

Morganton hospital ER seeing storm-related injuries

October 8, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: SHARON MCBRAYER smcbrayer@morganton.com| Section: News| 731 Words OpenURL Link

Morganton's new hospital CEO started his tenure with a trial by fire.

With less than a month on the job, Gary Paxson, CEO of UNC Health Blue Ridge since early September, had to manage the fallout from Hurricane Helene.

The storm tore a path across western North Carolina, causing flooding, mud slides, downed trees, power outages and deaths.

Paxson and the hospital system initially dealt with power loss and water issues, as well as making sure the hospital had the resources needed to continue operating as normally as possible during and after the storm. Paxson said the Morganton hospital went to emergency generator on Friday, Sept. 27. The generator typically has enough fuel to power the hospital for 96 hours, he said.

The hospital was able to have its full power restored on Saturday, Sept. 28.

The hospital also lost water and had to get an outside tanker truck to pump water into the hospital so it could function safely, Paxson said. It was able to return to city water Wednesday morning, he said.

"The city's done an amazing job of trying to get us back up and running," Paxson said.

Initially, after the storm, the hospital had to postpone non-emergency surgeries. But after it got back to using regular water and power, the hospital has returned to its normal operations.

Paxson said initially after the storm there were several employees who the hospital could not get in contact with, but as of Wednesday all employees but one have been accounted for.

"And we will continue to strive to find that last one as well," Paxson said.

He said the hospital is using every resource available to make sure all staff members are accounted for and safe.

As the hospital system was dealing with the storm and its aftermath, multiple staff members slept at the hospital because they either could not get home, didn't have power at home or just needed a safe place to sleep, Paxson said.

"And so we're housing a lot of those," he said.

Through it all, Paxson said the hospital has had support from UNC Health out of Chapel Hill. Some staff drove in from Chapel Hill and Lenoir to help.

"We've gotten physicians, nurses and other type of staff that have come in voluntarily to help us. We've had increased volumes in our emergency room and patients in-house, and so we've gotten amazing support from across the state to serve those extra needs," Paxson said. "That outpouring of assistance has been truly impressive and greatly appreciated."

He said the average number of patients in their emergency room is 80 to 90 people. Monday night the hospital saw 180 patients and Tuesday night another 125 patients, he said.

Some of those additional patients have been people in need of help to power oxygen equipment, he said. The hospital is working with the local Red Cross shelter to educate the community on the appropriate places to go so that the hospital can make sure the emergency room is prepared for emergencies. The Red Cross is operating a shelter at Oak Hill Methodist Church, located at 2239 N.C. Hwy 181, Morganton.

Paxson said the Red Cross has a generator that can power oxygen equipment at the shelter.

Paxson said the hospital has seen an increase in trauma incidents as people clear trees and debris, as well as from car wrecks. "We need to make sure that our emergency room is preserved to care for those true emergencies," Paxson said.

For instance, on Tuesday, Paxson said a man who was involved in a mud slide was brought in to the Morganton hospital. He survived.

"I believe, tragically, over the next several days, and even weeks, that we don't know the extent of the damage in our surrounding region, and we're going to have to be prepared for a lot of different events, including loss of life, loss of homes, loss of property, for sure," Paxson said. "So I don't think we know the depth of that yet. As power comes on and resources continue to come into the area, I think those will become more evident, and we will just have to take it a day at a time and process accordingly."

Paxson said a special thanks to emergency responders, linemen, power companies, internet companies and others who have worked to help the community through the storm.

"The communities have come together. The state has come together in amazing ways," Paxson said. "I'm proud to be part of this community."

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Faith, hope and love

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Without question our hearts are broken as we learn more about our neighbors who suffered devasting loss from hurricane Helene. Many people in my small hometown of Hudson, along with other neighbors in our county, lost power, internet, and phone service. Duke and Blue Ridge Electric, along with power companies who have come here to help them from other states and areas, have worked hard to help restore it. Compared to the loss and devastation in our beloved Blue Ridge Mountains, the events we have suffered cannot in any way be compared to the loss of loved ones and complete loss of property and everything families owned. Those who now have power and the internet; there are still pockets of people in our community who do not, can see the devastation our North Carolina brothers and sisters are enduring, and it is absolutely breaking our hearts.

Jesus said in Matthew 22 verses 37-39, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important. 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' I know many of you, like me, are seeing others act on this scripture every day, including yourself. Churches and their members, community organizations, organized volunteer groups, firefighters, police officers, and so many other volunteers that I can't name them all, have stepped up to help others in their community and in neighboring communities. Caring souls all around us are living out this scripture, doing whatever they are capable of to help each other and other communities.

I have also read Facebook posts and have seen neighbors reaching out to others who need help with their animals, whether it's offering a pasture for cattle or horses, providing temporary or permanent homes for dogs and cats that have been displaced, orphaned pets who have lost their families, or as our town manager shared with us, rescuing a baby beaver found by a local rescue team. There really is no end to the needs that have been and will continue to be identified in the coming hours, days, months, and years. All of God's creation needs our help.

If you want to physically volunteer and are looking for an opportunity, contact a local church or local authorities. In addition to dropping off supplies to be packed and sent to designated areas, there are other needs volunteers can help with. People willing to help individuals' clear trees from their property is a need I continue to read about and see on social media. Dropping off food for animals and other supplies to shelters would also be appreciated. We are asked to identify the need first rather than drive into a community where a plan has already been established.

I come from a family that loves to hug other family members and friends. I find myself now wanting to as one of my aunts used to say "hug your neck off" when I see you. In your senior years you realize how precious every day is, and you don't want to waste even one of them. As Paul said in First Corinthians 13:13 "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love." It is my prayer that your faith will remain strong in hope for tomorrow. Love is a gift from God and meant to be shared with others as he shared it with us. Let someone who is hurting know they matter and that they are loved.

In the coming days and weeks, I know you will have new stories to share with me. I'm here to listen to all of them, whether it's by email or talking to you in person, I pray that you will find some joy in each day. That joy can simply be listening to or helping a friend or neighbor. Email me ibelieve1068@gmail.com or stop me to talk when we see each other in the community,

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Mountain Response: Moore Support Continues

October 8, 2024 | Pilot, The (Southern Pines, NC) Author: ANA RISANO || Staff Writer ana@thepilot.com| Section: News| 1379 Words OpenURL Link

With the North Carolina mountains still reeling from the devastation left by Hurricane Helene, relief and recovery efforts continue to be supplemented by people from Moore County.

Locally, police and fire staff have been called to provide assistance and relieve exhausted crews in multiple towns. Residents with valuable medical skills, church communities and businesses collecting donations have also joined the ranks to help western North Carolina.

On Sept. 29, a couple of days after the hurricane caused devastating destruction, firefighters from Southern Pines, Aberdeen and Pinehurst headed to the mountains on an emergency deployment order issued by the state. They were assigned to the Marion Fire Department in McDowell County, taking over the normal emergency calls, clearing trees, and even running a search and recovery operation along the Catawba River.

Southern Pines firefighters Jonathan Veitch and Bradley Dick were among those deployed. They emphasized the way the local community has come together after the destruction and welcomed outside support with open arms.

"It was a very unique experience just seeing the station out there, and seeing the community really rally behind their fellow neighbors and really come together," Dick said.

While Marion was not hit as hard as other areas in the mountains, it still experienced downed trees, flash flooding, power loss and wrecked infrastructure. Veitch, who has been on other hurricane-related deployments, said he's never seen such destruction.

"I have not seen a localized destruction path at that level and in a community that thought it was relatively safe from hurricanes and tropical storms," Veitch said.

At the end of their deployment last week, they took the Aberdeen fire engine to Old Fort, where the next round of deployed firefighters would provide similar relief efforts.

West End Fire and Rescue has also been busy, bringing donations into the Banner Elk area and deploying one fourperson crew to Marion. Erick Duplessis has headed up the donation collection, making two trips with trailers full of essential items last week. He said a third trailer is getting prepped for this week.

"We've had a great outpouring of support," Duplessis said.

On Oct. 1, they went to Sugar Mountain and Newland with supplies. Duplessis said there is a distribution center set up in Sugar Mountain to help the harder hit parts of the mountains.

Separately, West End firefighters went to Marion to help handle the local emergency calls, clear roads and do damage assessments alongside other Moore County-based firefighters. Captain Matthew Scott said there were three crews at the station, and the call volume was so high that at times all of them were responding to different calls simultaneously.

"We were almost every day dang-near nonstop," Scott said.

This deployment was Scott's third, having previously helped with the Party Rock wildfire in 2016 in that region and with hurricane relief in Cumberland County a few years ago.

"I would say it is by far the worst we have ever gone on," he said. "It was the most involved we ever had — constantly doing something to help that community recover in whatever way we could."

Scott said it will take months for towns in the mountains to recover. "It altered a lot of their lives forever," he said.

Lauren Chriscoe, a nurse practitioner at Pinehurst Medical Clinic who has been providing medical assistance in Burnsville, agreed.

"I think it's going to be a marathon. The needs are forever going to be changing," she said, mentioning the onset of winter and the extensive work needed to restore roads and homes.

Chriscoe was born and raised in Burnsville. She drove six hours to her hometown, north of Asheville, on Monday, Sept. 30, a few days after Hurricane Helene rolled through. She knew her parents survived the storm but was drawn to help because of the "catastrophic" damage.

She said she quickly saw the need for medical assistance, with two fire departments and one elementary school serving as centers for the community. She worked with locals to create a makeshift hospital at one of the fire departments.

Chriscoe, local leaders and emergency response individuals developed an efficient system within the first few days for nurses and doctors to volunteer their time, as well as get ATVs into the backwood areas to rescue people.

"I got to see a lot of really good humans do really good things for a small community," Chriscoe said. "Everybody was nice and grateful to get medical access in a time of need."

Chriscoe said poison ivy and bee stings were among the greatest medical concerns, along with the availability of insulin. But she says they now have enough supplies to treat those in need.

