains, where at least 50 people died in and around Asheville, a tourism haven known for its art galleries, breweries and outdoor activities.

More than 150,000 households have already registered for assistance with the Federal Emergency Management Agency - a number that is expected to rapidly rise.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  Associated Press, 'Searches underway as Helene deaths pass 150 Searches underway as Helene deaths pass 150', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 2 Oct 2024 6 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF47078DE20808›

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Special delivery from Asheville Humane Society - 'Compassion in action' - Forsyth Humane Society rescues dozens of animals from Asheville

October 2, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)
Author: CONNOR MCNEELY Staff writer | Section: A | 1033 Words
Page: 1
OpenURL Link

Julie Long felt relieved when she saw a pack of hounds running down the plane's boarding ramp, barking and wagging their tails.

She had seen the Asheville Humane Society and knew that there was no way any animals could stay in the shelter after the devastation of Hurricane Helene. So the sight of cats and dogs excitedly arriving at a safe place in Forsyth County was a blessing beyond words.

On Monday, the Bissell Pet Foundation delivered 40 dogs and 57 cats from the Asheville Humane Society to the Forsyth Humane Society. Forsyth's Humane Society had also loaded up 1,000 pounds of donated supplies to send for distribution in Asheville.

"Being able to go on the transport last night was really cathartic for me, because having a child there and knowing how bad it is there, it was helpful for me to make a little difference of helping, knowing I can't be there," said Long, a volunteer at the Forsyth Humane Society.

Without electricity and running water, animal shelters in the western part of North Carolina are nearly helpless to care for any dogs, cats, or other small animals.

The flood of water completely swallowed Asheville's Brother Wolf Animal Rescue building after the shelter successfully evacuated its animals into temporary foster homes. At the Asheville Humane Society's headquarters, staff loaded up their animals into crates and sent them to Forsyth County.

The majority of the animals are healthy, but their stress and anxiety are through the roof, said Forsyth Humane Society President Mark Neff. Some of the animals came with a broken leg, hip, or eye infections.

For Neff and his 33 person staff, workdays in the aftermath of Helene now begin early in the morning and end late at night. The Humane Society currently has 210 animals in its care and is expecting hundreds more to arrive by the end of the week.

But despite the heavy workload, Neff believes the Forsyth Humane Society is shouldering the burden of those who have lost everything.

"This is compassion in action. And this isn't just about the animals. It really is about people," Neff said. "The people in these shelters, they're so focused on those animals, all they need to be focused on is themselves and their family and all of their losses."

Residents of Forsyth County have met the Humane Society with their help. The organization has now received over 500 applications for foster care, which helps free up space in the shelter and provide temporary care for animals who have already been flown across the state.

Neff often thinks about the upper limit that his organization can support. He knows that his medical staff can care for about 500 animals, and is thankful for the Forsyth County community, which he says is always ready to embrace animals without homes.

"The thing about animals is they're the innocent victims of this," Neff said. "Animals are completely, 100 percent dependent upon people."

As the animals arrive at the Humane Society, the organization's medical staff check their condition to understand whether they are spayed, neutered, vaccinated and healthy.

After that check, they are ready for adoption and foster care. Neff said that foster care usually entails a 2-4 week period of care for the animal, with variations if it is sick, injured, pregnant or nursing.

While the cats and dogs wait for a new home, volunteers keep them company in their crates and attempt to ease their worries after the chaos of the storm and a bumpy plane ride. Behind the Humane Society building, the organization has a large outdoor garden area with plenty of green space for dogs to run around and play.

Long, who has volunteered with the Humane Society for two years, said that her daughter and son-in-law went back to Asheville so she could work her job at a hospital.

"We had a lot of tears and a lot of 'OK, stop, take a breath,'" Long said.

Long decided to take in her daughters' two dogs, a German shepherd named Kratos, and a Pitbull mix named Luna, after the devastation of the hurricane.

At work, she cares for a number of hounds in the back of the Humane Society building. When she steps into their kennels, a mixed-breed dog named Crouton jumps onto her in a long embrace.

"What a relief," Long said. "We are literally saving that dog or that cat because they can't stay there. There is nowhere for them to stay."

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  CONNOR MCNEELY; Staff writer, 'Special delivery from Asheville Humane Society 'Compassion in action' - Forsyth Humane Society rescues dozens of animals from Asheville', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 2 Oct 2024 1 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF4707A92A8F18›

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Ask SAM: How can we help North Carolinians affected by Hurricane Helene?

October 2, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)
Section: A | 460 Words
Page: 2
OpenURL Link

SAM keeps getting questions from people who want to help the people in Western North Carolina who were affected by Hurricane Helene.

