

Unemployed worker: \$257 check each week 'doesn't do much'

October 14, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Isabel Hughes; USA TODAY NETWORK | Section: News | 947 Words Page: A2 OpenURL Link

Tara Christensen had no way of knowing that a Wednesday night in late September would be her last scheduled shift for the foreseeable future.

At about 11 a.m. on Sept. 25, the National Weather Service confirmed that Helene had strengthened into a hurricane. A briefing later that day predicted tropical storm-force winds and heavy rain would hit Western North Carolina.

Christensen wasn't too worried. She'd need time to clear her gutters and ready her house for the storm, but it was nothing she couldn't handle, she thought. Assuming she'd be back at work within days at Asheville cocktail lounge Rankin Vault, Christensen asked a coworker to cover her shift that night.

A day and a half later, Rankin Vault, like most other Asheville businesses, was shuttered indefinitely after Helene unleashed a fury on WNC not seen since the Great Flood of 1916.

Two weeks post-storm, Christensen and her coworkers remain jobless. A single mother, she's one of more than 14,000 WNC residents who have filed for disaster-related unemployment since late September. State officials say they only expect that number to grow.

Christensen, who relies heavily on tips from customers, was approved for unemployment funds. But she said the \$257 per week she receives is measly.

"Everything in my refrigerator is gone," Christensen said, noting that she was without power and water for at least a week and briefly evacuated to Knoxville, Tennessee.

"To restock the refrigerator, it's at least \$400 — think about condiments, what's in the freezer," she continued. "Two-hundred and fifty-seven doesn't do much."

Christensen isn't alone in that sentiment.

Others who have applied for unemployment funds, as well as local business owners, have decried North Carolina's \$350 maximum weekly benefit. They say the amount barely covers necessities.

While FEMA provides disaster-affected residents an initial \$750 for "immediate needs" such as food, water, and other supplies, that's a one-time payment. Residents must apply for the multiple, additional forms of financial support offered by the federal government.

Those specific funds typically take longer to receive.

In the short term, Christensen said she's managing. She called her utility companies and received a deferment. Her credit card company also gave her a grace period, which was just enough time for a refund for concert tickets to post to her account. That covered her minimum monthly payment.

But the longer-term outlook is less certain. Christensen doesn't know when she'll be back to work, and she's most worried about her mortgage.

"My loan company is giving me the runaround, so how am I going to pay that?" she said. "We don't have money in our pockets — but we're trying to do everything we can."

North Carolina's maximum weekly unemployment benefit falls on the lower side of the 50 states, but it's not the lowest in the nation. Four states rank last in maximum benefit amount — Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Tennessee — which offer up to \$275 per week.

Still, the Tar Heel State, along with Florida, only allows unemployed residents to claim benefits for up to 12 weeks. The three-month maximum is the shortest in the country, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan research and policy institute.

As of Oct. 8, 27 WNC counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians were approved for Disaster Unemployment Assistance, a federal program that expands unemployment eligibility to 26 weeks. The maximum benefit amount of \$350 remains the same, however.

This wasn't always so.

In 2013, the Republican-controlled General Assembly slashed the maximum weekly compensation from \$535 to \$350. It also cut collection time from a maximum of 26 weeks to a lesser amount of time determined by "the seasonal adjusted statewide unemployment rate."

The goal was to quickly repay a \$2.5 billion federal unemployment debt, which the state did just two years later, in 2015.

Yet unemployment benefits were only reduced more in subsequent years, with aid first cut to a maximum of 15 weeks. This was despite 2014 data showing that more than half of those unemployed in the state were jobless for more than 15 weeks.

Those 15 weeks were ultimately reduced to today's 12-week maximum.

M. Antwon Keith, assistant secretary for the North Carolina Department of Commerce, said time will tell how many WNC residents file for unemployment in the wake of Helene.

He added, however, that the storm's destruction — both physically and its decimation of the workforce — is unlike anything he's experienced in his three decades with the state commerce department.

"I was managing the offices in Charlotte during the Great Recession, so I have seen a thing or two," Keith said. "I can honestly say that in my belief, this is probably the worst I've ever seen."

Despite this dire economic outlook, communities in WNC have come together in ways not seen before.

At the Rankin Vault on Thursday, Christensen gathered with her coworkers and manager to turn the cocktail lounge into a mini-donation center. They can't open for business, Christensen said, but they can help those in need.

Smiling, she pointed to several packs of adult diapers tucked under a table that was filled with underwear, batteries propane cylinders, granola bars, and sandwich bags.

"I didn't even think adult diapers would be a need until one of our employees said something," she said.

Then, she began to tear up.

"You can talk about \$257, but at the end of the day, that doesn't mean sh*t," Christensen said. "There are people that still don't know where their loved ones are. We've got each other, so we've got it great."

Isabel Hughes is a Delaware-based public safety reporter aiding the Asheville Citizen-Times in post-Helene coverage. She can be reached at ihughes@delawareonline.com. For all things breaking news, follow her on X at @izzihughes_

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Some in Woodfin won't get water until repairs happen

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Author: Will Hofmann; Asheville Citizen Times | USA TODAY NETWORK | Section: News | 567 Words Page: A6
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WOODFIN — Nearly two weeks after Helene's rains cut off access to the North Fork Reservoir, leaving Asheville's 93,000 residents without water, the city is still facing considerable challenges as it attempts to fix the city's water system.

Meanwhile, the water district in the neighboring town of Woodfin, just north of Asheville, is making headway on bringing water back for around one-third of its customers, according to Gordon Maybury, chair of Woodfin's water district. Roughly another third of the district's customers are supplied by the Baird Cove water tank. The remaining third is supplied by Woodfin but also by the city of Asheville. The district began to fill that tank the morning of Oct. 10, a Woodfin Water District Facebook update said.

Since not all leaks have been repaired, water should not be consumed unless boiled, Maybury said.

A little more than half of Woodfin's 8,000 residents get their water from Woodfin water services, the other half are supplied by wells, Maybury said. But residents on the west side of the French Broad River get their water from Asheville, and it could be weeks before the city finishes with repairs.

"All of the water that water provides to our customers on the west side of the French Broad River comes from a contract we have to buy water from Asheville that interconnects with our pipeline," Maybury said.