She worked in Burnsville from Sept. 30 to Oct. 2, and then returned the following weekend. By the time she left on Sunday, she felt hopeful that the local providers could continue the operation.

"The town itself is stable, but the entire perimeter of Burnsville is essentially destroyed," Chriscoe said. "But they can do it (recover). They are very tough individuals."

State Rep. Neal Jackson, whose district includes part of Moore County, went to the Boone area last week with nearly 40 people from his church community, Beulah Baptist, from Bennett. The group mainly worked to remove debris and trees that fell on homes and roads.

"It looks like a bomb went off," Jackson said.

He said the greatest needs in the region are food, water and hope. "Looking into people's eyes, it's just devastation," he said.

Jackson shared a story of helping one mother with three children by bringing gas for their generator and food. She called them the angel she was praying for.

"She was crying, and the kids were jumping up and down because they had food to eat," Jackson said.

According to a press release from the office of Gov. Roy Cooper on Sunday, over 6,500 people have been rescued, evacuated or assisted by search and rescue teams.

Nearly 50 search and rescue teams have deployed over 1,600 responders, and roughly 1,700 North Carolina National Guard and 1,000 active-duty military personnel from Fort Liberty and Fort Campbell, Ky., are assisting

local and state responders.

"Continuing search and rescue missions in rough terrain, better communications and more resources on the ground are helping as we race to find missing people, reunite families and coordinate the delivery of supplies," said Cooper in a statement. "The people of western North Carolina are strong, and they deserve every bit of help we can get them. I'm so grateful for everyone stepping up to help as we dig out from this unprecedented storm."

The state has confirmed at least 77 storm-related deaths in the region. According to numbers released by individual counties, including Buncombe and Henderson, the death toll is over 100 in the state. The total impact is still unknown.

Last week, a team of five Southern Pines police officers went to assist local law enforcement in Buncombe County. Sqt. Marcus Rummel said it was his first time in Asheville.

The team thought it would be providing security at distribution sites, escorting supplies and helping with recovery efforts. But Rummel said they mainly helped with traffic control — blocking off roads where recovery canine teams and power companies were working.

"We were a very small piece to the puzzle," Rummel said.

Something that has stuck with Rummel since returning was the smell in Asheville, which he described as a mixture of mud, dust, mildew, rotting food and death.

While providing security outside a Lowe's hardware store, he noticed a waterline about 12 feet up the wall. That part of Asheville was swallowed by flash floods, similar to what happened at Biltmore Village. He said there was also about a foot of mud inside.

The damage reminded Rummel of a tornado, with leveled buildings, snapped power poles and debris everywhere. He said a 26-foot U-Haul truck was in the middle of the Lowe's garden center.

But from his interactions with locals, Rummel said people were staying positive and ready to help. He had several people check in with him, asking if he needed food or water even though he was there to help them.

A second team of Southern Pines officers was deployed on Sunday, Oct. 6 to provide additional support.

Donation sites are set up at local businesses across the county to take essential supplies west. Monetary donations can also be made through Samaritan's Purse or other trusted organizations with boots on the ground.

Additional information on Helene impacts and relief efforts are available at https://www.readync.gov/ or https://nc211.org/.

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Land Plan Group Studies Up

October 8, 2024 | Pilot, The (Southern Pines, NC) Author: ELENA MARSH || Staff Writer| Section: News| 768 Words OpenURL Link

Four members of the Moore County Land Use Plan Steering Committee highlighted their expertise at the committee's fourth meeting this year.

County Public Works Director Brian Patnode; Department of Transportation Engineer Matt Kitchen; Moore County Schools Superintendent Tim Locklair; and Sandhills Community College President Sandy Stewart all presented a little about their professional backgrounds for the committee.

The presentations were designed to allow for questions from other members of the committee and provide updated information on the county water and sewer system, roads and upcoming road projects and the public school system.

Water and Sewer

In his presentation, Patnode detailed where and how the county receives its water. He also detailed how the sewer system functions in the county and the current sewer projects taking place in Vass and Seven Lakes business district.

Patnode also helped the crowd get acquainted with the county's future water supply and the background surrounding those important decisions.

Based on growth projections in a recent study, the county could experience a gap between supply and demand as soon as 2029. If nothing is done, and assuming existing contracts to buy water from Southern Pines and Aberdeen don't renew, the gap would grow to almost 6 million gallons a day by 2052.

Whichever source the county decides to draw from is meant to carry the county into the next decade and beyond. The proposed projects so far exist within the \$100 million range.

Transportation and Roads

In the umbrella topic of infrastructure, roads and transportation are an important part of land planning.

However, unlike water and sewer systems, the North Carolina Department of Transportation does not build on a principle of guiding growth and development.

"From a DOT standpoint we don't build roads or design roads in through new territory in an attempt to drive development," said Kitchen.

Kitchen, who has been in the mountains aiding with NCDOT projects in the wake of Hurricane Helene, wanted to stress to the committee that the cliche "if you build it they will come" does not apply to roadways.

"Our purpose is to move goods and services of people safely and expand corridors that are currently developed and can be upgraded," he said.

Kitchen described a few projects that are currently taking place in the county. Notable projects include the widening of N.C. 211, the U.S. 15-501 and U.S. 1 project in Aberdeen, the expansion of N.C. 5 as well as some other widening and safety projects.

With the U.S. Open and Women's Open scheduled for Pinehurst in 2029, many of the projects discussed will be on a five-year timeline to finish construction.

Projects get approved and funded through the area metropolitan planning organizations: Sandhills Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Central Pines Regional Planning Organization and the Fayetteville Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Public Schools and SCC

The final presenters of the evening were Locklair and Stewart, who shared insights into the current state of the schools in the area.

Enrollment at county high schools has continued to climb over the years.

Currently, Pinecrest has over 2,200 students in buildings designed for 1,600. Meanwhile, enrollment at Union Pines is now up over 1,400 on a campus built for 1,060. Each accommodates the overflow with classroom mobile units on campus, along with half a dozen single trailers.

Locklair explained that the next big capital project for the school system would be significant upgrades to Carthage Elementary. While decisions about how to go about those upgrades, including potential funding, might still be years out, the district has ensured that it will continue to consider community members with a vested interest in the school.

A project both Locklair and Stewart touched on was the \$25 million in state funding earmarked for what the state calls a "Cooperative Innovative High School."

Innovative high schools are small public high schools typically housed on local college campuses. The schools are intended to expand opportunities for students' educational success by implementing a small cohort model that includes significant staff support.

Each school can have no more than 100 students per grade level. By law, it must focus specifically on students at risk of dropping out, students whose parents did not continue their education beyond high school and students who could benefit from an accelerated academic pathway.

Moore County's school will concentrate on vocational development to meet the expanding needs for skilled trade workers around the area.

At the college level, Stewart said that Sandhills Community College was becoming increasingly more enticing in students' journeys in higher education. Whether it be studying a trade or enrolling at SCC before transferring, Stewart wanted the group to know that the community college was growing and students will continue to be a part of the land planning scenarios.

Contact Elena Marsh at (910) 693-2484 or elena@thepilot.com.

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Meteorologists: Florida faces catastrophic damage

October 8, 2024 | Robesonian, The (Lumberton, NC) Author: Robesonian and combined wire reports | Section: news | 1428 Words OpenURL Link

"Milton is expected to bring catastrophic damage to Florida from potentially record storm surges along the Gulf Coast in the Tampa Bay region and areas to the south, including Fort Myers," said AccuWeather Chief Meteorologist Jon Porter. "Milton will bring hurricane conditions across the heavily populated I-4 corridor, including Orlando, with damaging winds, flooding rains and long-term power outages. In addition, piles of debris left on the curbs from the storm surge and flooding damage from Hurricane Helene just two weeks ago will likely be swept away by the storm surge and pushed into buildings, Porter said.

"Debris left behind after Helene could also turn into deadly airborne missiles when Hurricane Milton reaches the Gulf Coast with destructive wind gusts." AccuWeather experts estimate that Milton could produce more than \$200 billion in total damage and economic loss, especially if the hurricane makes landfall in or just north of the mouth of Tampa Bay, according to forecasters on Tuesday afternoon.

"We're facing the threat of two weather disasters in the span of two weeks in the United States, each causing more than \$200 billion in total damage and economic loss," Porter said.

Fortunately, for the hard-hit areas of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Tennessee, Milton is expected to turn more eastward late this week and is not expected to bring rain or wind impacts to the southern Appalachians. During Helene, there was also a second storm diving south into the lower Mississippi Valley which added even more energy to Helene as the storms merged, forecasters said Tuesday. That led to more wind and rain for a longer period of time, well after Helene made landfall.

On Tuesday afternoon, AccuWeather expert meteorologists increased Hurricane Milton to a 5 on the AccuWeather RealImpact Scale for Hurricanes in the United States. In contrast to the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale, which classifies storms by wind speed only, the AccuWeather RealImpact Scale is based on a broad range of important factors. "In order to better communicate a more comprehensive representation of the potential impact of a storm to lives and livelihoods, the scale covers not only wind speed, but also flooding rain, storm surge and economic damage and loss," Porter said. "Some of these hazards such as inland flooding and storm surge in many storms result in more deaths and economic loss than wind."

A 5 on the AccuWeather RealImpact Scale for Hurricanes warns of widespread catastrophic flooding in major population centers. Flooding may last days to weeks. structural damage to buildings, power outages and trees down, as well as catastrophic inundation in populated areas will be widespread. Coastlines altered by the hurricane may take years or longer to recover, forecasters said on Tuesday afternoon.

