

Eric Church, Luke Combs to hold Hurricane Helene benefit show

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Undeniable country icons, past and present, are coming together to benefit their beloved Western North Carolina.

Luke Combs, Eric Church, Billy Strings and James Taylor will headline the "Concert for Carolina" benefit show on Oct. 26 at Charlotte's Bank of America Stadium, home of the Carolina Panthers. The event will be hosted by ESPN's Marty Smith and Barstool Sports' Caleb Pressley and will feature additional artists to be announced.

Explore Asheville and the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority will present the event.

Tickets for the show will go on sale on Thursday at 10 a.m. ET/9 a.m. CT. Full details can be found at concertforcarolina.com.

"Concert for Carolina" partners include Tepper Sports & Entertainment, Explore Asheville, T-Mobile, Jack Daniel's, Whataburger, Miller Lite and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina.

How the concert came together

By Sept. 30, Combs, a Huntersville, North Carolina, native who credits a 300-mile northwestern North Carolina radius between his alma mater of Appalachian State University in Boone and Asheville as fundamental to his personal and professional roots, posted on social media that he was working on planning "something really special" to help his community.

"We are doing everything we can to get you the help you need now," country superstar Church added.

Church is a native of Granite Falls, North Carolina, roughly an hour north of Combs' Huntersville.

Church and Combs started reaching out to organize an event to raise critical funds for relief efforts. Those included a call to David Tepper and his wife, Nicole. Tepper owns the Carolina Panthers, MLS team Charlotte FC and Bank of America Stadium.

The Teppers offered the stadium as the venue for the benefit concert.

How are the performers connected with the region?

Combs headlined Appalachian State's Kidd Brewer Stadium in 2021 and played sold-out, back-to-back nights at Bank of America Stadium in 2023.

Church, who also briefly attended Appalachian State University, was inducted into the North Carolina Music Hall of Fame in 2016, recorded his three-part 2021 album "Heart & Soul" in the Western North Carolina town of Banner Elk, plus, in 2022, he was awarded the North Carolina Award, the state's highest civilian honor.

An impressive number of Michigan native Strings' "Billy Goats" fan base call North Carolina home, as evidenced by a six-night, two-week residency scheduled for February at Asheville's ExploreAsheville.com Arena.

Rock and Roll Hall of Famer James Taylor's connection with the region extends much further than his songs "Copperline" and "Carolina in My Mind." The performer moved to Chapel Hill with his family when he was 3 as his

father served as dean of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Medical School from 1964 to 1971.

How will funds for relief be administered?

All proceeds from the event, including sponsorships, will be split 50/50 between Combs and Church's Chief Cares Foundation to administer to organizations of their choosing in support of relief efforts across the Carolinas and the Southeast.

Combs' portion will be distributed between Samaritan's Purse, Manna Food Bank and Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest NC, and another organization to be announced.

Church's Chief Cares is focused on helping established charities and organizations that are well managed, organized and can expedite aid directly to the families affected by Hurricane Helene.

Eric Church's 'Darkest Hour'

also benefiting the region

On Friday, Church announced he would sign over all publishing royalties from "Darkest Hour," his first new song in three years, to the people of North Carolina.

In a press statement, he said the song was dedicated to "unsung heroes" who "show up when the world's falling apart."

"This is for the folks who show up in the hardest times, offering a hand when it's most needed and standing tall when others can't," he said. "Even in your darkest hour, they come running. When the night's at its blackest, this is for those holding the light, guiding the lost and pulling us through."

The song highlights Church and his team's concerns about their family members, friends and neighbors needing assistance, and he released it months earlier than planned.

"It just didn't feel right to wait with this song," Church said. "Sometimes you give songs their moment and sometimes they find their own moment."

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Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians hatchery loses fall trout stock

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CHEROKEE — Flies swarmed the rotting rainbow trout at Doug Reed II's feet.

"You hatch them, you raise them, you're around them all the time, and now they're gone," he said last Thursday afternoon, standing near the fallen fence of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' trout hatchery. "They're like our kids. We want to send them out into the world the right way."

What happened instead was Tropical Storm Helene's rains raised and strengthened the adjacent stream. Reed, the tribe's fisheries and wildlife manager, said the currents snatched away around 30,000 trout.

That portion was meant to stock the Qualla Boundary's waters until January.

Some of the fish died in the muck, baking under the sun. Most made it out, filling a small stretch of stream near the hatchery where only tribal members can fish.

For the thousands of non-member anglers who come in during the fall, Reed warns the number of fish they'll see will be a "lot lower than normal."

Michell Hicks, principal chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, called the situation "pretty significant."

"We've got to figure out how we stock the rivers for all the fishermen who come in here," he said. One study estimates that anglers bring in \$26 million every year.

But Hicks said that was a small issue compared to the devastation seen in neighboring swathes of Western North Carolina.

"We've lost no lives," Hicks said. "We're blessed, but we feel for our neighbors."

'Blessed': Qualla Boundary

Hicks said most of the power in the Qualla Boundary was restored by Thursday, and running water wasn't a concern. Cherokee Central School started back on Monday. Most of the businesses were operating as usual.

And the tribe was still able to hold the 112th Cherokee Indian Fair, which ended Saturday.

"This was a hard decision," Hicks said. "We never want to be insensitive, but we all need healing. Just knowing what our neighbors have gone through, it's good to gather and get folks together. There's always a mental health piece of any disaster."

To his right was a carnival with a number of rides and games. But most of the people on the fairground were gathered to his left.

It was Elder's Day, and hundreds of older tribal members were being served food as he spoke.

"It's just enough to make you cry," said Jonnie Walkingstick, a 64-year-old member. "Our community always gets together at this time of year to celebrate, but this time it's even more important because we have people here that

have been hurt by the hurricane."

And the tribe is using the fair to help all people across Western North Carolina, collecting food and water donations on the grounds.

"Our hearts and prayers are with our neighbors, and we want to do anything and everything that we can to help," Hicks said.

First there was a drought

Meanwhile, Gary Green cast a line downstream from the hatchery.

The 67-year-old Floridian had been fishing in the area for decades, hitting the 10-fish limit most of the time.

He'd only gotten a couple of bites on late last week.

"There's nothing," he said. "If there was, they'd already be in the cooler."

But it could be worse. The fishing was only one reason he came: "Feel this?" he said, gesturing around, referring to the cooler-than-Florida weather.

Despite everything, Reed said it could be worse, too. Had the flooding been as bad as it was in Asheville, he thinks the tribe could have lost all its fish.

"We have to look at the bright side," he said, watching excavators hack at the mud blocking the upstream spot where water got diverted for the hatchery.

It also could've been better.

A drought had reduced the water flow before the mud did. As a result, his team had decided to keep a reduced stock and do needed maintenance on sections of the hatchery.

And they would've had enough fish to replace the deficit otherwise.

"January's a rough estimate (for restocking)," Reed said. "We just have to see how our concrete work goes. And then we're going to open back up with whatever the river allows us."

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Pisgah football to resume season

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Pisgah football will resume the 2024 season on Friday, according to coach Ricky Brindley. The Bears will host West Henderson at 7:30 p.m. at the Bethel Middle School football field.

This is the first game Pisgah and West Henderson have played since Tropical Storm Helene ravaged Canton, Haywood County and Western North Carolina on Sept. 27. The Bears and Falcons last played in Week 5, defeating Smoky Mountain 31-21 and North Henderson 20-13, respectively.

The Bears are playing the game at Bethel Middle School because Pisgah Memorial Stadium suffered significant flood damage from Helene and won't be able to host any more games this season. It is the second time the stadium has flooded since 2021, when Tropical Storm Fred swept through WNC.