The topic of water on the west side of Woodfin has been controversial as some residents have sought to deannex from the small town, citing frustrations with water treatment and stormwater utility fees that apply to west side residents.

The water district is reporting the roughly 14-mile-long pipeline is "90% functional" as it has yet to discover vital leaks. On Oct. 9, Seth Eskard, executive director of the Woodfin Sanitary Water and Sewer District, told a small gathering that the plan was to work with the National Guard and Federal Emergency Management Agency to walk the additional miles along the pipeline.

"We found two pretty significant, maybe three pretty significant leaks, but the entire length of the pipe has not been walked yet," Maybury said. Two breaks found along the pipeline have been repaired, he said.

The Woodfin Reservoir dam, located at the end of Reems Creek, took some damage during the storm, but engineers from FEMA have said the damage only indicates that the dam has "some problems," and not "serious damage," Maybury said.

The Woodfin Water District is separate from the town government, but cross collaboration and aid to the town given by Buncombe County and state agencies has been strong, Woodfin Town Manager Shannon Tuch told the Citizen Times. Other collaborators have been the city of Durham, which sent employees as part of a mutual aid network, Eskard said.

"It's absolutely been our experience that Buncombe County and the state have been great partners responding to this emergency," Tuch said.

If customers find leaks or additional breaks in the line, they are encouraged to call the Woodfin Water District at (828) 253-5551.

Will Hofmann is the Growth and Development Reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA Today Network. Got a tip? Email him at WHofmann@citizentimes.com. Consider supporting this type of journalism with a subscription to the Citizen Times.

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Unscrupulous parties may seek to capitalize on Helene, county warns

October 14, 2024 | Tribune, The (Elkin, NC) Author: Ryan Kelly Section: News 648 Words

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Those affected by Hurricane Helene have been on the receiving end in the past two weeks of donations and supplies from residents in this community and across the state meant to help them through a challenging time.

Not everyone is sending care packages, water, socks, and the like — some see the aftermath of the storm and its devastation as a chance to make some quick money. Price gouging at the gas station or grocery store may be easier to spot than an unscrupulous contractor who may not, be authorized to work in North Carolina.

"The North Carolina Licensing Board for General Contractors advise and urge citizens to be vigilant and take necessary precautions when hiring contractors for repair and reconstruction work to avoid becoming further victimized by scam artists posing as legitimate contractors," the board wrote noting the warning was co-signed by the N.C. State Board of Examiners of Electrical Contractors, N.C. State Board of Examiners of Plumbing, Heating, and Fire Sprinkler Contractors.

"We know that in times of disaster, there are scam artists looking to take advantage of storm victims. The last thing we want is for someone who has been a victim of the disaster to be victimized a second time by a fraudulent contractor," they said.

"Scammers and unlicensed contractors can take advantage of vulnerable citizens following natural disasters. I saw it on a number of occasions working for a municipality following hurricanes," said Surry County Public Information Officer Nathan Walls, recalling time spent working in the Southeastern parts of the state before arriving in Surry County.

"Citizens can contact the County Permitting & Inspections Office to verify if contractors are licensed before starting any work on their property; citizens should not pay contractors upfront before the work starts either, because there have been scammers throughout history that walk off with the money and the citizen never gets the money back," Walls said.

"If your home or property has been damaged by disaster, do not let unscrupulous individuals take advantage of you during this vulnerable time," the National Association of State Contractors Licensing Agencies advised.

"Get proof that the contractor you may be working with is licensed. Some out of state contractors and unlicensed contractors want to help with rebuilding in disaster areas; however, it is illegal and punishable as a felony to perform contracting work in a declared disaster area without a contractor's license."

They suggest not rushing into repairs, "no matter how badly they are needed. Get at least three bids and do not hire the first contractor who comes along. Be cautious about door-to-door offers or repair services or flyers that are left at your door."

Even for the smallest job the association said homeowners need to require proof of a contractor's license or registration for the type of work that needs to be done beforehand. To prevent any hiccups on the backend with the final billing versus pre-work quotes, they said get a written contract that details every aspect of the work plan.

"Any guarantees made by the contractor should be written into the contract. The guarantee should clearly state what is guaranteed, who is responsible for the guarantee and how long the guarantee is valid. Avoid verbal promises, agreements, or contracts," the group advised.

For those who require work done on their homes, they want to get the ball rolling as quickly as possible, but the group warned, "Don't let the payments get ahead of the work. Keep records of all payment and receipts and avoid on the spot payments in cash. The safest method of payment is by check."

Citizens should verify if a contractor is licensed and reputable with their County Permitting & Inspections Office first before embarking on any work on their property — take the time to check and verify, because as Walls said, "It can save you a lot of money and a world of hurt."

Surry County Permitting and Inspections can be reached at 336-401-8300.

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Cardinals record first shutout with 49-0 victory over Falcons

October 14, 2024 | Tribune, The (Elkin, NC) Author: Cory Smith | Section: Sports | 951 Words

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PILOT MOUNTAIN — The East Surry Cardinals gave their home fans a show in their return to David H. Diamont Stadium.

East Surry forced four takeaways in the Oct. 11 game against Forbush and turned each one into points. The Cardinals blocked a punt then recovered it for a touchdown, recovered another fumble and grabbed two interceptions in the 49-0 victory.

Friday's Foothills 2A Conference win marked the Cardinals' first shutout of the season, while the Falcons were shut out for just the second time in 2024.

The Cardinals (4-2, 2-0 FH2A) have forced an interception in all six games this season, and the Oct. 11 game was their first with multiple picks. The win over the Falcons was the Cards' second game of the year with multiple fumble recoveries, as well as the team's second game with a punt block.

Forbush (2-5, 0-3 FH2A) was held to 2.2 yards per carry. Josh Key led East Surry with three tackles for a loss, while Porter Gibson, Hatcher Hamm, Jackson Key and Aaden Wright each added one TFL. Braden Snow had East's punt block, and both he and Gibson recovered a fumble.

The visiting Falcons had some success in the air as quarterback Tyler Winters completed 13-of-24 passes for 140 yards. However, the QB was picked off twice — first by Hamm, then by Stevie Keener.