The last time AccuWeather expert meteorologists issued a 5 on the AccuWeather RealImpact Scale for hurricanes was ahead of Hurricane Ian's catastrophic landfall in the Fort Myers Beach area of Florida in 2022. "Even if Milton loses wind intensity and makes landfall as a Category 3 storm, the storm surge will still be life-threatening, and in some places, it will likely be catastrophic," Porter said. "Both Katrina and Rita, two storms in 2005 in other parts of the Gulf Coast, share this similarity. In each case, they intensified into a Category 5 storm before making landfall as a Category 3. Katrina's maximum storm surge of 26-28 feet devastated Mississippi and is the record in the Atlantic basin, while also causing the catastrophe in New Orleans when the levees failed. "In Rita's case, the surge reached 15 feet along the Louisiana coast and extended several miles inland, completely devastating many towns," said AccuWeather Director of Forecasting Operations Dan DePodwin. "There is no recent precedent for a major hurricane to take this path toward Florida. Previous storms, including Helene and Ian, are likely not representative of the potential impacts to the Tampa area, including Sarasota, Bradenton, St. Petersburg and Clearwater. This is an increasing significant risk of devastating, catastrophic impacts to this region." Storm surges of 15-20 feet may occur

in and near Tampa Bay, with an AccuWeather Local StormMax™ of 23 feet. Some areas along the Gulf coast of Florida are at an increased vulnerability to storm surge due to the absence of protective sand dunes and barriers from damage sustained from Helene. This will create an extremely dangerous situation for coastal areas that will once again have dangerous and life-threatening surges. "Should Milton track a bit farther south and make landfall south of Tampa, the storm surge in Tampa Bay can remain dangerous but not as extreme," DePodwin said. "Such a track would also greatly increase the risk for significant, damaging water inundation in areas that experienced widespread destruction from Hurricane lan's storm surge, especially areas near Fort Myers, Naples and Charlotte Harbor. Even with Milton moving up toward Tampa, there will still be life-threatening surge in the Fort Myers area." Milton will approach the west coast of Florida Tuesday night into Wednesday then cross the Florida Peninsula Wednesday evening before moving out over the open waters of the Atlantic Ocean by Thursday. Destructive wind gusts are expected as Hurricane Milton moves inland and across the Florida Peninsula. Wind gusts of 60-80 mph can occur across much of the central and southern Florida Peninsula. Near where the center of circulation makes landfall, wind gusts can reach 120-140 mph with an AccuWeather Local StormMax of 165 mph. As the storm moves across, areas along the populous I-4 corridor can experience hurricane conditions, with flooding rain, damaging winds and even localized tornadoes.

As the storm approaches the eastern Gulf Coast, a wide swath of 2-4 inches of rain will fall across parts of the Florida Peninsula, southeastern Georgia and the northern Bahamas. Rainfall totals of 4-8 inches can extend into much of the Florida Peninsula. Across central and northeastern parts of the Florida Peninsula, rainfall totals can reach 8-12 inches with an AccuWeather Local StormMax™ of 30 inches.

This heavy rainfall can lead to widespread flooding, impassable roads and standing water for days, causing major transportation disruptions. There is the potential for areas of repeated downpours posing a risk for extreme flooding over a period of multiple days. Rainfall rates can reach 2-4 inches per hour with the heaviest downpours. If this occurs in urbanized areas, it can result in catastrophic flooding, including roads becoming impassable for a time. AccuWeather expert meteorologists say tornadoes will be possible to the northeast, east and southeast of the path of Milton Tuesday night through Wednesday night. AccuWeather Climate Expert and Senior Meteorologist Brett Anderson said a warming atmosphere and higher ocean temperatures are amplifying the risks and hurricane impacts in the United States this year. "The ongoing marine heat wave in the Gulf of Mexico has resulted in record high sea surface temperatures and record high ocean heat content, which is a measure of the amount of heat stored in the Gulf as far down as 2,000 meters," Anderson said. "This has the fingerprints of climate change written all over it." "This extreme amount of heat stored in the Gulf is adding a tremendous amount of excess energy to these hurricanes in the form of added wind energy and moisture, leading to rapid intensification and excessive rainfall rates," Anderson said. "Warm water is the main energy source for hurricanes. The warmer the water, the more available energy. The higher the air temperature, the more moisture it can hold, that is why we are so concerned about the impacts that global warming is having on hurricanes and other extreme weather events." Anderson said Hurricane Helene shattered records less than two weeks ago, and Hurricane Milton could do the same over the next 48 hours. "There is data that shows that the amount of available atmospheric moisture, or precipitable water, from Helene was the highest on record," Anderson said. "This surge of extreme moisture was able to be directed far inland, all the way up into the southern Appalachians and the Ohio Valley. This led to a sustained period of very intense rainfall and an extremely rapid rise of rivers and streams that caught many people off guard, especially in areas that hardly ever encounter significant flash flooding. "Unfortunately, Milton will be tapping into the same moisture source as Helene as it turns northeastward toward Florida. We may see yet another new record for atmospheric moisture," Anderson said. "There was a band of heavy rainfall that set up across the southern Appalachians well in advance of Hurricane Helene There are also bands of heavy rainfall ahead of Milton but much farther south across the Florida Peninsula, which is bad news for Florida.

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Red Cross: Donors vital in response to storm impact

October 8, 2024 | Robesonian, The (Lumberton, NC)

Section: news | 288 Words

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LUMBERTON — The American Red Cross continues to work to restock critically needed blood products uncollected due to the ongoing impact of Hurricane Helene's devastation in the Southeast. Donors outside of affected areas are encouraged to make an appointment to give now and help keep the blood supply stable in the weeks to come.

Since making landfall, the storm and its aftermath have led to the cancellation of more than 100 blood drives, causing thousands of blood and platelet donations to go uncollected. For so many people living with urgent medical care needs, blood transfusions are essential, and donations in the Southeast are key to keeping our nationwide network stocked. The Red Cross operates through a national inventory with the ability to move blood wherever and whenever it is needed most.

The time to give blood or platelets is now. Bring hope to those in need by visiting RedCrossBlood.org, calling 1-800-RED CROSS or by using the Red Cross Blood Donor App. As the Red Cross continues to urge people to give blood or platelets now, our teams are also on the ground providing vital relief — like food, water, shelter and support — in communities devastated by Hurricane Helene. If you're able to help those impacted by disasters big and small across the country, like Helene, please consider making a gift of any amount.

All who come to give blood, platelets or plasma Oct. 1-31 will receive a \$10 Amazon.com Gift Card by email, plus be automatically entered for a chance to win one of three \$5,000 gift cards. For full details, visit RedCrossBlood.org/Treat.

Lumberton

Oct. 16: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Truist Fayetteville Road, 4251 Fayetteville Road

Oct. 22, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., State Employees Credit Union- Lumberton, 4840 Fayetteville Road © 2024 Champion Media Carolinas.

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The Latest: Hurricane Milton takes aim at Tampa Bay

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Section: news | 4610 Words

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TAMPA BAY — Hurricane Milton is weakening slightly but remains a ferocious storm that could land a once-in-a-century direct hit on Tampa and St. Petersburg, engulfing the populous region with towering storm surges and turning debris from Helene's devastation 12 days ago into projectiles.

Here's the latest:

Advocates are reaching out to immigrants in Tampa and Orlando to help with evacuation plans and preparation

Among them are the Farm Worker Association of Florida, the Florida Immigrant Coalition and Hope CommUnity Center.

They've been translating official information from state and local authorities and sharing it in Spanish through WhatsApp groups, Facebook, and their social media channels to let the Hispanic community know about the location of shelters, where to find gasoline, sandbags, food, and water.

Like other organizations that serve low-income Hispanic families in the area, they've received hundreds of calls from Spanish speaking immigrants who can't find information in their language and don't understand English, asking for details about the storm.

"One of the main challenges is the language," said Jessica Ramirez, general coordinator at the Farm Worker Association that serves more than 10,000 immigrants. "In situations like a hurricane that are emergencies, it is not easy to find information in Spanish."

Gov. Ron DeSantis gives an update on debris removal efforts

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis vowed to continue around-the-clock efforts to pick up debris from Hurricane Helene until it's no longer safe to do so as Hurricane Milton approaches.

In a Tuesday afternoon briefing in Ocala, the governor said Florida Department of Transportation crews had just removed more than 1,300 truckloads of debris in just over 48 hours, which DeSantis called "a huge, huge amount."

The cleanup effort is key to sparing communities more damage, DeSantis said.

"We've made a huge dent in this," he said. "The more debris we can get picked up, the less damage that's going to happen, whether that's floating into the Gulf of Mexico, whether it's projectiles that go into other buildings."

Disney World now says its theme parks and entertainment complex will close Wednesday afternoon

And Disney World says the theme parks likely remain closed on Thursday.

On Anna Maria Island, residents in Milton's path are already fatigued from Hurricane Helene

"I'm still in shock over the first one and here comes round two," said Evan Purcell of Anna Maria Island, who stayed for Helene but is evacuating for Milton. "I just have a pit in my stomach about this one."

He packed up his father's ashes and was trying to catch his 9-year-old cat, McKenzie, as he prepared to leave.

Helene left him with thousands of dollars in damage when his home flooded. He's now worried Milton may take whatever is left.

"It's a coin toss," he said.

What is a hurricane's storm surge?

Storm surge is the level at which sea water rises above its normal level.

Much like the way a storm's sustained winds don't include the potential for even stronger gusts, storm surge doesn't include the wave height above the mean water level of the surge itself.

Surge is also the amount above what the normal tide is at the time, so a 15-foot (5-meter) storm surge at high tide with 10-foot (3-meter) waves on top of that can level buildings with ease, knock down bridges and flatten anything in its path.

Hurricane Milton forces Bucs and Lightning to leave Florida early and other teams to alter games

The NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers and NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning have left Florida ahead of Hurricane Milton to practice the rest of the week.

The Bucs departed Tuesday, relocating to New Orleans, where they'll face the Saints on Sunday. The Lightning left for Raleigh, North Carolina, on Monday night to continue preparations for their season opener against the Carolina Hurricanes on Friday night.

The Lightning's home opener against Carolina is set for Saturday night and is on as scheduled for now.

At the college level, the American Athletic Conference announced that a football game between Memphis and South Florida at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa has been rescheduled from Friday night to Saturday. The conference plans to monitor conditions after Milton passes and adjust accordingly.