The game will be pivotal in determining the Mountain 7 Conference champion. Pisgah enters 4-1, while West Henderson is 3-2, with both having a 1-0 record in conference play.

Other games scheduled for Week 8 in WNC

Murphy at Robbinsville, 7:30 p.m., Friday

Andrews at Cherokee, 7:30 p.m., Friday

Hayesville at Swain County, 7:30 p.m., Friday

Zachary Huber is a high school sports reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times and Hendersonville Times-News. Email him at zhuber@gannett.com or follow him on X @zacharyahuber.

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WHERE TO FIND HELP - Resources available in Henderson County Free water, food and supplies

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Food, toiletries, baby items and other essential are available at these six Resource Hubs, which open at 9 a.m. daily:

Etowah Elementary School, 320 Etowah School Road, Etowah.

Rugby Middle School, 3345 Haywood Road, Hendersonville.

East Henderson High School, 150 Eagle Pride Drive, East Flat Rock.

North Henderson High School, 35 Fruitland Road, Hendersonville.

Mills River Town Hall, 124 Town Center Drive, Mills River.

Fletcher Town Hall, 300 Old Cane Creek Road, Fletcher

Showers and phone charging

Mills River Town Hall, 124 Town Center Drive, Mills River. Bring your own toiletries and towels.

Curbside storm debris removal

Free to Henderson County residents. Push waste to the right of way of a property for pickup. Storm debris includes tree branches, leaves, logs, building materials, furniture, paint, etc. It should be separated from household garbage, construction debris, vegetative debris, large appliances, electronics and hazardous waste.

Shelter

WNC Agricultural Center, 1301 Fanning Bridge Road, Fletcher. Phone (828) 687-1414. Has phone charging and wifi.

Edneyville Elementary School, 2875 Pace Road, Hendersonville. Has bathroom facilities, hot meals and shelter for pets.

Hot meals

Salvation Army of Hendersonville is serving breakfast at 9 a.m. and dinner at 4 p.m. 239 Third Ave. E., Hendersonville.

East Henderson High School, 150 Eagle Pride Drive, East Flat Rock. Hot meals available at noon and 5 p.m. daily.

North Henderson High School, 35 Fruitland Road, Hendersonville. Hot meals available at noon and 5 p.m. daily.

Etowah Elementary School, 320 Etowah School Road, Etowah. Hot meals available at noon and 5 p.m. daily.

Mills River Town Hall, 124 Town Center Drive, Mills River. Free hot meals also available at noon and 5 p.m.

Pharmacies

CVS/pharmacy, 2001 Spartanburg Highway, Hendersonville. 828-693-7244.

Etowah Pharmacy, 6527 Brevard Road., Etowah. 828-890-0022, or 828-577-9508.

Harris Teeter Pharmacy, 636 Spartanburg Highway, Hendersonville. 828-696-9713.

Ingles Pharmacy, 1980 Asheville Highway, Hendersonville. 828-698-1116.

Ingles Pharmacy, 2901 Hendersonville Road, Fletcher. 828-684-2838.

Ingles Pharmacy, 625 Spartanburg Highway, Hendersonville. 828-694-3746.

Ingles Pharmacy, 3643 Howard Gap Road, Hendersonville. 828-698-2592.

Ingles Pharmacy, 220 Highland Lake Road, Flat Rock. 828-692-0546.

Pardee Rx — Fleming, 1027 Fleming St., Suite A, Hendersonville. 828-435-8140.

Publix Pharmacy, 635 Greenville Highway, Hendersonville. 828-393-6925.

Sam's Club, 300 Highlands Square Drive, Hendersonville. 828-698-6282.

Walgreens, 1148 Asheville Highway, Hendersonville. 828-693-8934 or 828-693-8308.

Wal-Mart Supercenter Pharmacy, 250 Highlands Square Drive, Hendersonville. 828-696-8021.

How to help

Donations may be dropped off at 118 McAbee Court, Flat Rock. Needed: Non-perishable food, especially meal-type canned goods, plus cleaning supplies, tarps, plasticware, paper plates, cups, flashlights and batteries. Not needed: diapers, perishable food, clothing items at this time.

For more information

Henderson County's call center handles non-medical requests for information. Call 828-771-6670 or email Helene-info@hcem.org. For emergencies, call 911. For more, visit www.visithendersonvillenc.org/helene-relief.

Churches, businesses and nonprofit groups offering services: https://www.hendersoncountync.gov/em/page/community-involvement

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Hospitals urge feds to help avert nationwide IV shortage

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Hospitals are urging the White House to help shore up supplies of IV bags after a North Carolina factory closed due to flood damage wrought by Hurricane Helene.

Several hospitals have implemented conservation plans and warned the public of potential disruptions since Baxter International temporarily closed a manufacturing site in Marion, North Carolina, about 35 miles east of Asheville. The Marion factory supplied 60% of the nation's IV fluids to health facilities. The factory also ships peritoneal dialysis solutions to dialysis centers.

On Monday, Rick Pollack, CEO of the American Hospital Association, urged President Joe Biden's administration to take immediate steps to address the "substantial shortages of these lifesaving and life-supporting products."

"Patients across America are already feeling this impact, which will only deepen in the coming days and weeks unless much more is done to alleviate the situation and minimize the impact on patient care," Pollack said in a letter Monday to President Joe Biden.

The AHA, which represents nearly 5,000 hospitals and health care organizations, wants the Food and Drug Administration to declare a shortage of IV solutions and allow hospitals and health systems to prepare sterile IV solutions in their own pharmacies.

The hospitals also want the FDA to find international suppliers of sterile IV solutions and to extend the shelf-life of all sterile IV and peritoneal dialysis solutions that are nearing expiration or have already expired.

Hospitals also want the Biden administration to:

Invoke the Defense Production Act to compel manufacturers to prioritize sterile IV solutions.

Request that Secretary Xavier Becerra, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, declare a public health emergency which would relax Medicare and Medicaid rules and regulations.

Direct the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Justice to monitor and act if the supply disruptions cause price gouging.

Several hospitals have warned of impacts caused by supply disruptions.

Mass General Brigham, which operates a network of hospitals in New England, said last week it only received 40% of its usual supply of IV fluid from Baxter.

The Florida Hospital Association warned of supply disruptions of IV and peritoneal dialysis solutions due to the Baxter facility closure.

Pollack said hospitals and health systems have already implemented plans to conserve IV fluids and ensure patient access to care and services.

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A small Watauga County community expects a 'new normal'

October 9, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Douglas Soule; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 814 Words Page: A2 OpenURL Link

BETHEL - After Tropical Storm Helene, Carter Dishman doesn't know when normalcy will return to his slice of Watauga County.

"I think there's probably a little bit of a new normal," he said at Bethel Baptist Church on Sunday evening, sitting at the only table in sight not loaded with donated food and supplies.

"I don't know if I want it to go completely back to normal right away," added Matt Marton from across the table.

"This community has grown so close together that I don't want to see it go back."

Chatter and laughter from community members, local volunteers and emergency responders who arrived from afar echoed in the background, evidence of the strong bonds that have been formed in recent days.

The church is a main artery for relief efforts for the Bethel community, which is on a winding route northwest of Boone. It sits just shy of the Tennessee border.

On the top floor Sunday, a Federal Emergency Management Agency employee helped residents apply for assistance. The church's bottom parking lot was reserved for portable showers and toilets, overseen by a National Guard team. It also served as a helicopter landing spot for medevac and supply drops.

"All of our flood areas, the bottoms of these valleys — the only places you can land are so soft that it wouldn't work," Dishman explained.