Forbush also turned the ball over on downs twice and punted once.

The Cardinals' offense has also been rolling during the team's recent three-game winning streak. The streak began with a 48-3 win over South Stokes on Sept. 12. East went more than three weeks between games due to its bye week then a postponement due to Hurricane Helene, but picked right back up with a 61-14 win at Wilkes Central on Oct. 4

East has scored 104 unanswered points dating back to the second quarter of its win over Wilkes Central.

Friday's matchup with Forbush was East Surry's first home game since the season opener on Aug. 23. The Cardinals' opening drive ended with a punt, but Hamm's interception put the offense back on the field. The Cards proceeded to score on each of their next six possessions.

East Surry rode its ground game for 337 rushing yards. The Cards have surpassed 330 rushing yards in three games this season after doing so just three times across the entire 2023 season.

The Cardinals have averaged at least 12.5 yards per carry and scored at least five rushing touchdowns in each game of their recent win streak.

Troy Watson followed up his 193-yard performance on Oct. 4 by carrying 12 times against the Falcons for 151 yards and two touchdowns. Also finding the end zone twice was Noah Felts, who finished with three carries for 78 yards and two touchdowns. Hamm, who ran for 27 yards, was the only other Cardinal with multiple carries.

Six Cardinals recorded one carry each, including freshman Jon Hutchens who ran in his first varsity touchdown in the fourth quarter. Carter Motsinger complimented East's ground game by completing 3-of-6 passes for 49 yards. Motsinger found Stevie Keener for an 8-yard strike in the second quarter — Keener's sixth receiving touchdown of the year — then the pair connected again for a 2-point conversion in the third quarter.

Zach Keener added one reception for 33 yards, and Braxton Davis had one reception for 8 yards.

East Surry is one of two FH2A teams still unbeaten in league competition. East is 2-0, and defending Foothills 2A Conference Champion North Surry sits at 4-0. Surry Central and West Wilkes sit in third place at 2-1, followed by Wilkes Central at 2-3, Forbush at 0-3 and North Wilkes at 0-4.

East Surry will travel to North Wilkes on Oct. 18. Forbush goes on the road the same day to face Surry Central.

East Surry 49, Forbush 0

Scoring

Forbush -0, 0, 0, 0 - 0

East Surry — 7, 20, 15, 7 — 49

First Quarter

3:44 ES Touchdown — Noah Felts 4-yard rush (Braden Snow PAT) — 0-7

Second Quarter

7:29 ES Touchdown — Troy Watson 23-yard rush (Braden Snow PAT) — 0-14

4:33 ES Touchdown — Noah Felts 56-yard rush (Braden Snow PAT) — 0-21

0:04 ES Touchdown — Stevie Keener 6-yard reception on Carter Motsinger pass (2-point conversion failed) — 0-27

Third Quarter

6:50 ES Touchdown — Troy Watson 9-yard rush (Braden Snow PAT) — 0-34

3:07 ES Touchdown — Porter Gibson fumble recovery on Braden Snow punt block (Stevie Keener 2-point conversion reception on Carter Motsinger pass) — 0-42

Fourth Quarter

 $5:57~{\rm ES}~{\rm Touchdown}$ — Jon Hutchens 8-yard rush (Braden Snow PAT) — 0-49

Offensive Stats

Forbush Falcons

TEAM

Pass: 140 yards on 13 completions

Rush: 71 yards on 32 carries

Total: 211 yards

INDIVIDUAL

Passing: Tyler Winters 13-of-24 for 140 yards, two interceptions

Receiving: Joseph Barnes six reception for 64 yards; Alex Clevenger three reception for 42 yards; Hayden Bales two receptions for 20 yards; Alan Benitez one reception for 10 yards; Giovanni Valerio-Real one reception for 4 yards

Rushing: Giovanni Valerio-Real 19 carries for 52 yards; Skylar Kimber two carries for 10 yards; Tyler Winters 11 carries for 9 yards

Kicking: N/A

East Surry Cardinals

TEAM

Pass: 49 yards and one touchdown on three completions

Rush: 337 yards and five touchdowns on 27 carries

Total: 386 total yards and seven touchdowns

INDIVIDUAL

Passing: Carter Motsinger 3-of-6 for 49 yards, one touchdown

Receiving: Zach Keener one reception for 33 yards; Stevie Keener one reception for 8 yards, one touchdown; Braxton Davis one reception for 8 yards

Rushing: Troy Watson 12 carries for 151 yards, two touchdowns; Noah Felts three carries for 78 yards, two touchdowns; Hatcher Hamm six carries for 27 yards; Luke Bruner one carry for 24 yards; Chris George one carry for 15 yards; Stevie Keener one carry for 15 yards; Carter Motsinger one carry for 14 yards; Jon Hutchens one carry for 8 yards, one touchdown; Nathan Kiger one carry for 5 yards

Kicking: Braden Snow 5-of-5 PATs

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UNSUNG HEROES: Tryon's dependable IGA serves shoppers in days after Helene

October 14, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Clay Johnson | Section: Community | 351 Words OpenURL Link

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

TRYON—Helene wasn't Willard Teaster's first hurricane. Teaster, who bought the Tryon IGA in 1997 and has managed it ever since, went through Hurricane Hugo in 1989 as a district manager working in Charlotte. When Hurricane Helene was forecast to impact Polk County, Teaster had one basic plan.

"Our plan is to always be open," says Teaster. "We did make some plans with the warehouse to try to set up additional deliveries."

After the storm passed on Friday, September 27, not enough of Teaster's employees could make it to the store to open due to downed trees blocking roads. But by Saturday morning, enough of them made it in to open, and the store's generator kept the lights and cash registers on and the food cold.

"We bought a generator for this store about 20 years ago. It was probably the best investment we ever made," says Teaster.

The store was without an Internet connection for more than a week but took both cash and personal checks. Teaster even allowed customers to get some cash back on their checks if they needed it. Some of the most indemand items were milk, bread, and canned goods.

"Charcoal was a big item. Seems like we'd fill a section up, and it'd get emptied real quick," says Teaster.

Ice was also in demand, but the supplier couldn't get to the store for the first three days after the storm. It's been able to deliver every day since.