UCF's Big 12 home football game vs. Cincinnati remains scheduled for a 3:30 p.m. EDT kickoff in Orlando.

UCF's men's soccer match vs. Marshall was rescheduled from Friday night to Sunday. Other college events postponed include a women's soccer match in Boca Raton between Florida Atlantic and Rice; it was to be played Thursday and now will be played on Oct. 17.

The LPGA Tour postponed the qualifying stage of its LPGA Q-Series that was scheduled for Oct. 13-18 at Plantation Golf and Country Club in Venice, Florida. The tour said it would provide an update for the qualifying tournament after the storm passes.

Disney World remains open while Universal Orlando will close ahead of Milton

Orlando's tourism machine began grinding to a halt Tuesday with at least one major theme park and the main airport announcing closures ahead of Hurricane Milton 's expected hit as a major storm in Florida.

Universal said it would close its theme parks and entertainment district at 2 p.m. Wednesday and remain closed on Thursday, canceling Halloween Horror Nights scheduled for both days.

The resort joins Orlando International Airport, which said it would cease operations Wednesday morning. The airport is the nation's seventh busiest and Florida's most trafficked.

Meanwhile, Walt Disney World said it was operating under normal conditions and planned, for now, only to close its

campgrounds and rental cabins in wooded areas.

After seeing sharks in flooded streets during Helene, Florida man braces for Milton

In southwest Florida, the streets in the seaside town of Punta Gorda's historic district, hard by the Peace River, are still filled with 5-foot piles of water-logged trashed pulled from homes damaged by Hurricane Helene's storm surge two weeks ago. Furniture, drywall, appliances, clothes, Bibles and other books, stuffed animals and other toys and even a couple hot tubs line the streets.

It's an area that was hit hard by Hurricane Charley in 2004 and Ian two years ago, but that was mostly wind damage.

Many of the residents have temporarily moved away as the homes are unlivable, but accountant and art collector Scott Joiner remains on the second floor of the New Orleans-style home he built 17 years ago.

He said during Helene's storm surge, bull sharks swam in the flooded streets and an alligator was found nearby. A neighbor had to be rescued by canoe. His family thought his first-floor garage would be a safe place to store their property, but the surge was too high. He said the city has been trying to pick up the trash, but didn't have enough time.

Now he's worried Milton's expected surge will make matters worse.

"Water is a blessing to have, but it is very deadly," Joiner said.

What kind of destruction do hurricanes cause?

The toll of damage from a hurricane depends on its strength and where it makes landfall.

Even a relatively weak hurricane can cause major damage and many deaths if it hits a vulnerable community or damages a key piece of infrastructure. A mid-strength hurricane such as 2004's Hurricane Jeanne in Florida will cause devastating damage to homes, infrastructure and the power grid. Deaths also commonly occur because of flooding, accidents, injuries and other disturbances caused by the storm.

What causes a hurricane?

Hurricanes often start as tropical waves that combine with warm ocean waters, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. They may also be fueled by thunderstorms. The weather system moves west as warm ocean air rises into it, and that creates a low pressure area underneath it, NOAA said. Air rises and cools, and that forms clouds and thunderstorms.

Hurricanes have maximum sustained winds — the highest one-minute average wind speed at a particular point in time — of 74 mph (120 kph) or higher. If a tropical cyclone has maximum sustained winds between 39 and 73 mph (63 kph to 120 kph), it's called a tropical storm. If maximum sustained winds are less than 39 mph (63 kph), it's called a tropical depression.

Hurricanes typically occur during hurricane season, which in the Atlantic basin occurs each year from June 1 to Nov. 30.

NASA astronaut posts video of the hurricane from space

Matthew Dominick shared a timelapse video to X that showed the hurricane from the Dragon Endeavour spacecraft.

Dominick and three other astronauts were supposed to return to Earth on Oct. 7 after a seven-month stay at the International Space Station. But their homecoming has been repeatedly delayed by tropical weather that is now

Hurricane Milton.

The soonest their SpaceX capsule can now undock for a splashdown off the Florida coast is Sunday.

The hunt for gasoline is adding to Floridians' anxiety as Milton nears

Long lines and empty pumps at some Florida gas stations Tuesday compounded the stress for residents planning to either hunker down or flee as Hurricane Milton approached the state's western coast.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said during a morning news conference that state officials were working with fuel companies to continue bringing in gasoline ahead of Milton's expected landfall on Wednesday.

"We have been dispatching fuel over the past 24 hours as gas stations have run out," DeSantis said. "So we currently have 268,000 gallons of diesel, 110,000 gallons of gasoline. Those numbers are less than what they were 24 hours ago because we've put a lot in, but we have an additional 1.2 million gallons of both diesel and gasoline that is currently en route to the state of Florida."

DeSantis said there wasn't a fuel shortage. But the hunt for gasoline was another nerve-fraying task for people preparing for a major hurricane.

Officials say small plane carrying people trying to evacuate crashes into Tampa Bay

Fire officials say four passengers aboard a small airplane were trying to evacuate from Hurricane Milton when the aircraft crashed into Tampa Bay on Tuesday morning.

Three of the four passengers on the Piper Cherokee were hospitalized after the crash near Albert Whitted Airport in St. Petersburg, said Ashlie Handy, a spokesperson for St. Petersburg Fire Rescue.

The passengers and one dog traveling with them were rescued from the water by a good Samaritan in a boat, Handy told The Tampa Bay Times. Their conditions weren't immediately known.

National Hurricane Center gives another update on Milton

The National Hurricane Center in Miami said Tuesday afternoon that Hurricane Milton's intensity had "rebounded," though it was still a Category 4 storm.

The storm was about 520 miles (840 kilometers) southwest of Tampa with maximum sustained winds of 155 mph (250 kph), the center said. It was traveling east by northeast at 8 mph (13 kph), it said.

Air Force Reserve hurricane hunters were the ones to find the storm had intensified, the center said.

"Today is the last full day for Florida residents to get their families and homes ready and evacuate if told to do so," the center said.

Florida Highway Patrol says 'the time is now' to evacuate

The Florida Highway Patrol says "heavy traffic patterns are flowing northbound and eastbound on all roadways" Tuesday afternoon as people continue to evacuate in advance of Hurricane Milton.

"For those wishing to evacuate, the time is now," the agency said in a statement. "Otherwise, finalize your storm preparations now."

Troopers were continuing to escort fuel tankers to assist with delivery of gasoline Tuesday. And the agency noted that all bridges in the Tampa Bay area will close when wind speeds are consistently at 45 mph or higher, or when

troopers deem road conditions a danger to public safety.

Amid hurricanes, an advocacy group calls for Southeast states to give voters flexibility

Representatives of the voting advocacy group Common Cause in a media briefing Tuesday urged Southeast states recovering from Hurricane Helene and bracing for another severe storm to prioritize flexibility for voters in November's election.

Amy Keith, executive director of Common Cause Florida, said the state has strong resiliency plans to protect election infrastructure, but "the place where we feel like the state is a lot weaker is really assessing what voters need."

She argued Florida officials should further accommodate its displaced and overwhelmed residents, for example by using vote centers that allow registered voters to cast a ballot in a location other than their specific precinct.

Common Cause was among organizations that lobbied Florida and Georgia to extend their voter registration deadlines Monday, to no avail.

"The expectation on voters was too high" for them to focus on registering Monday, Keith said, as they dealt with debris from Hurricane Helene and evacuated for a second hurricane expected to make landfall Wednesday.

Tampa Mayor Jane Castor says Milton's storm surge could turn a house into 'the coffin that you're in'

The predicted storm surge could swallow an entire house.

"So if you're in it, basically that's the coffin that you're in," she said.

She also expressed concerns about how far the ocean water could spread across the city. If that happens, "that is something that you only see in movies," she said.

"You want to pick a fight with Mother Nature? She's winning 100% of the time," the mayor added.

Preparations the Biden administration is making ahead of Hurricane Milton's arrival

White House spokesperson Emilie Simons says the Biden administration has deployed temporary power teams, swift-water rescue teams and search and rescue teams as Hurricane Milton approaches Florida.

She said FEMA also has established two staging bases stocked with 20 million meals and 40 million liters of water, and has nearly 900 staff members in the region. That includes 440 working on recovery efforts in the wake of Hurricane Helene, she said.

"To anyone in Milton's path, this storm will be catastrophic," Simons told reporters aboard Air Force One as President Joe Biden was flying to Milwaukee. "We urge you to listen to local officials, especially if you are told to evacuate."

Tampa City Councilman Guido Maniscalco calls Milton 'a potentially historically catastrophic storm'

"So I've been here my whole life, and I've never seen a storm like this," Maniscalco said at a briefing.

"This is a potentially life and death situation, this is a potentially historically catastrophic storm," he said. "This is the storm of the century. We haven't had this potential impact in over 100 years. We have to be ready. It's all hands on deck."

Disney World and Universal Orlando remain open ahead of Hurricane Milton

Major theme parks Walt Disney World and Universal remained open Tuesday ahead of Hurricane Milton 's expected hit as a major storm in Florida even as other parts of Orlando's tourism machine shut down.

Disney said it was operating under normal conditions and planned, for now, only to close its campgrounds and rental cabins in wooded areas.

Both theme parks say they'll continue monitoring the weather and adjust accordingly.

Meanwhile, other parts of Orlando were shutting down — including Orlando International Airport, which said it would cease operations Wednesday morning. The airport is the nation's seventh busiest and Florida's most trafficked.

The Orlando area is the most visited destination in the United States due to Disney World, Universal Orlando Resort and other theme parks, attracting 74 million tourists last year alone.

As Milton approaches, construction cranes in St. Petersburg are a concern

In St. Petersburg, the mayor is concerned about how some giant construction cranes will fare, as there was no time to lower the machines ahead of time.

"Due to Milton's rapid intensification and potential wind speeds, there is a risk related to some of the construction cranes that are operating in our city," Mayor Kenneth Welch said at a Tuesday briefing.