Dishman is overseeing the church's meal giveaways and other services, like ice distribution, which has helped people with diabetes keep their insulin at the necessary temperature. Marton travels around assessing what equipment and labor is needed to free people from their debris-strewn properties.

"The roads, half of them are gone," Marton told a couple of reporters sitting with them. "You're driving over stuff sometimes that you don't realize until you get out and look at it that it was eaten away under it. You're just thanking God it didn't collapse.

"Cars wrapped around trees and roofs, not where they're supposed to be," he added.

Despite the obstacles, the community banded together right away to work on recovery.

"Everybody out here, every man worth his weight in salt, has a chainsaw," Marton said. "The moment the sun started cracking through those clouds, it sounded like a hornet's nest up and down that road."

That made it all the easier for line workers and people like Staff Sgt. Tameisha Sumpter to come and help.

"Though there's a lot of destruction, these guys are so welcoming," said Sumpter, who leads the National Guard team, which also brought meals up mountains for people in need, as well as other assistance. "We have made some lifelong friends."

She sat on a stack of boxes holding disinfectant spray. Her team members had just returned from delivering aid and were throwing a football with local kids.

Just that morning, Sumpter had sung at the church's morning service. Dishman said it was the best service he'd ever seen there.

"The spirit was strong," he said. "We've got new family through this. The church family and the community family have definitely grown in number and in spirit this week."

Despite everything, many around the area feel lucky.

"With all the bad stuff you see, it really has been absolutely amazing to see how God has protected so many people," Marton said.

"There's places we've been to check on members of the church the first few days — every tree on the hill has been knocked down except the five trees that would've crushed a guy's house," he said. "A woman down the road, a tree was heading toward her house down the river. A strong wind came, turned it, and then that actually diverted the river to flow away from her house."

'Everywhere you go, it's like this'

Wendle and Charlene Capps came to the church for its showers and bathrooms.

Like many in the surrounding area, their water comes from a well. With their power out, they couldn't pump it out.

"This is our first time here," Wendle said. "She's been putting water on the grill and then I've been pouring it in the sink and taking a bird bath."

Charlene sipped from a cup of root beer with ice from the church.

"It's very cold and soothing, especially with all this work that we've been doing for the last eight or nine days around the farm," she said.

Sumpter approached: "Here's your washcloth, towel, deodorant and soap," she said.

"Everywhere you go, it's like this," Wendle said, after thanking her.

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Mental health suffers after natural disasters - Here are tips to cope

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Natural disasters evoke feelings of helplessness, grief and anxiety. They disrupt our sense of normalcy and leave survivors wondering when it will all be over.

Dr. M. Ed Kelley is medical director of behavioral health at Sweeten Creek Mental Health and Wellness Center, a campus of HCA Healthcare's Mission Hospital. He provided strategies to deal with the onslaught of emotions any natural disaster like Tropical Storm Helene tends to evoke, strategies to navigate these emotions and signs you or those around you may be struggling and in need of a higher level of care.

Why are natural disasters so stressful?

They bring up some of our core fears, Kelley said, and create feelings of helplessness.

"Many people feel they have no ability to defend themselves," he said.

People also may feel a lot of grief over loss of property, normalcy, security and, obviously, lives.

Kelley said natural disasters generate a lot of anxiety. When is the power coming back? When is the water coming back? Is everyone I know and love safe? How long am I going to have to live this way? Will I be able to feed myself four days from now?

"A storm like this hits at the core of the safety and security that most of us normally have from day to day," Kelley said.

How can we care for our mental health?

Kelley said he tells everybody they need to start with themselves.

"It may sound trite, but if you are not taking care of yourself, you can't take care of anybody else," he said.

Kelley said it is important to monitor how much you are sleeping and eating and if you are becoming overly emotional.

Another challenge is that many people aren't able to go to work. Kids may not be able to go to school. "You are no longer brushing your teeth at the same time every day," Kelley said. "One of the first things to go during a disaster is the sense of normalcy."

He suggests getting back on a schedule. Parents can help by setting a time every morning for everyone to wake up, followed by setting times for activities like taking a walk. And start brushing your teeth at the same time every day.

Also, get busy, Kelley suggests. Clear trees in your yard and in your neighborhood. Check in on your neighbors and spend time talking and hanging out with them, he said.

He shared an experience in his own neighborhood, when a home with a Starlink unit was providing the only WiFi he and others could easily access.

As folks gathered there to reach out to others online, they connected with one another as well, he said.

"It wasn't the WiFi that was healing," he said. "It was that sense of belonging and sharing our shared experiences with other people that was unbelievably, emotionally helpful for everybody."

Trauma diffuses when you share it, Kelley said.

"You realize other people are having a similar experience," he said. "Sharing that burden with one another really does help."

And lastly, people have to be willing to accept help, Kelley said, whether that is in the form of shelter, food or water.

"I think when we are fragile, we need to accept that," hey said.

How do I know if my children's mental health is suffering?

Kelley said parents should look for signs of stress in their children.

"With kids, their appetite and sleep patterns are huge. If you are noticing huge changes in those two things, you know they are struggling," he said.

Rather than talk about the stress and anxiety they are feeling, children and teens tend to get angry, have temperamental outbursts or become severely withdrawn.

"Kids are not as good as adults at identifying sadness and anxiety," he said. "It tends to come out in behaviors."

To head that off, Kelley suggests asking your kids how they are feeling. Check in with them and ask how they are doing, he said.

Then, as he suggests for adults, Kelley recommends getting kids back on a schedule, too.

What are signs that someone may need to seek professional help?

Kelley again stressed the need to start taking care of yourself right away and engaging with other people.

If you start having panic attacks or are having overwhelming feelings that you can no longer cope with life, or you are having thoughts of giving up or harming yourself, call 988, the suicide and crisis hotline, or bring yourself to an emergency room.

"Severe lack of sleep, severe anxiety and severe hopelessness and helplessness would be times I would suggest reaching out for help," Kelley said.

What other behaviors should we watch for?

"During times like these, we are also unfortunately at a huge risk for dropping into heavy substance use," Kelley said.

People use it to cope, but then it can trigger alcoholism and substance abuse problems.

"If that is becoming unmanageable, that is another reason to reach out for help," he said.

Here's where to find additional resources

Sweeten Creek Mental Health and Wellness Center, located at 32 Apex Circle, reopened its day treatment program on Monday, Oct. 7.

The adult program operates the following programs:

Mental Health Partial Hospitalization Program: 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Mental Health Intensive Outpatient Program: 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.

Referrals can be obtained through Missionhealth.org/MentalHealth or by calling 828-213-4696.

North Carolina resources

North Carolina's Peer Support Warmline is for those in crisis who need to talk with a peer but who are not suicidal. Call 855-PEERSNC.

For those experiencing thoughts of suicide, call 988.

For life-threatening emergencies, call 911.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness of North Carolina's hotline is available from 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday at 800-451-9682 by emailing helpline@naminc.org or texting 919-999-6527.

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Board hears of Surry County's Helene response efforts

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Surry County Emergency Services Director Eric Southern provided an update last Monday evening to the Board of Commissioners on efforts in the storm ravaged parts of the state. He said that Surry County has supplied nearly everything that has been requested but that the needs will soon be evolving as the weather changes.

"As everybody knows, the devastation in Western North Carolina is still ongoing. There's a lot of pictures that are starting to come out now on social media. There's also a lot of untruths and rhetoric that are out there on social media as well," Southern said.

"There are still areas that they haven't got into yet, the search efforts are still ongoing. They technically have not switched over to a recovery, so there are still active searches are going on," he said.