Money is what is needed the most right now, the N.C. Department of Public Safety said.

"Cash is always better than stuff," according to NCDPS.gov. "Stuff requires storage, sorting, and distribution - which is costly in both time and money. Cash can immediately be put to use for what is most needed in the moment. Give directly to local, trusted nonprofits for the biggest impact."

The department is also asking that people not go to damaged areas on their own to help.

"There will be numerous ways for volunteers to help in-person in the coming days, weeks, and months, and we will keep you posted on how to do that when the time is right," NCDPS said.

If you want to volunteer to help, you can fill out an application by going to www.nc.gov/working/volunteer-opportunities/volunteernc and clicking on Disaster Recovery Volunteer sign-up.

We do have several local drop-off points for donations.

In Winston-Salem, the Summit School, 2100 Reynolda Road, is accepting donations in conjunction with the Forsyth County Sheriff's office.

In Guilford County, residents can drop off supplies at Guilfordworks career centers and the branches of YMCA of Greensboro through Thursday.

The Guilfordworks centers are located at:

301 S. Greene St., Suite 200, Greensboro2301 W. Meadowview Rd., Greensboro607 Idol St., High Point.

Go to YMCAGreensboro,org to find the location closest to you.

Items that are being accepted include cleaning supplies, baby supplies, pet supplies, non-perishable food, hygiene products, children and adult sized socks, manual can openers, trash bags, tarps, hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes, bottled water, plastic utensils, and powered sports drink packets.

As we hear of other groups accepting donations, we'll include those on future lists.

For groups who are considering collecting donations and taking them to the mountains, you must contact the Business Emergency Operations Center, a part of the NC Emergency Management.

"It's needs to be coordinated and a planned delivery," said Robert Reece, the coordinator and operations officer for Winston-Salem Forsyth County Emergency Management.

"If you plan to move people, resources, or equipment into western North Carolina, you MUST coordinate plans and movements through the NCEM-BEOC," according to the NC Emergency Management website.

Notify the BEOC by emailing your logistics or movement requests to: BEOC@ncdps.gov.

The BEOC will need to know:

What are you moving? Why you need special access.When do you plan to move and from where?Where are you going?When will they arrive at the "border to Western NC" and where?

"In summary, until further notice, roads in Western NC (generally anywhere west of Hickory) are closed to all traffic other than emergency services and pre-approved shipments coordinated through the BEOC," the BEOC said.

Email: AskSAM@wsjournal.comWrite: Ask SAM, 418 N. Marshall St., #100, Winston-Salem, NC 27101

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  'Ask SAM: How can we help North Carolinians affected by Hurricane Helene?', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 2 Oct 2024 2 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF47076F664700›

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'I am Team Mountains' - To our North Carolina mountain neighbors: We're here for you

October 2, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)
Author: LISA O'DONNELL Staff Reporter | Section: A | 1236 Words
Page: 1
OpenURL Link

In July, I was standing in line for a burrito and beer at a taqueria in Hot Springs, a mountain hamlet north of Asheville, feeling weary but triumphant after a 21-mile hike on the Appalachian Trail, my first backpacking trip in seven years.

Hot Springs was slammed on that pleasant summer evening, with rafters fresh from trips down the nearby French Broad River and other outdoors' lovers filling local restaurants in the four-block downtown.

The anticipation of a local brew after an arduous hike in this funky town ringed by mountains made me giddy. Then, seemingly on cue, over on a small stage, a cover band started playing "Blue Sky" by the Allman Brothers Band, a favorite song that has always lifted my spirit.

"Going to Carolina. It won't be long and I'll be there."

My dam of jubilation broken, I sang that part out loud.

Really loud.

People turned to look at me.

I didn't care. I was in the midst of what the kids might call a whole vibe.

Mountain towns and communities do that to me.

And now, so many of them are suffering, after a deluge of Biblical proportions left them under water, buried in mud and ravaged by toppled trees. Today, the very isolation that makes them special, puts them in peril.

Jonas Ridge, Chimney Rock, Banner Elk, Spruce Pine, Damascus - Their names have always sounded lyrical, poetic to me.

I associate these communities with beauty, nature, hiking and some of the best moments of my life, like the time 10 years ago when my daughter, Claire, and I and another mother-daughter team, shuffled into a burger joint on the outskirts of Damascus after a week on the Appalachian Trail. Despite reeking worse than a middle-school boys' locker room, no one inside the restaurant wrinkled their nose. Damascus is a trail town, and they were unbothered by our stench. After a week of eating Clif Bars and ramen noodles, we gleefully gorged on cheeseburgers and milkshakes while praising Damascus for its restaurants, laundromat and cozy inns.