The cranes susceptible to high winds are at four construction sites and "residents near those four construction sites are at risk for those cranes malfunctioning during the storm," Welch said.

Since there wasn't enough time to take the cranes down, they will be placed in a "weather vane" position, which is the safest one during a storm, he said.

How many people are affected by the mandatory evacuation order?

The 11 Florida counties under mandatory evacuation orders are home to about 5.9 million people, according to county-level population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Two Florida counties — Desoto and Marion — have ordered residents who live in mobile homes, RVs, modular-type homes and low-lying areas to evacuate.

About 30% of Desoto County's roughly 34,000 residents live in mobile homes, while about 20% of Marion County's more than 396,000 residents live in mobile homes, according to Census estimates.

A venture capitalist is putting up money to clear debris from Helene in his neighborhood before Milton hits

In an area where residents are bracing for a double hit from hurricanes, Clearwater Beach homeowner and venture capitalist Arnie Bellini put up \$500,000 to hire private contractors to haul away debris from his neighborhood ahead of Hurricane Milton.

He said the sheer scale of the storm debris from Hurricane Helene — and the hard deadline to remove it ahead of Milton's expected arrival — is too much for city contractors to keep up with, so Bellini said he's doing what he can.

Piles of ruined refrigerators, furniture and drywall lines the streets of the neighborhood in Clearwater Beach, mounds of metal sheeting and two-by-fours left behind by Hurricane Helene that could turn into storm-powered shrapnel if it's not hauled away before Milton hits.

Bellini said he hopes his effort sends a message to other residents and business owners to do what they can to

restore their storm-battered communities.

Biden says Milton 'could be one of the worst storms in 100 years to hit Florida'

Biden participated in an Oval Office briefing Tuesday with a series of top administration officials to discuss the federal government's ongoing response to Hurricane Helene and preparations for Hurricane Milton.

The president told reporters afterward of Milton, "My priority is to increase the size and presence of our effort."

Biden postponed a planned trip later this week to Germany and Angola because of the storm, explaining, "I just don't' think I can be out of the country at this time."

He said he still planned to make his scheduled trips, though when he'd do that is unclear.

Biden also spoke about misinformation and disinformation surrounding the federal response to Helene, which Vice President Kamala Harris has blamed on her Election Day opponent, former President Donald Trump. Biden said of such misinformation, "Those who do it do it to try to damage the administration."

Asked about Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who has complained about Harris' comments about Helene, Biden said DeSantis "has been cooperative" and "said he's gotten all that he needs."

Biden said he told DeSantis, "You're doing a great job" and "we thank you for it" and said he gave DeSantis "my personal cellphone number."

The University of South Florida's football game Saturday against Memphis has been rescheduled

The game in Tampa has been rescheduled to Saturday, Oct. 12.

The American Athletic Conference and teams will assess the conditions and overall situation after the storm passes to determine whether any other adjustments need to be made, the school announced Tuesday.

The latest National Hurricane Center advisory on Milton

The National Hurricane Center said at 11 a.m. Tuesday that Hurricane Milton was about 520 miles (835 km) southwest of Tampa. It had maximum sustained winds of 150 mph (240 km/h) and was moving in an east-northeast direction at 9 mph, the hurricane center said.

The center said a storm surge warning has been extended southward along the East Coast of Florida to Port Canaveral. The government of the Bahamas has issued a Tropical Storm Watch for the extreme northwestern Bahamas, including Grand Bahama Island, the Abacos, and Bimini, the center said.

The hurricane was a Category 4 storm at late morning Tuesday, the center said.

"While fluctuations in intensity are expected, Milton is forecast to remain an extremely dangerous hurricane through landfall in Florida," it said.

It's a race against time to clear debris as Hurricane Milton approaches

Nick Szabo's fleet of excavators and dump trucks got to work at about 6:30 am on Tuesday, racing against the clock to haul away the three-foot-high piles of waterlogged couches, appliances, mattresses and two-by-fours that line the streets in this residential stretch of Clearwater Beach — all left behind by Hurricane Helene.

"All this crap is going to be missiles," if they don't haul it away ahead of Hurricane Milton, he said. "It's like a spear coming at you."

Szabo said he was hired by a local resident eager to help clear the roads — and unwilling to wait for overwhelmed city contractors to get the job done.

His team hauled away some 260 tons of debris as of 5 pm on Monday and they plan to keep working until 7 pm on Tuesday.

"It feels good to help," Szabo said.

A couple's vacation has turned into them being stuck in Florida as Milton approaches

It's easily the worst vacation John Fedor and his wife Laura have ever been on. After losing their phone on a Caribbean cruise, they missed their flight home to Philadelphia – and then missed the flight they rebooked Tuesday morning, after the bus they took to the Tampa airport was delayed.

"It's just been utter hell," Fedor said.

With the city's airport closing its doors at 9 am on Tuesday, the Fedors are among those who are now stuck in this city ahead of a major hurricane the likes of which the Tampa Bay region hasn't seen in a century.

"We looked into driving home, taking the train home," he said, but nothing worked out.

"We don't really have a whole lot of options ... we're kind of like stranded here."

President Biden postpones trip to Germany and Angola because of hurricane

President Joe Biden is postponing a planned trip to Germany and Angola to remain at the White House to monitor Hurricane Milton, which is bearing down on Florida's Gulf Coast, the White House announced Tuesday morning.

Press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the change was necessary "given the projected trajectory and strength" of the storm.

It wasn't clear when the trip might be rescheduled. Biden had promised to go to Africa during his term in office, which ends in January.

An unusual hurricane season goes from ultra quiet to record busy and spawns Helene and Milton

Explosively intensifying Hurricane Milton is the latest freaky system to come out of what veteran hurricane scientists call the weirdest storm season of their lives.

Before this Atlantic hurricane season started, forecasters said everything lined up to be a monster busy year, and it began that way when Beryl was the earliest storm to reach Category 5 on record. Then, nothing. From Aug. 20 — the traditional start of peak hurricane season — to Sept. 23 it was record quiet, said Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach.

Then five hurricanes popped up between Sept. 26 and Oct. 6, more than double the old record of two. On Sunday and Monday, there were three hurricanes in October at the same time — something that never happened before — Klotzbach said. In just 46.5 hours, Hurricane Milton went from just forming as a tropical storm with 40 mph winds to a top-of-the-charts Category 5 hurricane with 160 mph winds and then it got even stronger.

"I was looking as far back as the Atlantic records go and there's not really any good analogs for this season, just how neurotic it's been," Klotzbach said. "You know, obviously the season ain't over yet. We'll see what pops up after Milton." Schools in Sarasota County, which could suffer a direct hit from Milton, will be closed all week

"We will let you know — as soon as possible — about school reopening after Hurricane Milton has passed. Our facilities team will need time to safely conduct countywide assessments on all of our sites to ensure our traditional public schools and offices are safe to welcome back students, teachers, and staff members," the district said in a Facebook post.

The county was also urging residents in evacuation zones to seek shelter. The county is setting up evacuation centers, but those should be viewed as "last resort," county government said in a statement.

FEMA administrator Deanne Criswell says the agency is moving staff and supplies into place in advance of Milton

And Criswell pleaded with residents to listen to their local officials for guidance on what to do as the storm bears down.

"This is an extremely dangerous hurricane," Criswell said Tuesday morning. "I need people to listen to their local officials to get out of harm's way... People don't need to move far. They just need to move inland."

Authorities in the Mexican state of Yucatan reported only minor damages from Milton

The hurricane remained offshore early Tuesday. Power lines, light poles and trees were knocked down near the coast, and some small thatched-roof structures were destroyed, according to Yucatan Gov. Joaquín Díaz, but he did not report any deaths or injuries.

Are residents ready?

While Floridians are no strangers to storms, Tampa hasn't been in the direct path of a major hurricane in over a century.

In that lapse, the area has exploded in growth. Tens of thousands of Americans moved to the area during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many choosing to settle along barrier islands near Clearwater and St. Petersburg overlooking the normally placid, emerald Gulf waters. More than 51,000 people moved to the area between 2022 and 2023, making it the fifth-largest-growing U.S. metropolitan area, according to U.S. Census data.

Longer term residents, after having experienced numerous false alarms and near misses like Irma in 2017, may be similarly unprepared for a direct hit. A local legend has it that blessings from Native Americans who once called the region home and used to build mounds to keep out invaders have largely protected the area from major storms for centuries.

MIT meteorology professor Kerry Emanuel said a hurricane in Tampa is the "black swan" worst-case scenario that experts have worried about for years.

Control the path and power of hurricanes like Milton? Forget it, scientists say

Hurricanes are humanity's reminder of the uncontrollable, chaotic power of Earth's weather.

Milton's powerful push toward Florida just days after Helene devastated large parts of the Southeast likely has some in the region wondering if they are being targeted. In some corners of the internet, Helene has already sparked conspiracy theories and disinformation suggesting the government somehow aimed the hurricane at Republican voters.

Besides discounting common sense, such theories disregard weather history that shows the hurricanes are hitting many of the same areas they have for centuries. They also presume an ability for humans to quickly reshape the weather far beyond relatively puny efforts such as cloud seeding.

"If meteorologists could stop hurricanes, we would stop hurricanes," Kristen Corbosiero, a professor of atmospheric and environmental sciences at the University at Albany, said. "If we could control the weather, we would not want the kind of death and destruction that's happened."

How bad is Milton's damage expected to be?

The entire Gulf Coast of Florida is especially vulnerable to storm surge.

Hurricane Helene came ashore some 150 miles (240 kilometers) away from Tampa in the Florida Panhandle and still managed to cause drowning deaths in the Tampa area due to surges of around 5 to 8 feet (1.5 to 2.5 meters) above normal tide levels.

Forecasters warned of a possible 8- to 12-foot storm surge (2.4 to 3.6 meters) in Tampa Bay. That's the highest ever predicted for the location and nearly double the levels reached two weeks ago during Helene, hurricane center spokesperson Maria Torres said.