He said that as of Monday there were 17 Urban Search and Rescue teams and 40 swift water teams that are still out working. "Those USR teams go in between structural collapse to water, wilderness, you name it and they can pretty much search anything that's out there. There are also around 500 firefighters and 328 ambulances that are up there and two field hospitals that are in operation," he said.

Surry County has been able to provide support in the form of equipment and personnel to Helene cleanup and recovery. Southern said the county, "Has actually been able to provide several roles, everything from sending resources to moving equipment."

"We've sent a communications specialist up there, he just returned on Saturday. Our emergency manager for the county, Byron Isaacs, he deployed Sunday before last and he is actually in Ashe County as of today. He went to Buncombe County and spent a week up there. I'll be going somewhere up there after he returns," he explained.

Brent Robertson, assistant communications director for Surry County 911, told the board that he made a supply run to Beech Mountain and arrived after dark. "The only thing you could see was headlights, but there was a lot of infrastructure damage. You could see the evidence of the flooding in Boone but going up NC Highway194 to Beech Mountain, that was the worst thing we saw — a lot of roads and a lot of power line damage. "

Nick Brown, communications director for Surry County 911, added, "We delivered to Beech Mountain's Town Hall a generator from Randolph County. We picked up in Morganton and we delivered it and just dropped it off up there and come straight back to Surry County that night that we went up there."

Chairman Van Tucker asked Southern if there had been anything asked of the county that they had been unable to deliver. "We've pretty much responded and we've sent generators, AM radio stations, personnel, communications staff, and I know you've coordinated with sheriff's departments, and they've made some deployments up there. I also know we have extended out to Alleghany County the ability to use one of our sites over at the old Elkin landfill to bring their waste down."

"I have been extremely happy to see the response, but do you know of anything that else that we can do for them?"

Southern said the county was doing everything possible to help official responses and to help aid civilians and nonprofits get their donated supplies to areas in need. "There is nothing that has been asked of Surry County that has not been provided so far. Anything they have asked we've been able to provide and have had a lot of resources on standby that have not been used."

He said a request to send firefighters to Buncombe County got a very quick response from firefighters locally who volunteered, but it was fulfilled by another community before they could ship out.

He added, "A few minutes ago I was talking to Byron Isaacs, and he was trying to get another request in Ashe County filled and before we could get our guys on it, they had already had somebody else that had come up there. So, we're getting ready to fill another request in Buncombe County now."

Southern directed the commissioners and the public to the North Carolina State Emergency Management's website where there are officials links to requested needs for counties and donation sites.

He added, "There's also a page on there about rumor control that kind of talks about some of the things that's rumors versus what's actually true. There's also a lot of links on there about other agencies, contact information for them, roads that are out, and information like that on that page as well."

Tucker asked if the needs for assistance were likely to change. "As time goes on, will it shift more from water and food, for example, to clothing and winter type stuff and protection, that kind of stuff?"

"They're already seeing the change in the weather up there," Southern replied. "They had a search and rescue team that had went out, I believe from Hickory, Saturday morning and the area that they were getting deployed into it was around 30 degrees between the mountains. So yeah, it's definitely going to change."

Commissioner Eddie Harris offered thanks to State Sen. Eddie Settle and House Speaker Pro Tempore Sarah Stevens for financial responsibility. "You hear the term rainy day fund. Not too many years ago, I can remember when there was no rainy day fund, there was no fund balance. We owed the federal government several billion dollars. The rainy day fund in North Carolina, I think now it exceeds \$4 billion, something like that. Well, guess what? The rainy day is here."

Vice Chair Mark Marion said to Southern, "Thank you for the job you're doing and keep up the good work. All that I can do is say I'm here to support you and to let us know what you need, and we'll do our best to get it for you and other than that, I'll get out of your way, let the experts handle it."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Ryan Kelly, 'Board hears of Surry County's Helene response efforts', *Tribune, The* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3960C48D4CDA0



NCHSAA announces schedule modifications for Fall Sports

October 9, 2024 | Tribune, The (Elkin, NC)
Author: Cory Smith | Section: Yadkin | 559 Words

OpenURL Link

CHAPEL HILL — The North Carolina High School Athletic Association's Board of Directors met to discuss options for concluding the Fall Sports Season including the postseason calendar. These discussions were necessitated by the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina.

"Changes to the fall calendar are difficult as well as complex but necessary," said NCHSAA President Dr. Stephen Gainey and NCHSAA Commissioner Que Tucker in a joint statement. "Keeping our student-athletes safe as we try to minimize risk of injury was central to any decisions made. We commend the work of the NCHSAA staff in its research, the Board of Directors in making time to consider these changes and the willingness of our host partners to accommodate any changes and make their venues available."

The Board approved changes and modifications to the schedule. Sunday practices and competitions are still prohibited. The calendar below encompasses the changes made by the Board. Playoff dates in bold reflect a change.

Women's Tennis

Individual

Reporting deadline: October 14, 11:59 p.m. (revised from 3 p.m. to allow for an extra day of competition)

Regionals: October 18-19

State Championships: October 25-26

Dual Team

Reporting deadline: October 17, 11:59 p.m. (revised from October 10)

Seeding: October 18

First Round: October 21

Second Round: October 23

Third Round: October 28

Fourth Round: October 30

Regionals: November 5

State Championships: November 9

Volleyball

Effective immediately, the weekly limitation is modified to allow affected schools to make up multiple postponed matches, not to exceed eight in a week. No change was made to the daily limitation.

Reporting deadline: October 19, 11:59 p.m. (revised from October 16)

Seeding: October 20 (Sunday, after 1 p.m.)

First Round: October 22

Second Round: October 24

Third Round: October 26

Fourth Round: October 29

Regionals: October 31

State Championships: November 2

Cross Country

Reporting deadline: October 22, 11:59 p.m. (revised from October 19)

Regionals: October 26

State Championships: November 2

Men's Soccer

Effective immediately, the weekly limitation is modified to allow affected schools to make up multiple postponed matches, not to exceed four in a week. No change was made to the daily limitation.

Reporting deadline: November 6, 11:59 p.m. (revised from October 31)

Seeding: November 7

First round: November 9

Second Round: November 12

Third Round: November 14

Fourth Round: November 16

Regionals: November 19

State Championships: November 22-23

Women's Golf

The minimum number of nine-hole scores required to qualify for the Regional Championships was revised from five to three.

No calendar changes

Cheerleading

No calendar changes

Football

Effective immediately, a minimum of three calendar days (72 hours) must occur in between contests.

Reporting deadline: November 9, 11:59 p.m. (revised from November 1)

Seeding: November 10 (Sunday, after 1 p.m.)

First round: November 15

Second round: November 22

Third round: November 29

Fourth round: December 6

Regionals: December 13

State Championships: December 20-21

Special Provision

The Board approved one (1) additional contest for all sports with a season limit. To exceed the season limit of contests, the following conditions must be met:

Prior approval from NCHSAA

The contest cannot exceed the daily or weekly limitations

The contest must exceed the season limit for both schools

The contest MUST NOT be entered into MaxPreps

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Cory Smith, 'NCHSAA announces schedule modifications for Fall Sports', *Tribune, The* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3960C40000BB8



Gateway Wellness Foundation announces disaster relief grant opportunity

October 9, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Submitted article| Section: Community | 266 Words OpenURL Link

Gateway Wellness Foundation recently announced its partnership with the Dogwood Health Trust to provide an initial Disaster Relief Grant Opportunity to support Hurricane Helene emergency response efforts.

