

Resilience in the face of devastation: Stories from Hurricane Helene in Haywood

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Reporter Brionna Dallara spent the week traveling the crumpled and debris-strewn roads of Haywood County, talking to its people about their experiences during the worst flood in recorded history. She found resilience, hope and compassion among Haywood people. Here are some of their stories.

"Never anything like this"

Sorrells Marathon Garage has long been a cornerstone for the Jonathan Creek community to get their gas, grab a bite to eat or hear about the happenings in town — and as Hurricane Helene hailed on last week, it prevailed as a hub for locals and passersby to seek sanctuary during the storm.

One of the saddest moments for Michael Sorrells, owner of Sorrells Marathon Garage, came after the Helene's fury and much of the flooding had passed.

The Saturday after the Friday floods, a man entered his business, holding a plastic bag, asking if he could have some water.

"He unwrapped his plastic bag and he had his little dog, and he said, 'I just want to rinse my dog off before I bury him." Sorrells said.

It was a gut-wrenching moment, but not the only one for Sorrells and his employees in those long days of the storm and its aftermath. They were in the station by 5:30 a.m. that Friday and witnessed the waters wash away the produce stand across the four-lane Jonathan Creek Road before filling the road itself — then taking out the Coleman Mountain bridge a short ways downstream.

When the storm let up, people began to see the destruction and struggled to figure their next steps.

"I had traveling nurses from Mission (hospital) that were here trying to figure out how to get where they were going on their way back home," Sorrells said. "I've always been very accommodating to try to help people, I know the area, I know the roads, I know some connections and everything, but I felt helpless."

Sorrells was born and raised in Jonathan Creek, lived through the blizzard of 1993, and the floods of 2004. He's seen a lot of water but "never anything like this."

"We're hurt in this area, but they're devastated in other places in this county," Sorrells said. "But you know, people are resilient, and even though it's really bad and a lot of people lost a lot of stuff, they're holding up pretty good or seem to be and I've been aware of all the first responders, and all the rescues, and seen all that was going on and again, you have to have hats off to them."

Feeding people after the fallout

Serving up hot meals behind the counter at Sorrells Marathon Garage is Annie Lanning. Since the floods of Helene devastated Jonathan Creek, she's hardly been able to sleep without her mind racing over what she can do for her

community.

Her call to action was to feed people, whether it be a nice bowl of lunch at Sorrells or one of the big spaghetti dinners she cooked up last week — after working seven shifts in a row following the storm fallout.

"You're not going to hurt anything by helping people, that's always been my biggest thing," Lanning said. "You get back what you put out, it's up to you whether it's good or bad. If you be good to people, it comes back. There's people sitting out here at the picnic tables who don't even have a home to sit at, and I'm just like, 'just let them eat.' You know feed 'em, that's the only thing that I know to do."

Lanning, who lives in Iron Duff, said, 'Everybody's checked on everybody,' and seeing the communities come together has been heartwarming. However, having grown up on Jonathan Creek, witnessing the devastation of the place she loves and hearing stories from people coming into the store has been heart-wrenching.

"Cows going down the river, and mooing and nobody could get in there and save them," Lanning said.

"I've went home and cried because of people's animals, people. What really killed me is they had rafts they were putting in, the emergency people into the river, into J Creek and just trying to save people and seeing if they could find anybody because people weren't leaving their homes. I mean, it's hard to leave your home, its really, really hard to leave your home. I grew up on Beantown Road and right past that church right there, it went all the way up behind the church, the water did, and it was pouring down."

A day before the flood, Lanning took a picture on Coleman Mountain bridge with a caption about the storm coming. The next day, there was no bridge at all.

"As they always say, you don't know how good you have it until it's gone," Lanning said.

Trauma triggers from Tropical Storm Fred

Mandy West is a regular at Sorrells and good friend of Lanning's. Gathering at a picnic table outside she shows videos of her home in Dogwood Lake being flooded.

"We flooded so bad, it felt like our house was in the middle of the French Broad (river)," West said.