The storm could also bring widespread flooding. Five to 10 inches (13 to 25 centimeters) of rain was forecast for mainland Florida and the Keys, with as much as 15 inches (38 centimeters) expected in some places.

Gov. Ron DeSantis assures residents there's enough fuel for them to get away from Hurricane Milton

"There is no fuel shortage. Fuel continues to arrive in the state of Florida" despite long lines at gas stations, DeSantis said at a Tuesday morning news briefing. He said officials are working with fuel companies to continue bringing in gasoline.

"You do not have to get on the interstate and go far away," DeSantis said. "You can evacuate tens of miles; you do not have to evacuate hundreds of miles away. You do have options."

DeSantis said the state has helped evacuate more than 200 health care facilities in Milton's path and that 36 county-run shelters are open.

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They Said It

October 8, 2024 | Robesonian, The (Lumberton, NC)

Section: opinion | 310 Words

OpenURL Link

"Dr. Vincent Ohaju, a second year family medicine resident, and I have been deployed to UNC Health Blue Ridge in Morganton for a three-day assignment. Their hospital had lost power and water for two days but now are providing the care. It is an honor to serve alongside these teammates."

Dr. Joseph Roberts, UNC Health Southeastern chief medical officer, talking about an assignment to help with hurricane recovery in western North Carolina.

"The devastation brought by Helene in many communities across western North Carolina has been profound. The entire division wants to provide whatever assistance we can to our neighbors and to these areas that were hit hardest. We want to prioritize our resources, both staff and equipment, towards immediate lifesaving needs."

State Parks Director Brian Strong, talking about the operation of state parks.

"I wanted to see first-hand what being a nurse was all about. I want to work as a CNA while in school. It's a good job to have on the side, and you can make decent money for attending this three-month class."

Hilina Hailemariam, an international student from Ethiopia, talking about the nursing program at Robeson Community College.

"The best of humanity on display. God bless them!"

U.S. Sen. Dan. Bishop, R-North Carolina, in a post on X in reply to the following post on X: "My dad, my grandpa, all my nieces, I was Air Force, my son is a Marine — so I said, 'Hey, I want this.'" Linemen hike nearly two miles to restore power to Asheville Veterans Hospital after #Helene. @Southern Living http://spr.ly/6019Ue1VB.

"It feels surreal! I was very nervous coming into this, but being able to participate was honestly the most rewarding part—getting out there and speaking in front of people. The fact that I won was just a bonus."

Gabby Hyson, a UNCP student during the inaugural Braves Pitch-a-thon hosted by UNC Pembroke's Thomas College of Business and Economics.

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Dialysis solution shortage after closure of North Cove plant

October 8, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: BILLY CHAPMAN wchapman@hickoryrecord.com| Section: News| 602 Words OpenURL Link

The nation's largest maker of intravenous solutions is limiting orders of products due to flooding in McDowell County at its largest plant.

In a press release Friday, Baxter International said it was limiting orders of saline, dextrose and peritoneal dialysis solutions to prevent stockpiling and ensure equal access to available products.

"We have implemented allocations to help ensure we are appropriately managing our inventory and minimizing disruption in patient care," the company said in the release. "That means that after review and consideration of available inventory and the medical necessity of impacted products, a specific limit on what a customer can order has been implemented."

Baxter produces 60% of the country's supply of IV solutions, producing 1.5 million bags per day, according to the American Hospital Association.

Baxter's North Cove plant was impacted by flooding from the remnants of Hurricane Helene on Sept. 27.

Heavy rains triggered a levee breach, which led to water permeating the site. Bridges accessing the site from U.S. Highway 221 were also damaged.

As a result of flooding at the plant's site, the plant was closed after the storm.

The company said in a press release it was working with great urgency to reopen, but did not know when full operations would resume.

"We will spare no resource, human or financial, to restart operations and help ensure patients and providers have the products they need," the release said.

The company has about 500 workers on site to repair the plant, the release said. The company expects that number to double over the next week.

One entrance requires a fix to a county bridge, Baxter said in a Thursday release. The company is working to make a temporary bridge. Once it is fixed, the company plans to move some product out to be sent to customers, the release said.

Baxter said it expects a permanent bridge to be built by the Army Corps of Engineers and North Carolina Department of Transportation in the coming weeks.

2,500 employees

Baxter Manufacturing is the largest employer in McDowell County with over 2,500 employees. The company said it is working to get in touch with all of its employees to make sure they are safe.

While the plant is closed, the company is providing access to generators, laundry machines, showers, water, food and toiletries for employees at a site near the plant.

The company said counseling and financial assistance options from Baxter's Employee Disaster Relief Fund were

available to help employees with personal property damage and emergency expenses.

In a press release Sunday, the company said it was allocating \$1.5 million toward recovery needs.

Hospitals respond

The company said it would use its global manufacturing network to help mitigate supply issues.

Hospitals in North Carolina are looking for other places to get supplies.

"The closure of the Baxter North Cove plant has nationwide impact," UNC Health said in a statement. "At UNC Health, we are working through ways to conserve what we have in stock now and looking at alternative products we can use in place of the Baxter products. This is an active collaboration across our supply chain and pharmacy and our physicians and nurses.

"We are striving to maintain normal operations so that this temporary shortage of Baxter products is invisible to the patients we have the privilege to serve."

Novant Health also said it is working with other sources for hospital products.

"Baxter has been one of our trusted vendors for many years, and our thoughts are with their teams as they face this unimaginable disaster," the statement said. "Like health systems across the nation, Novant Health has been notified that we will not receive our full allocation of Baxter products, so we are working to source products from alternative suppliers."

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BILLY CHAPMAN wchapman@hickoryrecord.com, 'Dialysis solution shortage after closure of North Cove plant', *McDowell News, The* (online), 8 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C1496555E2AD28>



McDowell schools expect to restart classes Wednesday

October 8, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: FROM STAFF REPORTS | Section: News | 321 Words OpenURL Link

McDowell County Schools plans to restart school for all but one school on Wednesday, the school system said in a Facebook post on Friday.

In anticipation of Hurricane Helene's impact on the area, McDowell County Schools closed Sept. 26. Schools remained closed in the wake of flooding and damage to the area.

Schools will operate on a two-hour delay with limited bus routes starting Wednesday, McDowell County Schools said.

Old Fort Elementary School, which had flood damage, will not open on Wednesday, the school system said. The school system said it hopes to start school for students of Old Fort Elementary by Oct. 14 in a new location.

All schools except Old Fort Elementary and North Cove Elementary had power as of Friday afternoon.

"We will publish information by Monday evening for community bus stops for each of our schools," McDowell Schools said. "We will remain in a two-hour delay status for the remainder of the week to allow plenty of daylight for our drivers in the morning, and to ensure that our student drivers may safely travel to school."

All school staff are asked to report to work on Monday on a one-hour delay, McDowell County Schools said.

"Although this storm has left us with many unanswered questions, we continue to count our blessings and we are grateful for all of the prayers of support during this time of need," McDowell County Schools said.

Old Fort Elementary School

The school system is working on plans to bring Old Fort Elementary students together at another location, the school system said.

For parents of Old Fort Elementary students, the school system is holding two community meetings on Tuesday, Oct. 8. The first is at 4 p.m. and second at 6 p.m. Both meetings will be held at Greenlee Baptist Church, 5967 U.S. Hwy. 70, Old Fort.

"In this meeting, we will share our plan for the Old Fort students to remain together in another location," McDowell Schools said in the Facebook post.

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FROM STAFF REPORTS, 'McDowell schools expect to restart classes Wednesday', *McDowell News, The* (online), 8 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C149654F729700



McDowell students back to class on Wednesday on 2-hour delay

October 8, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Eric Millsaps| Section: Education| 262 Words OpenURL Link

McDowell County Schools students returned to school on Wednesday.

Superintendent Tracy Grit made the announcement about classes resuming late Monday afternoon.

Classes will be on a two-hour delay all week, Grit said as the schools work toward a regular schedule following Hurricane Helene which ripped up roads, damaged homes and left almost all of the county without power.

He added that Old Fort Elementary Students will return to school in a new location in a staggered entry beginning Monday.

"Limited bus routes will be different for each of our schools, based on the road conditions throughout our community. Please know that each of the roads in the district has been checked and verified with local officials to ensure which roads our buses can travel. In areas that had significant roadway damage, we will provide community stops," Grit said.

On Tuesday, principals of each school conducted call-outs to ensure that parents are familiar with the bus routes and community stops, Grit said.

"Parents, please know that safety is our primary concern for the return of our students, please do not take any unnecessary risks in getting a child to school. McDowell County Schools is committed to working with those families affected by roadway washouts and other hardships during this time of need. Should you have a situation that requires additional services, please reach out to the principal of your child's school," the superintendent said.

Grit also took time to praise emergency workers who have worked to make a return to school possible.

"We are forever grateful for the service and dedication to get our students back in school," he said.

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'NOW IT'S ALL GONE'

October 8, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: CONNOR MCNEELY WinstonSalem Journal | Section: Now Its All Gone | 1213 Words OpenURL Link

A brown fog of dust and dirt billowed through Old Fort as Amy Davis served chicken and dumplings to every person who wearily climbed the steps of her country store.

By her rough estimation, it seemed as if half the town of about 820 had become homeless by the end of Hurricane Helene's devastation. The wind and water had tossed mobile homes hundreds of yards and washed away cars into the Catawba River, leaving the town's residents to wait for the restoration of cell service and the arrival of help from across North Carolina.

In the days after the flooding, the sun beat down on Old Fort and froze a thick layer of mud and muck around the houses, stores and churches that residents and visitors from surrounding counties now worked to break up and clear.

Power and running water had become an afterthought. Everyone who remained either walked the streets of the town in a daze, worked feverishly to clear debris, or a bit of both.

Davis positioned a "check-in" list on a poster board near the stairs of her store, which collected names of individuals and families from the edges of the town to then post on the Old Fort Facebook page as "safe."

There were still many families and elderly couples unaccounted for in the outer edges of the town. Feeding the rescue workers and wandering Old Fort residents was how Davis figured she could make the biggest difference.