Gateway Wellness Foundation is providing emergency relief to those affected by Hurricane Helene in the form of grants to nonprofit organizations in Burke, McDowell, Polk, and Rutherford counties.

Funds may be used to provide direct assistance to individuals affected by Hurricane Helene and/or support the applicant organization in recovering from or responding to Hurricane Helene.

Grant funds are intended to cover the costs of providing emergency relief services to individuals or eligible organizations affected by the storm.

Grants will be accepted and awarded on a rolling basis. The foundation asks that applicants submit only one request for funding at this time.

The recommended maximum grant request is \$25,000. Requests in the \$5,000-\$10,000 range are more likely to be fully funded.

Organizations applying for a grant must be:

HOW TO APPLY

Click this link to access the online application form:

https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/1db2f1f56b524cc891f5a0fe4b50470a

The form must be completed in one sitting – it does not allow the user to save a partially completed application and return later to finish it. The foundation encourages applicants to prepare their application offline and return to the form when they are ready to submit.

A list of the grant application questions can be found at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cle10jlsWjdxf1C7HlEsl278FG6-rkzD/edit

If you have any questions or if connectivity is an issue, please contact Sarah Morse:

Email: s.morse@gatewaywf.org

Office: (828) 237-9274

Mobile: (828) 429-2128

74 N. Garden Street, Marion, NC 28752

Gateway's Disaster Relief Grant Opportunity webpage: https://gatewaywellnessfoundation.org/hurricane-relief-efforts-grant.

Submitted by Sarah Morse

The post Gateway Wellness Foundation announces disaster relief grant opportunity appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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That indomitable mountain spirit

October 9, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Drew Hines | Section: Across The Mountains - Drew Hines | 528 Words OpenURL Link

Mountain folks just aren't wired for hurricanes. But then again, who is? Who can possibly wrap their minds around the enormity of a storm like Helene? Who among us could fathom hundreds dead and scores missing in one fell swoop and not be forever changed?

We have watched television reports of Indonesian tsunamis and Afghan earthquakes, and of course, we shudder, and we pray, and we send relief because that's what Americans do. But then a witch named Helene mounts her broom in the Gulf of Mexico, skirts Florida and then scampers into Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee and Virginia, all the while leaving a trail of death and suffering to a degree seldom seen in a world that sometimes becomes numb to both. Besides the epochal loss of human life, there are the towns and villages swept away by rain-swollen streams and rivers and then buried in mounds of mud. We so want to believe that these lovely communities will be rebuilt and repopulated, and yet we fear they will never be the same as they were before that awful September day.

The lessons to learn here are legion. First, we're reminded that the things of this world are temporary in nature. A storm, a wind, or a fire can change a person's perspective, as well as their world, in a matter of moments. The Bible often encourages us not to put our trust in those things that can be here today and gone tomorrow.

Still, another lesson to learn is the importance of leaning on and caring for one another. Mountain people are especially good at this. Yes, they're independent as all get out, but at the same time, they are especially tenderhearted and apt to go to their neighbor in times of need. One western North Carolina woman said it best when interviewed for the news.

She declared, "We help each other! We don't wait for anybody else to do it."

I remember a story I heard years ago that makes this very point. A snowstorm of epic proportions had blanketed western North Carolina. The kind of snow that was common in these parts back in the early sixties. But this one was especially fierce. People were stranded for days back in the hills and hollers. Lines of communications were cut off, and folks in the Piedmont and eastern parts of the state were fearing for the safety of their family members stranded on high mountains and in lonely valleys and coves. The Red Cross was dispatched on missions of mercy. One worker trudged down a snow-covered country road to check on an elderly woman who lived alone.

When he got to her small cabin, he was relieved to see blue smoke curling from her chimney, signifying life. He pounded on the door, and she gingerly opened it. The relief worker asked, "Ma'am, do you have any food left?" Without hesitation, she replied, "I've not got much, but what I do have, you're welcome to it."

Helene may demolish property and scar the countryside, but she will never destroy that indomitable mountain spirit embodied by faith, endurance, courage and love.

The post That indomitable mountain spirit appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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UNSUNG HEROES: Thermal Ridge Vegetable Stand springs into action as community lifeline

October 9, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Storme Smith| Section: Columbus | 552 Words OpenURL Link

Editor's Note: This article is the first in a series in which the Tryon Daily Bulletin intends to highlight unsung heroes in the community who came together to help their fellow neighbors after Helene.

COLUMBUS—Leigh Raymer started the Thermal Ridge Vegetable Stand at 2526 N. Hwy. 108E to help her 9-year-old son Rory with word problems and math. What began as a simple endeavor quickly became a full-fledged business, with Rory earning twenty dollars a week to keep the books.

However, the stand has now taken on a new role in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

After stocking up on supplies from the Asheville Farmers Market to prepare for the hurricane, Leigh noticed the struggles people in the community faced due to a lack of cash and availability. In response, she decided to transition the vegetable stand into a free supply donation spot, which has rapidly evolved into a crucial resource for the community.

The stand has since become a central supply point in the area, attracting attention and support from visitors and volunteers who have been dropping off donations from as far away as Virginia and Minnesota.

Leigh, supported by her husband Tyler and friends and neighbors, has become a source of inspiration. The stand serves as a symbol of one family's commitment to helping their community.

Reverend Laura Crihfield and Judy Wiseman of the Yorkminster Presbyterian Church in Yorktown, Va., were among those who visited Thermal Ridge to drop off supplies and donations from their congregation.

"It felt like a calling to help," Crihfield said. She also mentioned plans to collaborate with local churches to bring additional supplies to the area.

Gwynne King, who volunteers at the stand, highlighted the incredible support from the community, with people stopping by and contributing items through their car windows.

When asked why they were providing this service, Leigh emphasized their love for the community and the immense devastation caused by the storm. "We were concerned about the financial burden many face due to the high costs of repairs and lack of access to essential supplies," she said.

Despite uncertainties about the duration of their relief efforts, Leigh says they are committed to continuing to assist as long as possible. She shared that the stand has been going through approximately \$2,000 of supplies each day, and intends to distribute any excess items to needed locations.

The most needed items include boxed milk, bread, juice, produce, eggs, diapers, wipes, water, and pet food. The stand continues to welcome donations of any kind and encourages those with an abundance of certain items to contribute while also taking what they need.

In addition, the stand is open to volunteers who can offer their time as needed, with daily hours of operation posted for those willing to assist.

It's important to note that the Thermal Ridge Vegetable Stand is not a registered formal relief location but is informally accepting and distributing donations. Leigh will update donors on Facebook with pictures and stories of

their daily activities to showcase their impact and reassure the community that help is available.

For those who have visited the stand, Leigh extended a warm invitation to return if they require further assistance, emphasizing that the stand is committed to supporting the community during this challenging time.

The post UNSUNG HEROES: Thermal Ridge Vegetable Stand springs into action as community lifeline appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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Annual Saluda Historic Depot Golf Tournament canceled

October 9, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Submitted article| Section: Community | 240 Words OpenURL Link

MILL SPRING—The ninth annual Saluda Depot Golf Tournament scheduled for October 14 at Bright's Creek in Mill Spring has been canceled. Due to severe storm damage, the tournament venue is closed for repairs.

The Historic Depot Board Members are developing a plan to contact sponsors and players to determine how to go forward. All parties involved will be contacted either by email or letter informing them whether the tournament will be rescheduled or how their money will be refunded.

The Saluda Historic Depot and Museum, a local, beloved landmark, survived Tropical Storm Helene with minor damage. All the artifacts housed in the museum were preserved and suffered no damage. However, like many folks in the area, the depot is currently without power and will reopen as soon as possible.