Having grown up in central Indiana, the land of endless cornfields broken only by the occasional beanfield, I can distinctly recall the moment when the Southern Appalachians hooked me. I was driving to a job interview in Hickory on Interstate 40 East, when the mountains near the Tennessee-North Carolina state line began to hug the westbound lane, while over on the eastbound lane, the Pigeon River raged far below.

I felt as if I had entered a postcard.

I applied a death grip to the steering wheel while navigating the curves, something we don't have on central Indiana roads, and was unable to fully take in the dramatic scenery. But I had seen enough. I knew then that I wanted to

live near the mountains.

They felt ancient, mysterious and more wonderous than a cornfield.

At some point living in Hickory, it became clear to me that there were two kinds of people in North Carolina: You either feel the pull of the beach or the pull of the mountains.

I am Team Mountains.

My future-husband, Jeff, took me on my first true mountain hike in 1990, a short jaunt on the Lookout Trail in Montreat. It was a pivotal moment that helped shape me. The hike was punishing - I was horribly out of shape, but what a payoff. The undulating ridgelines, the freshness of the air and the silence stirred something in me, something spiritual that transcends words. Naturalist Edward Abbey called these kind of experiences a "necessity of the human spirit."

As much as I'm able in the 35 years since that trek, I have explored the mountains and trails of Western North Carolina and to an extent, Southwestern Virginia, with hikes along the Appalachian Trail and in Linville Gorge, most of the state parks west of Morganton, the Great Smoky Mountains, the Green River Gorge and the Black Mountains and off the Blue Ridge Parkway.

I've topped off nearly every one of these hikes with a stop in the nearest community for a victory beer, pizza, cold soda or ice cream sandwich at a restaurant or convenience store. The Dripolator in Black Mountain, the Todd Mercantile in Todd, the Elk River Depot on the route up to Roan Mountain, and so many others, have all given me sustenance.

I'm thinking about these businesses and the people in those communities today. On the eve of prime leaf-peeping season, which brings tourists from around the country, I'm thinking of the owners of the Smoky Mountain Diner in Hot Springs, home of the best breakfast on the Appalachian Trail, where recently a Bible was placed next to a toilet in the women's restroom.

Obviously, it was opened to the Book of John.

I'm thinking of the hostel owners and shuttle drivers who drop me off at the trail's head, always with a tip or two, such as the driver in Hot Springs who took one long look at my hiking companions and me last July and informed us that she knew three places along the trail where she could pick us up if we decided to bail.

Two days later, I sat in a rocking chair on the patio of the Laughing Heart Hostel, and with a cup of coffee in my hand, watched wisps of morning fog float above mountain folds. A feeling of peace and stillness washed over me, something I needed in a time of divisiveness and hostility.

I will be back to these communities as soon as possible, with hiking boots and a credit card, ready to help in whatever small way I can.

As a committed member of Team Mountains, my spirit demands it.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  LISA O'DONNELL; Staff Reporter, ''I am Team Mountains' To our North Carolina mountain neighbors: We're here for you', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 2 Oct 2024 1 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF4707ADFA6E78›

NewsBank inc.

'Biblical devastation' - Our view: 'Biblical devastation' in western NC

October 2, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)
Section: A | 711 Words
Page: 9
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OUR VIEW

A storm goes wherever it pleases.

The best 21st century science can muster is educated guesses about its path.

The rest, it seems, is up to the whims of nature and whether we happen to be lucky.

In the case of Helene, western North Carolina was not.

Who would have guessed that the mountains of this state, and not the beaches of Florida, would bear the brunt of a storm spawned by the Gulf of Mexico, even after it had weakened to below hurricane strength?

For North Carolina, Helene turned out to be a wicked witch of the West, swelling rivers and creeks with record rainfall and unleashing angry winds, floods and landslides.

The words "catastrophic devastation" didn't do this storm justice, Buncombe County Emergency Services Assistant Director Ryan Cole told the Asheville Citizen-Times.

"It would go a little bit further and say we have biblical devastation through the county," Cole said.

County Manager Avril Pinder called it "Buncombe County's own Hurricane Katrina."As of Tuesday, the full extent of the death toll and the damage was still unclear.

But we know it's bad.

At this writing Helene had claimed 137 lives, 56 of them in North Carolina, more than any other state. That number is expected to grow, as hundreds remain missing.

It was still hard to assess the full extent of Helene's impact because it snapped power lines, blocked roads and disabled cellphone service. Many residents were isolated and helpless. So were local and state authorities. It was like being blindfolded while wearing earplugs with one hand tied behind your back.