With so few other stores open in the early days after the storm, demand at the Tryon IGA was high, but Teaster says customer patience was also high.

"I'd like to thank all of the people of Tryon who were patient with us and shopped with us," he says. "We appreciate Tryon and the surrounding areas so much."

The feeling is mutual, Mr. Teaster.

The post UNSUNG HEROES: Tryon's dependable IGA serves shoppers in days after Helene appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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FOOTBALL: Wolverines return after unprecedented break, face R-S Central

October 14, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Andy Rhinehart | Section: Polk Wolverines | 503 Words OpenURL Link

Welcome back to Polk County's 2024 football season.

It's been more than a month since the Wolverines last took the field, that a forgettable 43-6 loss to Landrum on Sept. 12. Polk will finally return to action on Monday, traveling to R-S Central for a Mountain Foothills 7 Conference matchup with a 7:30 p.m. kickoff.

The combination of the Thursday game against Landrum, a bye due to Patton not fielding a team and then a two-week break in the wake of Hurricane Helene led to what will be the longest break between games in school history. Polk did have a four-week gap between games in the 2020 spring season.

"It's been a very weird year and season," said head coach Dustin Fry. "But practices (since returning from the Helene break) have been really good. We came back out and I think guys were happy to be back out and doing stuff.

"We're healthy, and our energy has been good. We're probably not in as good a shape, so we've got to work on that. But I think they were happy to be back."

Following the loss to Landrum, Polk (1-3) began preparing for a Sept. 27 game at Hendersonville. Helene's arrival changed that and left teams with a lot of uncertainty as to how, when or even if the remainder of the season would be played.

Fry and staff originally thought the team would next play at Chase and began preparing for the Trojans. They found out Wednesday afternoon that a trip to face R-S Central (3-3) would first occur, forcing a quick change in game plans.

"We didn't find out about the Monday-Friday games until (last) Wednesday at 2," Fry said. "We were prepared for Chase, so we had an hour to switch (before practice) and go all right, let's go. At least when we get to Hendo, we have the game plan done and we'll just make some tweaks.

"We went and watched R-S and Chase (Thursday) for the first half, so that helped a little bit. But it's weird."

R-S Central defeated Chase 41-26 on Thursday and will have a small window of time to prepare before Monday's kickoff. Polk will face almost the same scenario this week with the quick turnaround before Friday's trip to Chase.

Under first-year head coach Jim Ryan, the Hilltoppers have already matched last year's win total. R-S has relied heavily on a running game that features senior back Karlen McEntyre and junior quarterback Elmer Littlejohn, with McEntyre just 120 yards shy of the 1,000-yard mark for the season.

"We've got to stop the run and then not get lulled to sleep when they do try to throw one deep," Fry said. "It's all just run, run, run, and then you keep playing it and they're going to try to sneak one behind you.

"Hopefully, we can pin our ears back a little bit and get it done. They're a much-improved team. They've done a good job over there."

The post FOOTBALL: Wolverines return after unprecedented break, face R-S Central appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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FOOTBALL: Landrum blows by Blacksburg

October 14, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Storme Smith | Section: Landrum Cardinals | 213 Words OpenURL Link

LANDRUM—In their first game after Tropical Storm Helene, the Landrum Cardinals put on a stellar performance on the road, securing a decisive 28-6 victory against the Blacksburg Wildcats.

The game started with a strong showing from the Cardinals in the first quarter, led by Titus Poore's ground game, which led them to take an early 7-0 lead. A long run by Aidan Kelley set up another rushing touchdown by AJ Lindsey and a successful point-after attempt from Joey Martinez, which extended Landrum's lead to 14-0.

The Cardinals maintained their dominance in the second quarter, capitalizing on turnovers and a fumble recovery to add another touchdown. Their defense played a crucial role, forcing turnovers on downs and maintaining their shutout heading into halftime.

Blacksburg scored a touchdown in the third quarter on a 5-yard pass, narrowing the lead to 21-6, but they missed the extra point. In the fourth quarter, Landrum intercepted a pass from Blacksburg and later scored on an AJ Lindsey rushing touchdown, sealing the final score at 28-6 in favor of Landrum.

With the win, Landrum's record is 5-1, 1-0 for the season. The Cardinals will next host the Clinton Red Devils (4-2) on Friday at 7:30 p.m. at Cardinal Stadium.

The post FOOTBALL: Landrum blows by Blacksburg appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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TRIFF sponsors free concert on Friday evening

October 14, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Storme Smith | Section: Arts | 354 Words OpenURL Link

The Casual Zealots perform on Trade Street

TRYON—The Town of Tryon came alive on Friday night from 5 to 8 p.m. as businesses extended their hours and the community came together for a free concert sponsored by the Tryon International Film Festival.

The concert at St. Luke's Plaza featured a performance by local band the Casual Zealots, comprised of Jim Peterman, Vincent Corda, Tommy Lytle, Ian Herrod, and Robbie Johnson.

The Tryon Downtown Development Association took to Facebook to express solidarity with those affected by Tropical Storm Helene while emphasizing that downtown Tryon is open for business. Despite minimal damage to the downtown area, the association highlighted the importance of community support for small business owners as they recover.

TRIFF Co-founder Beau Menetre said that the free concert was a way to bring the community together.

"We postponed the film festival planned for this weekend (which will now take place November 22 to November 24), but we at TRIFF still wanted to bring a little bit of joy to Tryon and bring the community out for a relaxing night of music. This is the festival's 10th anniversary, and we are looking to bring the film festival back bigger and better than ever."

Local artist Becky Hyatt Rickenbaker, who shares space at the 80Six Gallery and attended the event, expressed her gratitude for the community's resilience.

"There are so many people who did so much," she said. "It's nice to have a night where folks can come out and have fun. Tryon comes together in times like these."

Kevin Parker, owner of the Tryon Coffeehouse, echoed similar sentiments. "It's wonderful to see so many folks from all over Tryon here tonight. These are the folks that make Tryon such a wonderful place to live and work."