The SHD Board Members regret having to cancel the annual tournament since it is the major yearly fundraiser. Proceeds from the tournament were earmarked to help reduce the mortgage debt on the depot building.

The SHD Board Members would like to thank depot members, the Saluda Community and those visitors and railroad enthusiasts who reached out to express their concern for the depot's preservation following Helene. Rest assured that the one-hundred-twenty-one-year-old "lady" has survived many storms, including Helene, and the Saluda Historic Depot and Museum will remain one of Western North Carolina's special places to visit.

Submitted by Nita High

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Bridge over Green River at Lake Adger Dam now open

October 9, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Jeff Allison| Section: Community | 321 Words OpenURL Link

Repairs in place after NCDOT works around the clock on construction

MILL SPRING—On September 27, damage from flooding closed the bridge over the Green River at Lake Adger Dam, temporarily cutting off a major traffic route. Workers with the North Carolina Department of Transportation have worked around the clock to get the bridge reopened.

They did just that on Saturday, opening up a major thoroughfare in the county.

One of many roadways damaged by Tropical Storm Helene in western North Carolina, the bridge on Hwy. 9's reopening symbolizes the hard work of construction crews over the last ten days.

"We are happy to see the bridge reopen," County Manager Marche Pittman says. "This is just one step so citizens can more easily return to their daily lives and routines."

Wanda Payne, the Division 14 engineer with the NCDOT, said many of the bridges closed in the area were due to the approaches being washed out and damaged.

"We were able to get those abutments rebuilt," says Payne. "Engineers came out and did structural surveys to make sure everything was sound before construction so we could get this reopened Saturday. The approaches are gravel at this point, but they will be patched in the upcoming weeks to make the structure more permanent."

Payne said they are focusing on many bridges and roadways in the area, and timelines for repairs are being handled on a case-by-case basis. She said they have many fast-approaching temporary repairs to get one-lane access in several areas.

Payne also expects more permanent repairs to be completed throughout the county over the next several weeks before winter sets in. She said those repairs should be finalized in December.

"We are making great progress and have come a long way during this week and a half," Payne said on Wednesday.
"But we still have a lot of work to do."

The post Bridge over Green River at Lake Adger Dam now open appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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Grandfather Mountain executive director shares stories of Hurricane Helene rescue, relief

October 9, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Derek Halsey| Section: Local | 1881 Words OpenURL Link

When the raindrops began to fall on Wednesday night, Sept. 25, the first storm was beginning to saturate the ground in these 300-million-year-old hills. Hurricane Helene, the second and much bigger storm, had yet to reach Florida soil at that point, yet this initial low-pressure rainstorm up ahead was laying the groundwork for the disaster that was to come. With the weather system flowing from south to north, this two-storm monster was ready to take on the Appalachian Mountains — 500 miles from the northern Gulf of Mexico shoreline of West Florida.

Jesse Pope, President and Executive Director of the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation points out that local police, firefighters, and EMTs were doing rescues long before Storm Helene hit the High Country two days later. It was the beginning of what has been a tragic and historic two weeks of devastation.

Pope grew up in nearby Mouth of Wilson, Va., and attended Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk. He soon realized that he did not want to move away from these beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains. He found a home with the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, first as a naturalist, a backcountry ranger, and an animal keeper at the facility's zoo. Eventually, he worked his way up to the Executive Director position while raising a family in Newland.

Over the last two weeks, Pope has been heavily involved with the storm relief effort that has ensued here because, luckily, he has had some experience with natural disasters in the past.

"I did some missionary work back in the day, and I have done quite a bit of relief work as well," Pope said. "I was down in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina and worked two different two-week shifts there. We also did some Hurricane Matthew relief work in 2016. I also have a First Responder background and a wilderness medicine background as well. So, I always feel like I have skills that are beneficial to relief situations like we are experiencing now, plus I just don't mind working, in general. After disasters like this happen, a lot of the hard work happens in the first week, the second week, and three weeks and more after the event because that is when everybody else leaves, and that is truly when the work is needed."

Pope's experiences have naturally made him an asset to the team, which consists of many impressive individuals who came together right after Hurricane Helene smashed into the High Country. Pope and his team began working with the Avery County YMCA, the Feeding Avery Families organization, the local police, firefighters and EMTs, and eventually, folks from neighboring counties and all around the country.

Pope knew the community was about to endure a deadly, devastating storm for the ages.

Pope's eyes were opened while looking out of the windows on the second story of his home. One of his three kids was uneasy with the ferocity of the storm when it hit full force, so Pope went upstairs to reassure and calm nerves. Instead, he, too, started freaking out about what was happening in front of them.

Grandfather Mountain Park has a weather station on top of it, and according to Pope, the previous two-day rainfall measurement record was 12.3 inches of water falling during a 48-hour period. This time around, more than 20 inches of rain was measured, and the initial focus at the Grandfather Mountain facility was to begin making sure the animals in the zoo were safe and the pavement was still roadworthy. As all of that was playing out, the winds of Hurricane Helene finally made their way up from the Florida coast, hammering the High Country on Friday morning.

"My son was in his room and he gets a little bit anxious about big storms, as we all do, and he said, 'Yeah Dad, I'm good,' and then we started to look out of his window," Pope said. "I have a bunch of big oaks surrounding my house,

which was built in 1968, and one of the big oak branches had broken and was swinging back and forth in the wind over my driveway. I told my son, 'I kind of wish the wind would just blow that one down because it is so high, I can't reach it, and it's going to hit our car underneath.' No more than a few seconds after I said that, we watched that whole oak tree fall down. ... 'Dad, did you see that?' Seconds later, another big oak tree falls onto the top of the first tree, and then a third tree fell on top of the other two. And, during that same main-line gust, the wind shear blew another tree down that smashed into my neighbor's house. All four big trees fell within 30 seconds of each other, and we watched all of it happen right in front of us."

The high winds were adding to the flood damage. Initially, high waters were taking out the houses and businesses and roads, but suddenly, trees of all sizes were doing more damage.

By the time the storm had passed through on Friday afternoon, Sept. 27, the destruction kept grinding. Soon, all phone towers were out, all electricity was out, and the roads were blocked in every direction.

That's when Pope became an important cog in the relief efforts, partly because he explored and found a spot on the back side of Grandfather Mountain where he could get a phone signal. At times, it was only enough of a signal to get a text or a Facebook post or two out, and that unexpected hotspot proved to be crucial.

"Saturday, there was little to no communication, so by Sunday, that is when we really realized that there was a ton of people in the shelters and that the shelters needed supplies, food, water and tarps. So we immediately put out a call for help to friends, family and the donors of Grandfather Mountain through social media," Pope said. "Right away, people began to bring in supplies, and that is when we realized that the Starlink satellite connections were a great tool and resource when you have no cell towers working.

"By Monday morning, we had loads of supplies coming into Avery County from literally all over. I have a friend in Florida named Mark Coffman, for instance, who is a regular at the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games every July, and I told him, 'Look if you can find any Starlink systems at Home Depot or anywhere else, buy as many as you can while you travel up here.' I was thinking he would find about two or three of them on his way from Florida to North Carolina, but he crisscrossed from store to store as he drove up, and he showed up with seven. I talked to Mark on Sunday about 4 p.m. and he showed up the next morning with supplies, and he is still here working with us. In fact, one day, Mark and us, along with the Teen Valley Ranch youth camp, we served 1,000 meals at the Spear Country Store."

Folks on the local level organized a plan as well.