But experts already are calling it one of the worst storms in U.S. history.

And some of the stories that have already emerged are beyond heartbreaking.

A Texas woman frantically pleaded for help for her parents and her 6-year-old nephew, who were stranded on the roof of their house in Asheville as the floodwaters rose. But a rescue never happened. The roof collapsed and all three drowned.

Lake Lure, the setting for the movie "Dirty Dancing," was filled with splintered debris.

Asheville's Biltmore Village was inundated by floodwaters, the city's River Arts District turned into a tattered array of caved roofs, buckled walls and snapped phone poles. The village of Chimney Rock was all but erased from the

map.

Some area received as much as 30 inches of rain. Helene ripped houses off their foundations, uprooted trees and hurled them like spears, plucked fence posts out of the ground and triggered landslides.

Rebuilding will take time and money. The Washington Post estimates $26 billion in property damage.

President Biden planned a visit Wednesday, to see the damage for himself. The president also said he would likely ask Congress to pass a supplemental funding bill provide relief to the states affected by Helene.

Gov. Roy Cooper noted ongoing efforts to reopen roads and provide emergency shelters. The National Guard has been deployed, he said, during a Tuesday morning briefing.

State lawmakers should tap North Carolina's $5 billion budget reserves, called, by the way, "the rainy-day fund," to help provide relief for the ultimate rainy day.

Meanwhile, 22 states are sending personnel and providing assistance.

What painful lessons can we learn from this latest natural disaster?

Deny it if you wish, but climate fuels more frequent and severe storms that tend to move more slowly and dump more rain. Even the mountains, once thought to be insulated from the effects of hurricanes, are vulnerable.

"This storm has the fingerprints of climate change all over it," state climatologist Kathie Dello told The Guardian. "The ocean was warm and it grew and grew and there was a lot of water in the atmosphere. Unfortunately, our worst fears came true. Helene was supercharged by climate change and we should expect more storms like this going forward."

Kudos, meanwhile, to the Greensboro and Winston-Salem police and fire departments for dispatching volunteers to help.

Triad pilots queued up to deliver badly needed supplies.

Local nonprofits mobilized to collect supplies.

And, as communities usually do, even in this season of deep divisions, people came together to help and comfort one another, with rakes and shovels and chainsaws and kind words.

As USA Today reported, the very worst of times can often bring out the very best in us.

"We are going to check on the neighbors," a man in Red Hill who just happened to be named James Waters told his son. "That's what we do."

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  ''Biblical devastation' Our view: 'Biblical devastation' in western NC', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 2 Oct 2024 9 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF4707CFCB1358›

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Counties eligible for federal disaster benefits - Four northwest NC counties eligible for federal disaster unemployment benefits

October 2, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)
Author: RICHARD CRAVER Staff Reporter | Section: A | 384 Words
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Residents in four northwest North Carolina counties - Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga and Wilkes - have been declared eligible for federal disaster unemployment assistance benefits, the N.C. Division of Employment Security said Tuesday.

The eligibility is a byproduct of the Biden administration's declaration of a state of emergency in North Carolina from the devastating rainfall and flooding caused by the remnants of Hurricane Helene.

The disaster unemployment assistance covers individuals who are unemployed as a direct result of Hurricane Helene. Business owners and self-employed individuals affected by the storm also may qualify for benefits.

Benefits would be made retroactive to Sept. 29 and may last for up to 26 weeks.

There are 21 other counties, along with the Cherokee Indians of N.C., that have been approved: Alexander, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania and Yancey.

The division said additional counties may be added at a later date.

Eligible individuals have until Dec. 2 to file an application for disaster unemployment assistance at des.nc.gov or the DUA Hotline at 919-629-3857.

Individuals must first apply for state unemployment benefits. For those determined to be ineligible for or have exhausted regular state benefits, they may be eligible to make a federal disaster unemployment assistance claim.

Eligibility is determined weekly, and individuals must continue to be out of work as a direct result of the disaster each week to get unemployment benefits.

Those eligible include:

• No longer have the job that provided their primary source of income;

• Are unable to reach their place of unemployment;

• Cannot work because of an injury caused by the storm;

• Were unable to begin employment or self-employment due to the storm; and

• Have become the major supplier of household income due to a storm-related death of the previous major supplier of household income.

Documentation required includes: name and address of all employers you worked with within the last 24 months; county of residence; county of employment; mailing address and ZIP code; valid telephone number; Social Security number or Alien Registration number; proof of employment and income if you're self-employed, a farmer or a commercial fisher.