Several stores and restaurants extended their hours for the event, including Mirrorball Gallery, Brooks Tavern, Tryon Bottle, Buck's Pizza, Tryon Painters & Sculptors, KD's Sea Shack, 80SIX Gallery/Becky Hyatt Rickenbaker, Huckleberry's, The Tryon Coffeehouse, Back Alley Boutique & Bud Bar, Trade Street Diner, Mountain Trail Soap Company, The Nest, and Wild Petunia's.

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Victim assistance centers to open in Sugar Grove, Beech Mountain Oct. 16 and Oct. 17

October 14, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com | Section: Local | 234 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — North Carolina Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey has announced Victim Assistance Centers (VACs) will be open this week in Jefferson, Sugar Grove and Beech Mountain to aid those affected by Hurricane Helene.

A VAC will be open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 15, at the Parks and Recreation Center, 626 Ashe Central School Road, Jefferson, N.C. 28640.

A second VAC will be open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 16, at The Western Watauga Community Center, 1081 Old U.S. Hwy. 421, Sugar Grove, N.C. 28679.

A third VAC will be open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 17, at the Buckeye Recreation Center, 1330 Pine Ridge Road, Beech Mountain, N.C. 28604.

"These Victim Assistance Center are crucial to help us reach people in need directly. We will continue to operate these VACs in the coming days and weeks to provide valuable resources and support to storm victims," Commissioner Causey said. "NCDOI staff members will be on hand to offer their expertise and assistance to the public."

NCDOI is currently coordinating with law enforcement agencies, emergency management, fire departments, rescue squads, charities, churches and civic groups to assist victims. NCDOI will continue to host future events to assist with insurance claims for those affected.

For more information and resources, and a schedule of all VACs and insurance camps, visit www.ncdoi.gov/helene or contact the NCDOI Consumer Services Division at 1-855-408-1212.

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Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com, 'Victim assistance centers to open in Sugar Grove, Beech Mountain Oct. 16 and Oct. 17', *Watauga Democrat, The*(online), 14 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C39888B1A6CCD8>



Watauga BOE approves Valle Crucis School student relocation plan

October 14, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 138 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — The Watauga County Board of Education has approved a Valle Crucis School relocation plan for students and staff after Hurricane Helene severely damaged the current school.

The approved plan — which gives BOE Chair Gary Childers and WCS Superintendent Leslie Alexander the authority to execute any lease agreements and licenses to relocate the students from the Valle Crucis School — will mean the Valle Crucis Conference Center will host kindergarten through 5th graders and Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute will host 6th through 8th graders.

The current school flooded during Hurricane Helene, while the new school — still in the process of being built — did not receive any damage.

School staff will have a meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 15, to begin planning for the transition.

This is a developing story and will be updated with more information.

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Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com, 'Watauga BOE approves Valle Crucis School student relocation plan', *Watauga Democrat, The*(online), 14 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C39888AC24CFD0>



Woolly Worm Webfest will be held Oct. 19

October 14, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff report | Section: News | 611 Words OpenURL Link

BANNER ELK — Although Tropical Storm Helene put a damper on plans for the annual Banner Elk Woolly Worm Festival, organizers have announced an event this weekend to keep the spirit of woolly togetherness intact through what is being called "Woolly Worm Webfest: Race to the Worm Scavenger Hunt," taking place from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 19.

The premise of the Race to the Worm Scavenger Hunt is that the Woolly Worms, Merriweather and Mistiweather, have been blown away by the storm and ended up in different parts of the state. Participants in the Charlotte and Raleigh areas can take part in a fun, real-time scavenger hunt to track down Merriweather and Mistiweather!

Purchase a Scavenger Hunt Ticket and tune into clues via our Facebook and Instagram pages starting at 10 a.m. Clues will be sent every 30 minutes, getting more specific as the day goes on. The first person to find each woolly worm wins \$500 and more! (Proof of ticket purchase must be provided to win.) Plus, you'll meet some fun faces at the hunt's base locations, with a Woolly Worm presence at each site—complete with costumed woolly worms, local influencers, and booths selling festival merchandise. All proceeds from ticket sales will support the Woolly Worm Festival and its community grants.

Sign up deadline is Friday, Oct. 18.

Included as part of the event, patrons can "Race to the Worm" by purchase of a ticket that enters the bearer to win \$500 for finding the hidden worms. Additionally, patrons can purchase a "no-show ticket," support the festival from afar. "Even though we can't gather in person, you can still make an impact by purchasing a 'No Show' Ticket to support the Woolly Worm Festival," according to festival officials. "Funds raised from these tickets will go directly to local youth organizations that rely on the grants provided by the Kiwanis Club, which normally receives a portion of the festival's proceeds. While we may not raise the full \$50,000 this year, every contribution brings us closer to continuing these vital community programs."

The festival also is promoting its online vendor marketplace, where many favorite vendors at the Woolly Worm Festival are featured for purchase of products online. The online vendor marketplace will launch on October 19, while "No-Show Tickets" are currently available online.

Also as part of the festivities, join the WNC Local Kids Coloring Contest as part of this year's Woolly Worm Webfest. You can participate by downloading one of our woolly worm coloring sheets or drawing your own design—coloring sheets and crayons are available at Mountain Grounds Coffee in Sugar Mountain and the Avery Chamber of Commerce Office at Tynecastle, or you can download and print sheets at home. Submit your finished artwork at either location by Monday, Oct. 21, for a chance to win. First place receives \$250, second place gets \$125, and third place wins \$75, with a panel of local business owners voting on the top designs.

Beginning at 1 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 20, there will be a special Live Stream Woolly Worm Race on the Woolly Worm Festival Facebook page.

"While we can't gather in person, we're excited to bring the thrill of the Woolly Worm races right to your screen, with the winning worm predicting the 2024-2025 winter weather," according to the festival's website. "This year's race is dedicated to honoring the incredible first responders, linemen and recovery personnel who have worked tirelessly to help Western North Carolina recover after Hurricane Helene. Be sure to watch live and join the excitement from home!"

The Banner Elk Woolly Worm Festival is sponsored by Avery County Chamber of Commerce and Banner Elk Kiwanis Club. For more information, visit www.woollyworm.com.