The experience was especially distressing for West who suffered a catastrophic work injury during Tropical Storm Fred that put her in a coma and burn unit for 30 days.

"When they came to evacuate us at 6:30 the other morning, the sirens and stuff freaked me out really bad," West said.

West was also worried about her mother, who lives nearby and relies on oxygen. Fortunately, just as her last oxygen tank was running low, the power came back on.

"I thought we were going to die. I have a lawyer friend ...and I texted her and said, 'if I die today, if I get anything, take care of my family," West said. "It flooded down there and it's really muddy and stuff, but still, we're better off than most people."

West's home doubles as an animal rescue where she cares for rescued dogs and 15 feral cats. Though only four of the cats had been inside the house, all were accounted for by the end of the storm, as the others had reached higher ground.

"I have an old Nissan Xterra that I used to take out trash and drive my dogs around in and it flooded. I got it started

briefly yesterday and then it killed out no power, so it probably ruined it," West said.

She said the only way she gets through hard trials is her people.

"I love my people, take care of them," West said. "When everything's lost, we have each other, that's it, that's all you got. Take it from somebody who lost it all."

Down the street at Winngray Campground, campers worked to restore what had taken 50 years to build, as a flooded front office reflected the hard work of generations. Meanwhile, employees shared their farewells for a dear friend lost during the storm.

A quilt with a message

Emergency Services were overwhelmed with rescues, and neither Wells Funeral Home nor Hospice Care could respond. As Hurricane Helene raged on, no one could come to the bedside of Kimberly Butler's dear friend, Marian Badgley, who passed away in hospice during the natural disaster. "Can I pronounce her?" Butler asked the funeral home over the phone.

Even though Butler is a nurse, she was told she couldn't officially pronounce Badgley's death.

With no power and the clock ticking, they needed to find a way to transport Badgley to the morgue at the hospital.

"My son and I wrapped her in a blanket, pulled her out, and my son had an old quilt of ours and wrapped her in it and put her in the car," Butler said. "When we looked down — I swear this is true, you can see my goosebumps — it said, 'God is love, He died for you,' on the quilt that we put on. We dropped her off at the hospital, and that was our last time."

As they took her on her final ride, they prayed.

"We drove, thought about her, and prayed because we haven't even been able to mourn yet. But it doesn't matter. My son said it wasn't planned, but she got the send-off that was loud, even though she wasn't," Butler said with a smile.

Badgley had fallen a week prior, breaking her hip, and they all knew the end was near.

"We said our goodbyes. The dog was on the bed. Sue, me, and my son, all of us said goodbye to her, and that night the storm came in," Butler said.

Badgley had been in charge of volunteer operations for the Alzheimer's Association in Haywood County, often calling The Mountaineer when events arose, and she also helped at Shady Grove.

A different route

Parked outside Winngray Campgrounds in Jonathan Creek, FedEx driver Cory Jenkins was making his first round of deliveries since the hurricane left trees down and bridges broken. The route he once knew had become unrecognizable.

"It's been slow. Power lines down. The trees, from getting up on Utah Mountain, from getting up, I have not been on Cove Creek, that's my next section that's going to be challenging," Jenkins said.

In the back of his van were stacks of packages, mostly food boxes or medicine.

"A lot of the packages are medications that people need, the elderly need, and if they don't find their way to their houses, I mean, it's going to suffer tremendously for the customers," Jenkins said.

In the Woodland Baptist Church parking lot, cars poured in from all corners of the county, as people gathered to receive bundles of essential aid after Hurricane Helene.

Alone during a flood

Lynn Eberidge heard about the distribution site from her landlord and was eager to get water, and was hoping to get winter clothes after all of hers were lost to the flooding.

"I haven't succeeded to do that, but I'm okay with that," Eberidge said. "I thank God for this church because they are a blessing to us, to the whole community. We need to pull together."