"The partnerships began to blossom," Pope said. "We work a lot with the Williams YMCA of Avery County on a regular basis, so Trey Oakley and I, Trey is the CEO of the Williams YMCA, we drove around and went to the hospital to talk to the leadership there. We checked in with Sally Loftus of Feeding Avery Families, we checked in with the local school system, and we went to Incident Command and met with the command leaders who were running the Emergency Response. Another food bank organization that we worked with during this event was called A Simple Gesture out of Greensboro, N.C. When I made the call out to them that we were in trouble and we needed help, they responded instantly. And, we also wonderfully partnered with Wine To Water organization in Boone as well and with everyone working together, good things began to happen."

As the need to feed people grew in the High Country, Pope and his team realized that it would take a couple of days to get the Grandfather Mountain Park restaurant up and running, and that is when a worldwide relief organization stepped in to bridge the gap.

"The World Central Kitchen organization was set up and mobilized in Boone, doing their amazing work, but we couldn't get to Boone at that time," Pope said. "So, the main World Central Kitchen set up in Asheville flew in 300 prepared meals and landed with them here at Grandfather Mountain for two days in a row, and we distributed them to rescue workers across the county. Then, on the third day, we finally got our food service hub up and operational."

There have been many hotdogs and hamburgers served at many locations throughout all of our counties over the

last two weeks, yet one day, an idea was hatched to bring along a treat for those in need that might lift their spirits – ice cream.

"We took eight tubs of ice cream to the Spear Country Store and used coolers and ice to get it there," Pope said.
"One of the people who was cooking on the grill for others down there had been doing it for hours and everyone kept asking him: 'Hey, do you want something to eat? You need to eat.' But, he'd say, 'No, I don't want to take food from other people. I'm good.' When the ice cream showed up, however, he was like, 'Yeah, I'll take a little ice cream.'"

Not long afterward, a family walked up to the store from a long way off, as folks could see them by the side of the road in the distance. It was a young family with five kids in tow, hoping for a good meal.

"The second-oldest daughter was shellshocked," Pope said. "I've never been through a war, but that is the only thing I could imagine when I saw her. That little girl looked so sad and so confused and so scared, stunned at what had just happened to them, and I think she was just old enough to know that this situation was bad, yet not old enough to understand that everything will be OK again someday. There were some police officers there from Concord, N.C., who were volunteering to help, and one of the officers was talking to her family and to her, trying to cheer them up.

"The officer then picked her up and put her into his UTV side-by-side and he is trying to show her all of the bells and whistles and flashing lights of his police vehicle, yet it is all lost on her. She was just sitting there with no too little expression. Then, one of my team members notices her and decides to scoop some ice cream for her and bring it over. As soon as the ice cream was handed to her, her reaction was like, 'Ice cream!' She immediately came alive. All of a sudden, she was a little kid again. For a few minutes, she was happy, and something good was happening in the world around her, as she sat there with her bowl of ice cream."

To find updates on this crisis and to find ways to help, go online to grandfather.com/helene-updates/ ©2024 Watauga Democrat - Mountain Times Publications, All rights reserved.

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Fire departments faced being cut off, difficulties while responding during Helene

October 9, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 1052 Words OpenURL Link

SUGAR GROVE — During the Hurricane Helene and its immediate aftermath, multiple fire departments had to deal with one key fact: they were cut off.

"At the very beginning, we recognized that there was no way out," Cove Creek Volunteer Fire Chief Steve Marks said.

Fire departments and local emergency officials knew Hurricane Helene was not going to be a normal event in the High Country.

Cove Creek VFD staged personnel at the station, knowing they would likely be busy.

"Which turned out to be a blessing because once we were cut off, no one else could really get to us, and that included a number of our volunteers," Marks said. "Having spent 42 years in the fire service, I've never seen a disaster of this magnitude, and I've been fortunate to have been involved in lots of different responses. But never anything like this that has been so impactful to a community."

At the Beaver Dam Volunteer Fire Department, Chief Terry Guy left his house at 4:30 a.m. to get to the station. His assistant chief lived next door, and even that early, they had to cut their way to the station as several trees had already fallen across the road.

From there, the fire departments checked the roads and responded to any calls. At one point during the height of the storm, Marks and Guy and other fire departments across the county realized that conditions were not safe to be out in.

"At that point, we realized that we had done all we could do," Marks said. "So we came back in after that, we hunkered down and sort of waited for the vast majority of the of the rains and the winds to pass. It was a haunting experience to watch right before your eyes the tops of trees snap, and trees fall all around you, and then look out Hwy 321 and see nothing but a river where the highway was. That was new event to all of us."

At one point, the Cove Creek VFD lost power but got it back when the emergency generator came. A little bit later, the power went out again, as a landslide at the station destroyed the propane tank.

"It was the realization that, at that point, it was just the radios. That was all we had," Marks said. "It was a hurry up and wait to see what was going to happen next."

It was similar experience at the Beaver Dam VFD, Guy had pulled all his firefighters back to the station. At one point, the station was surrounded by water on three sides.

"We actually had water that came up into our station. I've been on that department for 30 years, and I've never seen that happen before," Guy said. "We were kind of cut off and stuck at the station until the storm was over and water (receded)."

The water was about 6 to 8 inches deep and went about 14 feet into the station, but Guy said there was no damage.

Watauga fire departments across the county had that same issue of being cut off. In Meat Camp, N.C. 194 turned

into a river just past Goober Peas store cutting off the Meat Camp Volunteer Fire Department. Similarly, N.C. 194 across from Valle Crucis School was underwater, which limited access to the Shawneehaw Volunteer Fire Department. Zionville VFD was also facing flooding and dangerous conditions.

Foscoe Volunteer Fire Department Chief Matt Aldridge said he had similar access issues. He said he realized they were cut off at around 8 or 9 a.m. Multiple main power lines were across N.C. 105 along with "huge" trees across the road.

"We were like everybody else; we were on our own island down here," Aldridge said. "It was scary for a while. We had a good group here, a good group at station two. We were just ready to do what we had to do."

Marks and his team had set up a mini MASH-style unit at the station to "be the hospital" until the roads could reopen or the weather allowed for a helicopter to land. There was one ambulance on that side of the county at the time, but Marks understood that they were sharing it with wherever there was access on the west side.

"You hear about these situations, or you read about them, but seldom do you ever experience being truly cut off," Marks said. "Never have I experienced a time when there wasn't going to be mutual aid, there wasn't going to be an ambulance that could transport to the hospital. I think that's really when that adrenaline and the experience kicks in and you just do what you have to."

Once the storm died down and crews were able to open up the roads in the various fire districts — including removing rubble from a landslide on Hwy 421 headed toward Vilas — it was a relief because not only could they now get patients out, but they could get resources in.

"There were folks that were really wanting to help us that couldn't get in for a while, but once we got access, we were able to coordinate resources, and really then it became a mission of determining who was in immediate need," Marks said. "Who was trapped or needed to be evacuated —sort of an initial damage assessment and triage effort."

Throughout the next few days, and still ongoing, the fire departments became some of the very places to receive donations and give those out to those in need all while recovery efforts continue.

And throughout it all, Aldridge, Marks and Guy all saw unbelievable actions from their firefighters, some of whom had no idea what was happening at their own home.

"They put that secondary to helping the community," Marks said. "That speaks volumes to that dedication piece that these folks were willing to put forth. We had folks sleeping on turnout gear on the bay floor. We had folks who didn't sleep because, obviously, the dispatch system was down, so somebody had to stay up and listen to the radio. We had folks that you know that would say yes to whatever you ask them — rolling up their sleeves and doing whatever was necessary. Whether that was responding to a call or cleaning up a coffee spill in the kitchen, they were willing to do whatever was needed during this disaster."