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Staff report, 'Woolly Worm Webfest will be held Oct. 19', *Watauga Democrat, The* (online), 14 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3E9ACF3032C70



Disaster Recovery Center to open Tuesday in Boone

October 14, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com | Section: Local | 281 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — A Disaster Recovery Center is opening Tuesday, Oct. 15, in Boone to assist North Carolina survivors who experienced loss from Helene.

The Watauga County DRC is located at the Appalachian Enterprise Center at 130 Poplar Grove Connector.

The center is open 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Sunday

A Disaster Recovery Center is a one-stop shop where survivors can meet face-to-face with FEMA representatives, apply for FEMA assistance, receive referrals to local assistance in their area, apply with the U.S. Small Business Administration for low-interest disaster loans and much more.

FEMA financial assistance may include money for basic home repairs, personal property losses or other uninsured, disaster-related needs, such as childcare, transportation, medical needs, funeral or dental expenses.

Centers are already open in Asheville, Lenoir, Marion and Sylva. To find those center locations go to fema.gov/drc or text "DRC" and a Zip Code to 43362. Additional recovery centers will be opening soon. All centers are accessible to people with disabilities or access and functional needs and are equipped with assistive technology.

Homeowners and renters in 27 North Carolina counties and tribal members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians can visit any open center, including locations in other states. No appointment is needed.

It is not necessary to go to a center to apply for FEMA assistance. The fastest way to apply is online at DisasterAssistance.gov or via the FEMA app. You may also call 800-621-3362. If you use a relay service, such as video relay, captioned telephone or other service, give FEMA your number for that service.

For the latest information about North Carolina recovery, visit Hurricane Helene | NC DPS or fema.gov/disaster/4827. Follow FEMA on X at x.com/femaregion4 or on Facebook at facebook.com/fema.

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Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com, 'Disaster Recovery Center to open Tuesday in Boone', *Watauga Democrat, The* (online), 14 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C398889DD45E28>



Local forest ranger, NCFS reminds community of safe burning practices as fire season arrives

October 14, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 649 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — The fall fire season is here and Watauga County Forest Ranger Andrew Harsey is reminding the community to use caution when burning outdoors.

Typically, wildfires occur more frequently October through early December. In 2023, the N.C. Forest Service responded to nearly 2,000 wildfires during those months, responding to more than 1,200 of those fires in November. Backyard debris burning, arson, escaped campfires and machine and vehicle use continue to be common ignition sources for human-caused wildfires, according to the NCFS.

"I've already seen a lot of people burning debris — just cleaning up sticks and other (debris)," Harsey said. "I think there's going to be more of that going on. You're going to have the people that usually burn stuff, but then you have the people that don't usually burn stuff that are now burning."

Harsey said that those who haven't burned before — and even those who have experience — should educate themselves on best practices, look at the weather, and try to burn when it rains.

Harsey said one small fire has already escaped locally due to debris burning. Harsey said his agency is conducting wildland fire training for local firefighters and an annual refresher "to reengage in training and talk about the current state of things."

The N.C. Forest Service is waiving the requirement for open burning permits for counties impacted by Hurricane Helene, including Watauga County, until further notice.

"Hurricane Helene left excessive amounts of storm-related debris on the ground in the western part of the state," said Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler. "Critical infrastructure is still being restored, and many communities continue to have limited access, making it difficult, nearly impossible, for people to comply with the law and get a burning permit. While we're waiving the requirement for a permit in these 21 counties, we cannot stress caution and safety enough when it comes to burning outdoors this time of year.

Those burning debris should use the following tips:

Check local burning laws. Some communities allow burning only during specified hours. Others forbid it entirely. Make sure you have a valid permit (once it is required again). You can obtain a burn permit at any N.C. Forest Service office or authorized permitting agent, or online at www.ncforestservice.gov/burnpermit. Keep an eye on the weather. Don't burn on dry, windy days. Local fire officials can recommend a safe way to burn debris. Don't pile vegetation on the ground. Instead, place it in a cleared area and contain it in a screened receptacle away from overhead branches and wires. Be sure you are fully prepared before burning. To control the fire, you will need a hose, bucket, steel rake and a shovel for tossing dirt on the fire. Keep a phone nearby, too. Never use kerosene, gasoline, diesel fuel or other flammable liquids to speed up debris burning. Stay with your fire until it is completely out.

North Carolina law prohibits burning trash and non-vegetative materials.

"With more fuel on the ground as a result of the hurricane, seasonal leaf fall, and as conditions continue to dry, burning storm-related debris as safely as possible is paramount. We need our emergency personnel focused on hurricane response and recovery efforts, not pulled away by escaped debris burns. Use the best practices and wildfire prevention tips recommended by the forest service," said Troxler.

This waiver does not apply to permits required by other agencies, including the N.C. Division of Air Quality or a local fire marshal's office.

To learn more about fire safety and preventing wildfires and loss of property, visit www.ncforestservice.gov/fire_control/fc_firesafetyoutdoors.htm. For information about creating defensible space and a fire-resistant landscape around your home and property, visit www.resistwildfirenc.org.

"During the spring season, fires can spread quickly," said North Carolina State Forester David Lane. "Your N.C. Forest Service county ranger is a resource and can provide guidance about when, where and how to burn safely outdoors. Contact your local NCFS county ranger's office before starting an outdoor fire."

To contact Harsey, call (828) 726-7172 or email Watauga.ncfs@ncagr.gov.

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Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com, 'Local forest ranger, NCFS reminds community of safe burning practices as fire season arrives', *Watauga Democrat, The*(online), 14 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C35C8CA09A2160>



Watauga Rec Center working to get fields operational, resumes indoor programming

October 14, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 762 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — The Watauga County Recreation Center reopened on Monday, Oct. 7, after Hurricane Helene left much of the rec center's grounds flooded with trash and debris just over a week prior.

Watauga County Parks and Recreation Director Keron Poteat said the rec center and its staff were "extremely fortunate" given the situation. If the water happened to have come over State Farm Road, Poteat said it could have entered the gymnasium, and they would be looking at an entirely different situation altogether.

"We did have some leaks, but there was nothing out of the ordinary inside the building," Poteat said. "We started coming in on Sunday to assess what was going on and to get some crew in here to start the process of opening."

For the week of Oct. 14 to 20, the rec center will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. All indoor programming, including fitness classes, swim lessons, childcare, and pickleball clinics, will return.