Eberidge lives off Charles Creek in Canton and was alone when the Pigeon River began to rise. Having witnessed her son lose his trailer and belongings in the 2021 floods — he now lives in Alabama — she knew what could be washed away.

"I wish there was someone there for me. But the lady next door, she lost her house, and across the street, she lost her house because of floods, and it scared me very badly," Eberidge said. "But I'm okay because I'm a very strong person. You gotta do what you got to do."

Thankfully, her neighbors were able to evacuate safely, and her family from Alabama has come to stay with her.

"I'm doing good, I'm doing better," Eberidge said. "We're helping each other. ... And thank God for Pathways and the missions around here."

Nearby, Lisa Fuller was making a supplies and food run for Grateful Table in Canton. The restaurant has coordinated with Woodland Baptist to get food to cook free meals for the community.

After the flooding destroyed her office in Biltmore Village, Fuller turned to helping her community, no longer able to return to work.

Getting what you can

Nathan Folse lives off the Pigeon River and watched from his front porch as the water began to rise.

"There's a stop sign at the end of our road, 8-feet tall or so, and it was completely covered before it got washed away," Folse recalled. "We were really lucky to have our house high up, but we saw lots of people's stuff floating down the river."

During the floods from Tropical Storm Fred in 2021, the water was far from his family's home, so they assumed it couldn't be much worse this time around.

"It was though, it was many feet higher than it was in 2021," Folse said. "It was scary, I didn't realize how serious it was. I was sort of out of the loop in the days leading up to the storm. We were pretty confident that our house was going to be fine."

Now, between neighbors and loved ones Folse said they're banding together as much as possible to conserve clean drinking water and other supplies.

"We've just been getting what we can when we can," he said.

Flooded with a fear of water

Off Israel Road in Canton, Kallie and Adrian Conley faced a different reality.

"We're flooded out bad," Kallie said. "We don't have a driveway, we don't have a road, we don't have nothing. No cellphone service, no power, no nothing."

With a pile of supplies on her lap, sitting in the car, Kallie said they wanted to stock up as much as possible before they evacuate out of state.

"That's why I've got all my dogs with me, I'm not leaving them behind — I've got a puppy up here and three in the back and I'm pregnant, and I've got three little ones. We're struggling bad," Kallie said.

She said she'll be 25 years old in January and has never experienced anything like the horrors of Helene.

"I'm very traumatized and I'm still scared," Kallie said. "I don't know how to swim because I have water terrors. So, it's even worse for me. And I already have PTSD and anxiety, so it doesn't really help."

She said a Unit 8 Search and Rescue squad reached her family's home, but the conditions were so dangerous that the team couldn't risk their lives attempting to bring in supplies. As a result, she and her family had to wait until the storm passed.

"We just waited, just praying, hoping that we were going to be OK, and then they came back four days later when it was all settled," Kallie said. "They did come knock on all our doors to make sure we were alive on the inside."

A manager in mayhem

Behind Clyde's Town Hall, Olivia Sampson watched her town being flooded.

"We saw in real time, the fire department being flooded, and the church being flooded, in the town hall, all the main road, and it was so fast. It happened so fast," Sampson said.

As the manager at Sonic Drive-In, Sampson stayed up late after her shift monitoring the weather. By 2:30 a.m., sirens sounded in Clyde, and her husband confirmed the river had overflowed.

An employee called, saying they were evacuating, but the signal soon cut out. The next day, Sampson found her employee's home under water. Although unable to access the shelter due to privacy restrictions, that employee eventually made contact and has been staying with Sonic staff ever since.

But Friday brought new worries when Sampson's grandparents ran out of oxygen, and she knew the backup tanks wouldn't last long. After scrambling for help, she brought them to the shelter, where they're now safe.

Sampson's home avoided flooding, and she has opened her doors to others who lost everything. "We have six people staying with us, sharing our amenities, while we figure out how to help," she said.

Sonic also set up a foundation for employees affected by the floods in Western North Carolina, and Sampson's location remains closed for now.