With her family and fellow neighbors, Davis spent the weekend following the storm clearing the streets and cutting down trees until they reached the country store. When they realized the building was still intact, Davis and her family started putting together plans for free meals.

"It's not just that they're getting hot food and a hot meal, but that they know the family that's making it, and they know that we're from here," Davis said. Her husband's family traced their lineage to the mid-1700s, when English and Scottish settlers had arrived in the area, before it became a fort in the Revolutionary War.

As the lunch hour arrived Wednesday morning, construction workers climbed the stairs in grime-soaked T-shirts and pants. With about a dozen others, they cleaned a number of properties that lined the town's main street, Catawba Avenue, including the Hillman Beer brewery, which opened in 2020.

The brewpub is one of two breweries in Old Fort, which is a dry town situated in the dry McDowell County. It was only relatively recent state laws that allowed breweries across North Carolina to serve beer, wine and cider in dry counties, but only what they made themselves.

Residents felt a deep sense of connection to the brewery as a new kind of meeting place that attracted tourists traveling from Charlotte to Asheville.

Jeff Parker, the landlord that owned the property in addition to many others in the downtown area, said the brewery had become the social hub of the Old Fort community.

But now the building's upcoming Oktoberfest decorations were caked in mud. A twisted smell of yeast rose from sludge of the taproom, where dozens of kegs were stacked on top of one another.

"It's all concrete masonry and stainless steel," Parker said of the building. "It's going to be a lot of work, but we're not giving up."

In the streets of the town, employees from the N.C. Department of Transportation, Old Fort residents, members of the Coast Guard and others cleared away trees and debris. Caravans of military jeeps, semi-trucks, and police vehicles filled the faded parking lots. Helicopters thundered overhead about every hour, a strange sight for Old Fort.

Chuck Aldridge, a local bed-and-breakfast owner, pointed to the surrounding buildings with a warning: the sewer system needed to be replaced, and it wasn't something the town could do without help from the state.

What they could do was take care of their own. On Monday, days after the storm had passed, Old Fort's police chief called Bo Cooper, who managed a Columbia Forest Products warehouse, and asked if the town could use it as a distribution center for supplies.

By the next day, Cooper was driving a forklift in the warehouse, surrounded by dozens of others who carried food and supplies to trucks and waiting families.

Residents drove pickup trucks with stacks of water bottles and toilet paper loaded into their beds and drove them down the streets and avenues of Old Fort.

At the edge of the mud-covered parking lot of the Old Fort Elementary School, which is a mere 3 years old, two sister teachers reunited with three students who brought flowers and cards with well wishes.

"We love you, we'll be praying for you," one of the cards read. "We have Old Fort pride deep inside."

"That's the truth! We'll come back," Lindsay Rowland Latham said. "That hurricane will spit out the Rowland girls."

Her sister, Anna Rowland, stared ahead at the old white house she had grown up in. She had been staying in the house with their mother, Emily, and her sister Lindsay, as the floodwaters rose around it.

When they left the house and reached higher ground near the school, their family watched a couple with a 10-month-baby clinging to its mother's chest wade in kneedeep water to break into the school. The man had grabbed a tree-limb and broke the glass window to get his family in after the waters swept away their car, Rowland said.

Rumors abounded about what would happen to their classes. Both Rowland and Latham worried about many of their students who lived further out from town and mulled over potential meeting places at nearby churches.

"They don't want to split the kids up but what are you going to do?" Latham said.

Inside the elementary school, there was already a strong stench of sewage that choked the hallways. Filth streaked across the terrazzo floors and masked construction crews sawed open the floor of the basketball gym, where the water had buckled and ruined the seams of the hardwood. Outside, the recess yard was an endless field of dried mud.

The surrounding rows of houses and mobile homes was worse. The structures stood on low-lying land now filled with mounds of silt and packed dirt that cracked and sunk around feet, exposing tree roots, fractured fences, tarps and plastic bottles.

Glass scattered across the rooftop of a house, where its owner had punched out a window to escape the rising flood. Back in front of the elementary school, Emily Rowland stood with Belinda Wright, a neighbor from down the street.

Wright said she was asleep Friday morning when she heard a knock on the door. She grabbed pictures, the ashes of her mother and granddaughter, and left. The next thing she knew, the floodwaters were slapping up on the porch

and her daughter was pushing her out of the house.

"We got out about as far as the Old Fort exit, and we watched our life float away," Wright said. "Every last bit of it."

Rowland turned her gaze over to the house her family had built and lived in for the last 20 years.

"That's all they knew," Rowland said of her daughters. "They walked across the street every day for work, and now it's all gone."

After a pause in conversation, the two glanced at each other with small smiles hinting on their faces.

"I'm just glad you're OK, honey," Rowland said, pulling Wright into an embrace.

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Wordkeepers congregating in Ashe Arts Center on Oct. 19

October 8, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: JERRY SNOW| Section: Mountaintimes | 229 Words OpenURL Link

WEST JEFFERSON — The Wordkeepers are scheduled to gather at the Ashe Arts Center on Oct. 19 from 4-6 p.m., according to ashecountyarts.org.

The Ashe County Arts Council is encouraging all writers to attend the free event.

Wordkeepers gives writers a chance to share their original work and connect with others in the field.

Because Hurricane Helene did so much damage to the area at the end of September, the Arts Council cancelled some events while postponing others, usually indefinitely, for the first half of October.

The Buffalo Nichols in Concert scheduled for Oct. 3 at the Ashe Arts Center was postponed because of Hurricane Helene, according to ashecountyarts.org. Updates will be announced on their website.

The Missoula Children's Theatre, sponsored by the Ashe County Arts Council and the Ashe County Little Theatre, was planned for the week of Sept. 30 through Oct. 5 in Ashe County but was postponed. For more information, call 336-846-2787.

The Ashe County Arts Council could not host the Black Opry Concert on Sept. 26 due to the deadly storm, but hopes to reschedule it, according to the Council's Facebook page. Art on the Mountain, scheduled for Sept. 28, was cancelled, according to the Council's Facebook page.

The Council plans to reschedule the Off the Wall Fundraiser, which was scheduled for Oct. 5.

More details about the Ashe County Arts Council's postponements and other events scheduled can be found at ashecountyarts.org

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Plenty of help to go around thanks to volunteer outpouring

October 8, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Becky Johnson| Section: Hurricane Helene | 625 Words OpenURL Link

Hundreds of citizens across Haywood County have rolled up their sleeves to help those in need in the aftermath of Helene. As soon as Glenn and Jen Duerr got internet back on last Thursday morning, the first thing they Googled was how to help.

"We finally got service today and looked for where we could volunteer and donate money," said Jen.

The retired couple saw that Jonathan Valley Elementary was serving as a supply distribution site, so they drove over from Waynesville and were put to work on the spot sorting boxes of diapers.

Amy Bumgarner, who was elbow-deep organizing baby formula, was thankful for the chance to finally be doing something useful.

"We were lucky our stuff is all good," she said. "My brother is a fireman for Waynesville, and he's seen all the things, so I know how bad it is for some people. They are hurting, and we had to do our part."

Bumgarner brought her son, Lawson, along, too.

"I wanted to help, because there's a lot of people in need," said Lawson, a student at Hazelwood Elementary.

Outside the school, lines of cars pulled up to the curb to receive the supplies. The distribution site ran like a welloiled machine.

First, volunteers with clipboards talked to each carload, finding out what their needs were. Hot meals? Cases of bottled water? Clothing or pet food? They had it all.

They jotted down what was needed on a sticky note, stuck it on the vehicle's windshield, and sent the vehicle on down the line — using a walkie-talkie to radio ahead to the sorting team.

Volunteers stationed at a long line of tables heaped with food and supplies then scurried about, corralling and bagging the supplies to load into each vehicle.

"I wanted to do my part to help the community as much as I can, even if it's just packing up some apples," said volunteer Barb Schuelke, who lives in Jonathan Creek.

Schuelke had searched the web for ways to help and discovered the online volunteer clearinghouse through Orchard Church, signing up for a shift at the school down the road from her home.

"I'm blessed I wasn't destroyed and nothing was damaged and my family and friends are safe. So this was the least I could do," she said.

Meanwhile, another volunteer was peddling bananas. Ten boxes of bananas that were ripe now had just come in, and she was on a mission to give each carload a couple of bunches.

A similar undertaking was playing out across the county in Canton at the IP Sport Complex. A merry-go-round of supplies steadily roll in, get sorted and organized and stacked — medicine here, cleaning wipes there, peanut butter over yonder and so on. Then they're sent back out again as storm victims cycle through to get what they

need.

Pisgah freshman Annabelle Keilberg and Tuscola freshman Juliette Wenzel were among the volunteers.

"I wanted to help out because people aren't doing so great here. We have power at home, but I know people who can't even leave their house," Juliette said.

Annabelle was back for her second day of volunteering. After being isolated from her friends without cell phone or internet, she welcomed the chance to have a purpose.

"I want to do anything that can help other people. It makes me feel really happy and like I have an impact," she said.

The outpouring of donations means there is more than enough to go around to anyone who needs it, without fear they are taking things from someone else who might need it more.

Any family is encouraged to take advantage of the free hot meals, milks and breakfast items for any child 18 and under, whether they were impacted by the flood or not. Simply stop by Jonathan Valley or Bethel elementary schools between 9 a.m.-6 p.m. weekdays.

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Haywood fall festival status: what's off, what's on

October 8, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Hurricane Helene | 296 Words OpenURL Link

Fall is festival season in Haywood County. Here's what we know about festivals that have been canceled, and festivals still happening.

Church Street Arts & Crafts Show

The Church Street Art & Craft Show in downtown Waynesville — scheduled for Oct. 12 — has been canceled. The decision was made mid-week last week, when the recovery landscape post-Helene looked much different than it does now. Many artists and vendors could no longer travel to the event, and some have lost inventory due to the storm.