Poteat said the process for reopening began with county maintenance director Robert Marsh inspecting the flooded ball fields. He advised people to stay off them for the time being to allow them to dry and to keep people from pressing down on the mud.

Poteat said they hope to have the fields operational by April so that they can host a state-wide baseball tournament. They're also looking to salvage what they can of the youth soccer season.

"We have to have them up and ready," Poteat said. "We'll have teams from across North Carolina up here, and we want to make them look as good as we can."

Meanwhile, maintenance staff replaced windscreens at the tennis courts and worked to clear debris from the rec center grounds, including the playground. Poteat said App State students were also instrumental in clearing the fields, as many of them showed up to help without even being asked.

"They cleared a good amount," Poteat said. "That was super helpful and impressive; right off the bat, they were doing it."

However, other recreation facilities in other parts of the county did not fare as well. While the Old Cove Creek school came out of the storm relatively unscathed, Poteat said its septic system was severely damaged.

Furthermore, the basketball courts, tennis courts, playground, picnic shelter, and walking track on school grounds were decimated by the storm. Poteat said these areas now "look like the bottom of a river bed" and will have to be rebuilt at some point.

"On these beautiful days, the amount of devastation is even more stark," Poteat said. "You will have a beautiful day, but you look back and there's broken roads and broken homes. You just think 'how in the world are we going to rebuild, when is it going to be done?' Like with Cove Creek, that's probably a ways off. Of course, we want to build it back, but the priority for the county is going to be roads and schools."

The rec center, like many organizations and businesses in the county, is also facing staffing challenges, as folks have had roads and bridges on their commute washed out, experienced damage to their homes and students have been displaced due to their apartments flooding. Despite these challenges, Poteat said many were still out in the

community and lending helping hands where needed.

On the brighter side, guests will be surprised to see a new infusion of color to the rec center's interior decor after local artist Kent Paulette donated a vast collection of his work to the complex.

The collection features some of Paulette's most notable pieces, which include mountain landscapes, area landmarks, native animals, and pop culture references. Paulette's unique style is accomplished in part by utilizing water from local streams and creeks to create his paintings.

Poteat said the donation came about after she was looking for art to include in an auction to help generate seed money for the Deep Gap recreation area. Paulette offered his work and also offered to fill in the white space inside the rec center. All in all, the collection is worth approximately \$160,000.

"It's really super timely," Poteat said. "It's kind of a bright spot with all of the stuff that's been going on. I had no idea he was going to turn us into a museum."

In addition to the infusion of color, the rec center is also anticipating the arrival of new gym equipment worth \$64,000, which is also being donated. Poteat said the new equipment is "due to arrive anytime."

To stay up to date on happenings at the Watauga County Recreation Center, visit wataugacounty.org.

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Blue Ridge Energy restores power to all members after severe damage

October 14, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 433 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — Blue Ridge Energy has restored power to all of its Watauga County members.

All power was restored on Sunday, Oct. 13, at 9:54 p.m.

"A few weeks ago, we experienced the most devastating outage in the history of this cooperative," said Doug Johnson, Chief Executive Officer, Blue Ridge Energy. "We see the amount of devastation that you have experienced, that we have experienced, and that whole communities have experienced.

While wind-related outages did sporadically occur on Oct. 14, full restoration was possible Sunday evening after a 24/7 response when outages began from Hurricane Helene on Sept. 27.

More than 500 people made up line crews from across the state and eastern United States to assist Blue Ridge Energy in restoring power to 63,000 members without electricity at the height of the outages. Crews have worked around the clock since the outages began in the late evening of Sept. 26.

"Our members have been so supportive of the cooperative and so appreciative of our lineworkers in the field. We serve an amazing membership and I thank you," Johnson said.

The raging swift water led to flooding and mudslides, downed trees, washed away bridges and not only roads and pavement but in many cases the actual ground beneath them. The storm took down much of the cooperative's electric grid, leading to quick rebuilds just to get power restored as quickly as possible. Long-term repairs will go on for months to ensure the electric grid is strong and reliable.

The cooperative dispersed teams of service crews responsible for repairing and energizing tap lines as well as construction crews responsible for replacing broken power poles.

"As we're finally sending our maps turn to all blue, we rejoice and are thankful we have the lights back on to everyone we can restore." Johnson said. "Now we set out on the hard path of additional recovery. We have damage to the electric grid we'll have to repair in the weeks and months ahead. You have damage to your homes, businesses, vehicles, and all we're going to have to work together with our federal, state and local governments and our neighbors, churches, and all the help we can get from volunteer organizations to restore our beautiful area to what it was. We will get there! And I will continue to hope and pray we will all work together in a way our area comes back and recovers."

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

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Hagaman honored with Attorney General's Dogwood Award

October 14, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 240 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — Watauga County Sheriff Len Hagaman was recently honored with the Attorney General's Dogwood

The award is given to people who are working to improve the health, safety, and well-being of their fellow North Carolinians, according to the North Carolina Attorney General's Office.

"As the people of Watauga County confront the devastation of Hurricane Helene, Sheriff Len Hagaman has been a steady hand of leadership," said Attorney General Josh Stein. "His office has been helping to keep people safe, conduct welfare checks, rescue people in danger, and ensure that Watauga residents have the latest information as they recover. Sheriff Hagaman has been tireless in this work, and I'm grateful for his service."

The awards event took place on Oct. 8.

"Our Watauga County Sheriff's Office family has remained tireless in their work, and I'm grateful for our team's service," Hagaman said in a press release.

Other groups honored at the event included Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles, Iredell County Sheriff Darren Campbell, Cabarrus County Sheriff Van Shaw, Rep. John Torbett (District 108), Union County Deputy SRO Chris Byrum, president of the Charlotte Metro Human Trafficking Task Force and the founder and executive director of Present Age Ministries Hannah Arrowood, co-founder of the venture capital firm Bright Hope Capital, LLC Malcomb Coley former reporter Ann Doss Helms, former president and vice chairman of the Charlotte Hornets Fred Whitfield, Rep. Kelly Alexander (District 107), Tepper Sports & Entertainment, Food Lion, Bank of America, and NASCAR.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C35C8CA3BE5848>



Hay available to farmers beginning Oct. 17

October 14, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com | Section: Local | 191 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA – In an effort to prepare producers for winter feeding in an organized manner, the Watauga County Cooperative Extension will be hosting Hay Days on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. at 5715 US Hwy 421 N in Boone beginning on Oct. 17 free of charge.