In Hazelwood, the air is thick with the dank smell of mud as house after house discards belongings, most dusted in brown silt.

Childhood home gone

For a little over 60 years James Haney lived in his home in Hazelwood. In one day, it was gone.

"I was raised here; this was my mom and dad's. We moved here in March of '64, and I bought it from my mom back in '04," Haney said.

He recalled the flooding from Hurricane Ivan in 2004, but he noted that was just a drop in the bucket compared to now.

"It got maybe 2.5 to 3 inches on the floors. I ripped up the carpet and replaced everything. This time, it was about 3.5 feet," Haney explained.

At 6 a.m. Friday morning, his friend called, but Haney had already been awake since 4 a.m.

"We checked the creek; it was still in the banks, maybe a foot, foot and a half out. So I went back to bed. I went back to sleep, and he called at six o'clock and woke me up," Haney recalled. "He asked me, 'How bad is it getting you?' and I said, 'Well, I don't really know; I ain't looked in a couple of hours.'"

When Haney finally looked out back, he saw the water had poured into the yard and was soon lapping at the house.

He got his grandson out of bed, who needed some convincing on his day off, until Haney explained the reason.

"We got out before it got real bad," Haney said.

He has plans to rebuild.

"We all got out alright. All this, it's like they say, is just material stuff. Whatever. As long as I'm alive and they're out, that's all I ask for," Haney said. Since then, he's had help from friends and family to clear out the house.

"I guess I really don't let stuff upset me. I've always been that way. I've had to work hard all my life, so it's just another day to me," Haney said. "That's the way I look at it: just another day. As long as I keep getting up, I keep moving forward."

In Bethel, a water truck was stationed outside Jukebox Junction, while hot meals were served inside.

An unsuspecting gift

Paul Lott, one of the owners of Jukebox Junction in Bethel, returned to the restaurant to find the lower level wiped out by the flood.

"All downstairs is gone," Lott said. "We'll figure out how to rebuild, if we come back this time. It was quick—the whole breaker box was flooded, but surprisingly, the freezer and refrigerator kept working, so the product was still good. The next day, though, things started glitching. We moved items to our ice cream cooler, but all the ice cream

melted. We should've had an ice cream giveaway."

Despite the damage, Lott said they are blessed. By the Monday after the hurricane, the restaurant was serving hot meals to locals.

In addition to the restaurant, Lott also runs a small farm with mushrooms, honey bees, and crops. Though the flood took a toll, he remains hopeful.

"The bees are doing what bees do—nature finds a way," he said. Although the flood wiped out his cornfield, it allowed his mushroom logs to become saturated, making them ready for harvest, he added. "This week, I've had a boom of mushrooms. We just served shiitake mushrooms with our hamburger steaks, and I'm calling it a gift. We were able to feed people not just with nutritious, but also medicinal mushrooms. I credit a higher power for making that connection possible."

Evacuating into the tempest

Jason Allen of Bethel thought he could escape the storm by heading to Asheville, unaware he was traveling straight into the storm's ground zero.

"I stayed at my sister's house, which took on about five feet of water in the basement. There's still no power or water, and three streets within a block and a half are lined with trees toppled over power lines," Allen said. "The River Arts District has been erased. It's crazy. I have friends in Swannanoa who lost everything."

Allen lives in a converted bus and feared it would be completely wiped out. He wanted to drive it to Asheville, but it wouldn't start. Now, he faces the challenge of gutting his bus again before it can run.

"It'll still drive; it just needs new batteries, but everything inside got wet," Allen said.

At Maggie Fly Fishing Shop, locals pack care bags for distribution while sharing their stories from the hurricane.

It's like snowing in Miami

Joan Kaywell and Frank Johnson are from Florida but found themselves stuck in the mountains of Maggie Valley when the worst hurricane they had ever experienced hit.

"I've lived in Florida for 61 years and weathered countless hurricanes, but I've never seen the devastation I've witnessed here," Johnson said. It wasn't until their friends from the Maggie Fly Fishing shop came knocking that anyone was able to contact the couple. For three days, they navigated a route out, since Evans Cove Road was impassable.