All required documentation must be submitted within 21 days from the day the application is filed.

DES said it will work with people who cannot provide all documentation to ensure that their unemployment benefits are not delayed.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  RICHARD CRAVER; Staff Reporter, 'Counties eligible for federal disaster benefits Four northwest NC counties eligible for federal disaster unemployment benefits', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 2 Oct 2024 3 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF470780CEE0F0›

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WS/FCS sends water, equipment to help counties - WS/FCS sends water up to Watauga and heavy equipment and a crew to Buncombe

October 2, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)
Author: LISA O'DONNELL Staff Reporter | Section: A | 273 Words
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Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools has joined the massive effort to deliver aid to public school systems in counties left crippled by Hurricane Helene.

Acting on a request for help from Buncombe County Schools, four members of the local school district's facilities team traveled to Asheville on Monday to deliver several pieces of heavy equipment including a mini excavator and skid steer, and help clear debris from a high school so that it can be used as a distribution center until students return, Superintendent Tricia McManus said.

In thinking of other ways that the school district could help, McManus reached out directly to Leslie Alexander, the superintendent of Watauga County Schools. Alexander has deep ties with the local school district. She was principal at Reynolds High School for several years before moving into central office, where she was an area superintendent and chief human resources officer. She became Watauga County Schools' superintendent in 2023.

"I asked her how it was going," McManus said of her call to Alexander, "and she told me that it looked like a war zone."

The immediate need was water, prompting local school leaders to issue a district-wide plea on Monday afternoon for cases of bottled water.

On Tuesday, the school district planned to deliver a bus load of water up to Watauga County in a campaign that was billed as Water for Watauga.

McManus said the school district will continue to reach out to schools in some of the smaller communities impacted by the storm.

"We'll keep figuring out how we can give to our neighbors," she said. "I'm sitting here thinking, 'What else can we do?'"

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  LISA O'DONNELL; Staff Reporter, 'WS/FCS sends water, equipment to help counties WS/FCS sends water up to Watauga and heavy equipment and a crew to Buncombe', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 2 Oct 2024 3 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF470777F6A518›

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Dockworkers may have advantage - Dockworkers may have advantage

October 2, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)
Author: TOM KRISHER, TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS Associated Press | Section: A | 349 Words
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PORT STRIKE

PHILADELPHIA - With 45,000 longshoremen at 36 U.S. ports from Maine to Texas on strike for the first time in decades, experts say the workers might wield the upper hand in their standoff with port operators over wages and the use of automation.

Organized labor enjoys rising public support and achieved a string of recent victories in other industries, with the backing of the pro-union administration of President Joe Biden. Their negotiating stand is likely further strengthened from having the nation's supply chain of goods under pressure from the effects of Hurricane Helene, which coincided with the peak shipping season for holiday goods.

The union also points to record profits the shipping companies made, in part because of shortages resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and to a more generous contract that West Coast dockworkers achieved last year. The longshoremen's workloads also increased, and the effects of inflation eroded their pay in recent years.

In addition, commerce into and out of the United States is growing, playing to the union's advantage. Further enhancing its leverage is a still-tight job market, with workers in some industries demanding and in some cases receiving a larger share of companies' outsize profits.

"I think this work group has a lot of bargaining power," said Harry Katz, a professor of collective bargaining at Cornell University. "They're essential workers that can't be replaced, and also the ports are doing well."

The dockworkers' strike, their first since 1977, could snarl supply chains and cause shortages and higher prices if it stretches on for more than a few weeks. Beginning after midnight, the workers walked picket lines Tuesday and carried signs calling for more money and a ban on automation that could cost workers their jobs.

Experts say consumers won't likely notice shortages for at least a few weeks, if the strike lasts that long, though some perishable items such as bananas could disappear from grocery stores. In anticipation of a strike, most major retailers stocked up on goods, moving ahead shipments of holiday gift items.

Little progress was reported in the talks until just hours before the strike began at 12:01 a.m.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  TOM KRISHER, TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS; Associated Press, 'Dockworkers may have advantage Dockworkers may have advantage', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 2 Oct 2024 6 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF470725D1B3A0›

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  Charlotte Observer, The (online), 2 Oct 2024 10 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16CC885820046170%40AWNB-19BF05BE825046EE%402460586-19BF100CF2C9D729%409-19BF100CF2C9D729%40›

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  Charlotte Observer, The (online), 2 Oct 2024 17 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16CC885820046170%40AWNB-19BF05BE825046EE%402460586-19BF0F889BF6B896%4016-19BF0F889BF6B896%40›

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