Reservations for hay must be placed 48 hours in advance to ensure sufficient inventory. Each farm/producer will be limited to a maximum of 15 round bales/large square bales and 50 standard size square bales each distribution day.

Hay will no longer be available for pickup outside of these hours and will not be available for pickup on Hay Days without an order.

Reservations can be placed by calling the Watauga County Extension's Hay Hotline at (828) 319-2543. Please leave a message if your call is not answered, and someone will reach out to confirm your order.

The Watauga County Agricultural Extension plans to continue Hay Days as necessary with the intention of producers receiving enough to build sufficient inventory for winter. According to the extension, the intention is for farmers to not just squeeze by but be okay as they recover from Hurricane Helene.

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Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com, 'Hay available to farmers beginning Oct. 17', *Watauga Democrat, The*(online), 14 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C35C8C948F2F00



NCDOT contractor to close portion of Aho Road for stabilization on Oct. 16

October 14, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com | Section: Local | 122 Words OpenURL Link

BLOWING ROCK — A contractor for the N.C. Department of Transportation will close a Watauga County road this week for road stabilization and repair.

Beginning the morning of Oct. 16, crews from GeoStabilization International will close Aho Road from Blackberry Road to Cross Creek Farm Road.

The preferred detour route is as follows:

From Aho Road, turn right onto the Blue Ridge Parkway. Turn left onto Sampson Road. Turn left onto George Hayes Road. Turn left onto Bamboo Road. Turn left onto Deerfield Road. Turn left onto U.S. 321 to Aho Road.

GSI earned the emergency contract following damage to the road from Hurricane Helene.

This closure will be in effect for several weeks with updates to follow on the road's reopening.

Motorists are encouraged to check DriveNC.gov for real-time traffic updates.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C39888AE71E098>



Determination to rebuild follows Florida's hurricanes - Determination to rebuild follows Florida's hurricanes

October 14, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: ASSOCIATED PRESS | Section: A | 239 Words Page: 7 OpenURL Link

VENICE, Fla. - No sooner had residents of the Bahia Vista Gulf condominium complex dug out and from Hurricane Helene than they were faced with the same daunting cleanup from new damage inflicted by Hurricane Milton.

"They've got to start the whole process over, cleaning, sanitizing, bringing in drying equipment, getting them all dried and prepped for renovations," lamented Bill O'Connell, a board member at the complex in Venice, about an hour south of Tampa.

A swath of the state still was coming to terms with damage from the unusual dual strike of storms in such close proximity. Many residents, some returning home after evacuating, spent much of Saturday searching for gas as a fuel shortage gripped the state.

President Joe Biden on Sunday surveyed the devastation inflicted on Florida's Gulf Coast. After an aerial tour and a briefing, Biden said he was thankful the damage from Milton was not as severe as officials anticipated. But he said it was still a "cataclysmic" event for the people in the storm's path.

Milton killed at least 11 people after it made landfall as a Category 3 storm, tearing across central Florida, flooding barrier islands and spawning deadly tornadoes. On Sunday, Lindsey Bayer, the director of operations in Citrus County's district medical examiner's office, confirmed a person had died after a tree-cutting accident.

Officials say the toll could have been worse if not for the widespread evacuations. Overall, more than a thousand people were rescued.

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ASSOCIATED PRESS, 'Determination to rebuild follows Florida's hurricanes Determination to rebuild follows Florida's hurricanes', Winston-Salem Journal (online), 14 Oct 2024 7 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C33B2BA9B24160>



App State falls to division cellar in loss to Louisiana - Appalachian State falls to division cellar in loss to Louisiana

October 14, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS| Section: B| 371 Words

Page: 3
OpenURL Link

LAFAYETTE, La. - It was a tough night for Appalachian State and quarterback Joey Aguilar.

Aguilar threw two touchdown passes, but also had four interceptions. The Mountaineers once again gave up an explosive play, and Louisiana took a 34-24 victory in a Sun Belt Conference showdown on Saturday night.

The loss dropped the Mountaineers to the bottom of the Sun Belt Eastern Division standings. At 0-3, any chance of returning to a conference championship game has virtually vanished.

Ben Wooldridge accounted for three touchdown and scored the game-clincher.

Aguilar threw a 26-yard touchdown pass to Eli Wilson to draw the Mountaneers to 27-24 with 8:06 left.

The trouble began after Jordan Favors made an interception deep in App State territory with the Mountaineers trailing by three, but their third turnover of the fourth quarter and fourth turnover of the game set up Wooldridge's score. The Ragin' Cajuns forced another turnover in the final minute to seal it.

Trailing 20-17 early in the fourth quarter, App State (2-4, 0-3) moved inside the Louisiana 20 on a first-down run, but Agu's fumble return for 68 yards to the Mountaineers' 17 as well as a penalty for a horse collar tackle on the return gave the Ragin' Cajuns (5-1, 2-0) a first down at the App State 8.

Davis mishandled the exchange with Wooldridge, kicking the ball through traffic and into the end zone. Burton, an offensive lineman, split two defenders to fall on the loose ball. Wooldridge's 1-yard touchdown with 1:03 to play was sandwiched between a pair of Tyrone Lewis Jr. interceptions.

The latest big play to hit the Mountaineers was Wooldridge's 74-yard pass play to Terrance Carter, who finished with 107 yards on four catches.

Aguilar was 20-of-42 passing for 236 yards with three touchdowns for Appalachian State. Almost lost in the defeat was the performance of Kanye Roberts, who rushed for a career-high 148 yards on 26 carries and caught a 15-yard touchdown pass. Kaedin Robinson had seven catches for 96 yards.

App State is off next week before an Oct. 26 matchup with Georgia State. Originally scheduled as Homecoming, school officials will soon announce whether the game will be played in Winston-Salem or Charlotte as Boone continues its cleanup after Hurricane Helene caused damage due to flooding.

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