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Wine to Water responding to Boone and beyond

October 9, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 479 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — On Friday, Oct. 4, a Buncombe County Ambulance rolled into the Wine to Water warehouse at 689 George Wilson Rd. in Boone. Fortunately, there were no patients for the ambulance to transport. Instead, the vehicle was filled with food, water and other supplies to transport back to one of the areas hit hardest by Hurricane Helene.

Over the past week, Wine to Water's warehouse has become a hub for donations and supplies from paper products, canned foods, hygiene items, baby food, nonperishables, bottled water, and everything in between.

The nonprofit organization has been responding to the needs locally and in other areas across western North Carolina that were impacted by the historic storm.

Mandy Freeman, program manager with Wine to Water, said they have set up several supply sites in Watauga County, including in Meat Camp and Vilas, along with others throughout the region, such as in Linville, Newland, Spruce Pine, Asheville, Hendersonville, Canton and Marshall.

"We have groups that go out into communities, and they're assessing the situation and finding a hub, a place for us to set up and distribute supplies," Freeman said. "Once we get to those areas, people go one truck at a time, if the road's passable, and they may be walking to a location or up a hill to get supplies to people. Every day, we have come back from those areas with a needs list, and if it's here in our warehouse, it gets to go. It's just an ebb and flow right now of donations and receivables and sending out into those remote areas."

Wine to Water is a global nonprofit preserving life and dignity through the power of clean water. Founded in 2004, WTW develops WASH (water, sanitation, hygiene) solutions in direct partnership with local leaders, creating an impact beyond water.

The team works to improve environmental sustainability, education, women's empowerment, health care and economic growth. The organization is active in Nepal, the Dominican Republic, the Amazon and Tanzania. The WTW Disaster Response team actively responds to floods, earthquakes and hurricanes with life saving water and relief.

Now, WTW is bringing its global mission locally as Hurricane Helene has impacted the many places it calls home. It's even working to bring its water filtration technology to places in western NC that are currently cut off from its own water supply.

Freeman said the immense effort is possible due to the hard work of the many volunteers who contributed to sorting through the large amounts of donations and designating them to the different areas of need.

"Our volunteer team has done all of the above," Freeman said. "They're receiving our donations, sorting them out and making care packages. What we're doing is creating piles, like at the front loading area where it's marked to go to Marshall. We're matching places with the needs list if you will."

To support Wine to Water's response to Hurricane Helene, visit wtw.org.

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AppHealthCare urges safe water usage following Hurricane Helene, recommends disinfection and testing for wells and springs

October 9, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report| Section: Local | 550 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — Flooding and excessive rains, like that experienced from Hurricane Helene in the area, can cause water in a private well or spring to become contaminated. If contaminated water is consumed or comes into contact with skin, it can cause illness. The only way to know if your water is contaminated is to get it tested.

AppHealthCare will be offering disinfection and bacterial test kits at no cost for private wells and springs. This will be a priority area for the AppHealthCare Environmental Health Team in the coming days and weeks as road conditions improve, power is restored and samples can be safely transported.

It is important to follow recommendations from AppHealthCare, the public health department serving Alleghany, Ashe and Watauga counties, to ensure the assessment and testing of your well or spring is completed properly.

Has your well or spring flooded?

If your well has flooded, follow safe water precautions to prevent illness caused by potentially contaminated water:

Do not drink water from your well or spring. Do not use contaminated well or spring water. You cannot see, taste or smell bacterial contamination in your well or spring. Use only bottled, boiled or treated water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene until you are able to properly disinfect and test your water. Inspect the well seal and casing for damage as floodwaters can cause cracks or other issues that allow contaminants to enter. If there is damage to your well or spring, contact AppHealthCare Environmental Health at (828) 795-1970 or email eh@apphealth.com. Avoid turning on your pump until you are sure the electrical system and well components are dry and functioning properly. Properly disinfect your well or spring before testing. Disinfection must be done properly in order for testing to be effective. AppHealthCare is working to get disinfection kits locally. Disinfection kits will be provided at no cost. Test your well or spring for contaminants. You must use official water testing kits in order for the sample to be tested properly. AppHealthCare is working to get testing kits locally. Testing kits will be provided at no cost.

Request a Disinfection and Test Kit

To request a disinfection or test kit, please complete this form and an AppHealthCare staff member will reach out to you once kits arrive. You can also call AppHealthCare at (828) 795-1970 Monday through Friday 8 a.m. — 4:45 p.m. and select option 3 on the phone menu to be connected to the Environmental Health Team. Please note there will be a limited number of kits available.

If your well or spring did not flood but you are concerned about bacterial contamination, contact the Town of Jefferson Water Plant for Ashe and Alleghany Counties or Town of Boone Water Plant for Watauga County for assistance. Municipal, town or community water supplies cannot be tested by AppHealthCare.

AppHealthCare Environmental Health Staff are available to help you ensure your drinking water is safe. It is important to contact them for assistance and guidance for how to properly disinfect and test your well or spring if it has been flooded.

For questions or concerns, contact AppHealthCare Environmental Health at (828) 795-1970 Monday through Friday 8 a.m. — 4:45 p.m. or email at eh@apphealth.com. If there is an urgent public health issue after hours, call AppHealthCare at (828) 795-1970 and follow the phone prompts to be connected to the after hours service.

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Infographic: How to avoid Hurricane Helene related scams

October 9, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Local | 14 Words OpenURL Link

The following is an infographic on how to avoid scams relates to Hurricane Helene.

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'A testament to the community:' Historic Valle Crucis buildings survive flooding

October 9, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Community | 411 Words OpenURL Link

VALLE CRUCIS — Since the late 1800s, two historic buildings in Valle Crucis have seen their share of flooding. Hurricane Helene was no different.

Both the Mast General Store Annex and Valle Crucis United Methodist Church have been staples in the communities as they sit right across from each other.

They survived the 1916 and 1940 floods, and now, they have survived historic flooding from Hurricane Helene.

In preparation for the storm, the employees at the Mast Store Annex deployed its pending flood protocol to sandbag doors, move merchandise to higher levels, and route high water under the store, according to the business.

General Manager Joe Bentley said the grounds around the Mast General Store Annex building is what was most devastated from flooding. The store did receive some flooding, but Bentley said it was nothing that "couldn't be fixed." The original Mast General Store did not have any damage.

"The store survived," Bentley said. "This community and this store are stronger than ever. The store has been here 125 years, and of course, the original Mast Store has been there for 141 years, so that just shows you the strength of this community."

Throughout the day on Oct. 2, Bentley said he saw people coming from "wherever" asking what was needed or if anyone was in desperate need of anything.

"I would call it a beacon," Bentley said, "I would call it just a symbol of what Valle Crucis is about."

Across the street is Valle Crucis United Methodist Church, built in the 1870s. On Oct. 2, Rev. Dr. Michael Marcela was shoveling mud from the walkway. His church, like in the past, had flooded with approximately two feet of water on the bottom floor. He said they would have to redo the inside as the flooring and pews were ruined. The back deck was also destroyed and will have to be replaced.

In 1940, the sanctuary floated down the road. In 2004, it flooded again. But time and time again, flood after flood, the church has continued.

"It's a testament to the community. It's a testament to this church," Marcela said. "You know, folks have rebuilt this place several times, and they're all ready to come back in and do it all again."

On Oct. 2, Marcela was unsure if they would be able to prepare the church for the Sunday, Oct. 6, service.

When one church member who was helping clean up heard that, he had one message: "Valle Crucis Methodist Church will worship this coming Sunday."

And they did.

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