Smoky Mountain Bluegrass Festival

The Smoky Mountain Bluegrass Festival scheduled for Oct. 12 has also been canceled. The festival is a crucial fundraiser for the Haywood County Arts Council, but they are now shifting their focus to aiding storm recovery efforts.

Ticket holders will receive a Google form via email to either donate the cost of their tickets to relief efforts or request a refund. For more information, visit haywoodarts.org or email director@haywoodarts.org.

Maggie Valley Arts and Crafts Show

The Maggie Valley Arts and Crafts show at the Maggie Valley Festival Grounds is still on for Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 19-20. The fall festival is hosted by the Maggie Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Only a small number of vendors have canceled, mostly from the Tennessee side due to I-40 being closed due to landslides, according to Maggie Chamber Director Teresa Smith. Smith said visitors are eager to come.

"We have had phones calls all week from folks inquiring if we are still going to have it," Smith said.

Apple Harvest Festival

A decision about the Apple Harvest Festival, slated for Saturday, Oct. 19, in downtown Waynesville, is a go. The Haywood County Chamber of Commerce made the call Thursday, but with the caveat it will be scaled down since over one-third of vendors scheduled to line Main Street can't make it.

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Left in the dark: demand accountability for loss of cell service during Helene

October 8, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Callie Pruett Schwaber | Section: Opinion | 867 Words OpenURL Link

"The neighbors from Florida who just built their house above us called to say they've been in hurricanes on the coast and never been so scared," my mom said as the keys to her Ford Ranger pickup jingled distinctly over the phone.

"They said they feel their house creaking and earth around them moving. A tree fell and totaled their son's truck. Your dad is going up to advise if they should evacuate."

I heard their creaky front door open on her end of the line as she walked outside into an explosion of noise from Hurricane Helene, now a tropical storm, passing over Haywood County.

I knew I couldn't stop my dad, a state expert on our region's slopes and erosion, from going up there, and I couldn't stop my mom from wanting to do everything she could to help her neighbors. That's Marc and Anita Pruett. That's what mountain people do.

But I urged them to wait a second. We, a state away but with an internet connection, had just received news.

"Mom, we're seeing reports that every road in the county should be considered closed and all bridges are impassable. If the neighbors do evacuate, y'all are on your own. They'll have to go to someone else's house in the immediate area of the Cove."

I heard her yell for my dad that they were too late for evacuation amidst raindrops hitting the phone and the rush of wind into the microphone.

"Okay, we're going up. This is so scary. Love you," she said and hung up. That was the last time we spoke to my parents until more than a full day later after the storm finally subsided.

Cell service for every major carrier went dark around noon on Friday, Sept. 27. As a vocal advocate for the region, I started receiving notes from worried friends, former classmates, and neighbors who could not get in touch with family and loved ones inside Western North Carolina.

No one could have imagined the incremental degradation of local communication infrastructure over the last few years could cause such an immense volume of suffering.

The storm raged viciously for hours after we lost contact. Worried and wanting to take action, I reached out to our phone carrier, Verizon. The representative told me to tell my parents to turn on Wi-Fi calling if they have Wi-Fi.

I told them that I can't reach my parents and that they have Verizon's Wi-Fi, which has been out even longer than the cell service. The representative then said to try a booster. I said my parents have a Verizon booster already.

After that, the only thing I got from Verizon was that teams on the ground and engineers will be "working on it." That was that. So we held our breath in the radio silence.

In statements through mayors, newspapers and emergency services, Verizon and other major carriers made it clear that their view on the widespread lack of service was due to "power outages and fiber damage from high winds, debris and flooding caused by the storm."

While Helene was, without a doubt, the most serious natural disaster in WNC this century, pre-existing problems with communication infrastructure should be taken extremely seriously by those in decision-making and executive positions.

The bottom line is that the human suffering we saw in our mountains was preventable had there been connection to emergency services — and we can never allow it to happen again.

The flooding we saw this week was the result of a network of problems that impact rural communities (including infrastructure, erosion, health care, physical access, etc.) yet a spotlight has been put directly on the failure of most life-saving tools available in this century — cell service and internet access.

Conversations between customers on official forums like Verizon Community Forums have been complaining of a decline of service as far back as four years ago in 2020.

In other unofficial forums such as Reddit, there are a dizzying array of related threads that include hundreds of posts detailing the decline of service from the envisioned heyday of the twenty aughts.

As Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers said to The Mountaineer, "I lost the ability to communicate with our emergency services early on, and it pains me to think that someone was trying to reach their loved one or someone needed help and they couldn't get it. I will not rest until I find some answers, because at our very time of need they let us down."

The executives of major cell phone carriers, activists and political leaders have a humanitarian duty to act selflessly now. Every resource in our wide arsenal should be diverted to restoring service to disaster areas and improving infrastructure in the mountains.

As of today, my parents are still trapped in their cove, and we have only heard from them once since the storm. But I keep calling. As I watch another tropical storm system forming its monstrous eye in the Atlantic, my stomach clenches for the next disaster — because there will be another — and this history of failure and catastrophe demands that we fight for the future now. Together.

Callie Pruett Schwaber is a Haywood County native, an advocate for the Appalachian region, and founder of Politicary. She currently lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

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Parkway closed with scads of downed trees and road damage, but Smokies is open

October 8, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Life | 376 Words OpenURL Link

The Blue Ridge Parkway is under a total closure, with tens of thousands of downed trees and extensive damage to the road from Helene. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park was largely spared from the storm and remains open to visitors everywhere except Haywood sections of the park. The storm skirted along Haywood's border, leaving areas to the west and south unscathed.

Blue Ridge Parkway

The entire length of the Blue Ridge Parkway remains closed in North Carolina and Virginia while crews assess damage from the hurricane. Severe damage, particularly the section from Boone to Cherokee, has been reported. Assessment teams are currently evaluating the timeline and cost of repairs.

Considerable work remains, especially in North Carolina, where crews have so far encountered tens of thousands of trees across the roadway and nearly three dozen rock and mud slides. The slides have occurred above and below the road and have also severely damaged or swept away the roadbed in numerous places.

The full closure of the Blue Ridge Parkway includes bicycles and pedestrians. Hazards both seen and unseen endanger unauthorized users and some threats may not be obvious, such as weakened road structures or hanging limbs, which are subject to falling in changing weather conditions. The parkway is also an active work area, with vehicles and heavy equipment moving through the area.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

While most sections of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park remain open, the Haywood County areas of Balsam Mountain, Cataloochee and Big Creek are closed due to storm damage. The rest of the Smokies to the west and south of Haywood County were spared impacts from Helene.

U.S. 441 over Newfound Gap between Cherokee and Gatlinburg, is now open 24 hours a day. The park is lifting the overnight road closure with the help of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and Sevier County.

However, illegal commercial vehicles continue to be a concern, with park authorities turning away 173 commercial vehicles over five days. Although I-40 going to Tennessee is closed due to a landslide from the storm, Newfound Gap Road is a two-lane road with steep, continuous grades and tight curves not suitable for trucks. There are no truck lanes, runaway truck ramps or places for a large commercial vehicle to slow down and pull over.

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The long game of recovery: county points donors to United Way for needs down the road

October 8, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Vicki Hyatt vhyatt@themountaineer.com| Section: News| 335 Words OpenURL Link

Donations and volunteers are flooding into Western North Carolina following the wreckage of Hurricane Helene, but for those who want to give cash, the recommendation is to contribute to United Way of Haywood County.

Haywood worked through a disaster recovery just three years ago when Tropical Storm Fred turned the East Fork and portions of the Pigeon River into a deadly and destructive torrent. Fred hit Haywood hardest, and donations reaching \$1.76 million helped get people back into their homes.

Ironically, there are five families almost ready to move into their homes as part of the recovery from Fred. Remaining funds designated for that recovery are earmarked to purchase appliances and furniture for the homes, said United Way director Celesa Willett. Other than that, every penny raised has been accounted for and used to assist flood victims.

The same will happen this time with donations made to the organization, Willett pledged, noting that United Way of Haywood doesn't take any administrative fees for its effort.

"This will be a long-term recovery," she said. "Donations coming to United Way will be used to restore homes damaged by the flooding."

The agency has forged a successful model working with the N.C. Office of Recovery and Resiliency and the Baptist on Missions group whereby disaster relief funds flow to flooded families to get their homes restored or replaced.

"I don't know how much money we'll get this time because the damage is more widespread," she said, "but United Way will be here to help in the future as we have in the past."

In working directly with flood families, Willett heard heart-wrenching tales. Families sensed her caring heart and willingness to listen, and poured out their stories. In a previous interview, Willett said it had been her greatest honor to be involved in the flood recovery effort.

"We are strong, we are resilient, we take care of our own," she said. "It is wonderful to see neighbors helping neighbors like we've seen now. We will see this through to the end. These are our people."

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Plenty of help to go around thanks to volunteer outpouring

October 8, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Becky Johnson| Section: On Premise| 42 Words OpenURL Link

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The retired couple saw that Jonathan Valley Elementary was serving as a supply distribution site, so they drove over from Waynesville and were put to work on the spot sorting boxes of diapers.

Amy Bumgarner, who was elbow-deep organizing baby formula, was thankful for the chance to finally be doing something useful.

"We were lucky our stuff is all good," she said. "My brother is a fireman for Waynesville, and he's seen all the things, so I know how bad it is for some people. They are hurting, and we had to do our part."

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Outside the school, lines of cars pulled up to the curb to receive the supplies. The distribution site ran like a welloiled machine.

First, volunteers with clipboards talked to each carload, finding out what their needs were. Hot meals? Cases of bottled water? Clothing or pet food? They had it all.

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"I wanted to do my part to help the community as much as I can, even if it's just packing up some apples," said volunteer Barb Schuelke, who lives in Jonathan Creek.

Schuelke had searched the web for ways to help and discovered the online volunteer clearinghouse through Orchard Church, signing up for a shift at the school down the road from her home.

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Pisgah freshman Annabelle Keilberg and Tuscola freshman Juliette Wenzel

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