"He has a heart problem, so I wanted to ensure we could access help in case of a medical emergency," Kaywell said. "We had to take a back road through Miss Caroline's Wedding Chapel, and you really have to be cautious going through there."

Having lived through hurricanes before, including one where Kaywell's brother went missing for two days, they drew on their past experiences.

"Florida has been through a lot, and we're used to it, but the mountains?" Kaywell questioned. "My future sister-inlaw asked, "Why didn't the people of Asheville evacuate like we do in Florida?" I told her it's because this was unprecedented." "It's like snowing in Miami; you just don't expect it—not like this," Johnson added. "But, I love mountain people; they all pull together."

"I was afraid to look up"

Landon Henley of Maggie Valley doesn't think he'll ever be the same after the horrific scenes he's witnessed since Hurricane Helene struck.

"The devastation is unbelievable. There's towns that are gone, there's homes that are gone. I saw a FedEx driver this morning driving around looking for a house and I went and asked who they were looking for, and I said, 'That house is not here anymore,' and she said, 'I'll take it back with the others,' so if that tells you where we're at with the community, it's everything," Henley said.

He believes the news hasn't fully captured the extent of the devastation.

"I think I'm going to have some PTSD from it," Henley said. "The only sleep I have gotten has been really restless. The only way we can cope is to turn to the Lord."

Though Henley is from Maggie Valley, he joined forces with the Cajun Navy — a Louisiana-based rescue group that responds to natural disasters — lending tools from his construction company and clearing paths for rescues. His efforts extended beyond Haywood County, reaching areas like Black Mountain and Swannanoa.

At times, he feared looking up, uncertain of what he might see.

"We've been over there clearing the roads out, and just trying not to look up — because there's bodies in the trees. The news doesn't make it out to be as bad as it really is. It's terrible. There's children running around naked asking for their parents, over in Swannanoa and Black Mountain," Henley said.

"We were able to save a lot of people, which I'm very blessed and thankful for. On this side of the county it's not nearly as bad as some other people got it."

One of the toughest challenges was clearing roads that were washed out or blocked by fallen trees, with no way to know what lay ahead.

"You don't know what's up ahead of you. You don't know if someone's taking their last breaths a hundred yards from you and there's nothing you can do about it," Henley said. "I guess that's the thing I've struggled the most with — I feel like I should be doing more, and I think that's where everybody is. Everybody just feels like they should be doing more, and in reality, there's not much more we can do."

In Clyde, piles of belongings from homes and businesses line the curb, a stark testament to the losses along Old Clyde Road.

Will I go into labor?

With the threat of flooding looming, the possibility that she could go into labor at any moment made the experience even more intense for Savannah Hatherlee.

"I was here by myself when they did the siren to evacuate, and I was terrified," Hatherlee said, recalling that her partner was at work that morning.

The couple had moved into the apartments — now with a flooded first floor — just two months prior.

"When we found I was pregnant we needed a two-bedroom place, so we found this one," Hatherlee said.

After the 4 a.m. siren sounded, she was quick to drive to her grandmother's house in Canton and was safe through the storm. Now, Hatherlee's family is the only tenant left in the apartment.

"We're the only ones living here right now, even the people on the second floor have moved out. I don't know if they're coming back, because there's no power. But we kind of have to stay here right now," she said.

Delayed hair cuts

Lora Nelson and her family loaded the last of the salon chairs into a now-vacant Superior Cuts on Depot Street in Clyde. Like many business owners weathering Helene, her livelihood was swept away by the storm.

"We're self-employed and we can't get money until we get back to work and we're sort of waiting on permits, and our hands are sort of tied because what's the next step? We got our building cleaned, and we want to get back to work as soon as we can," Nelson said of her and her business partner.

Despite placing sandbags around the store, the storm raged on, wiping nearly everything out.

By 10:30 a.m. Friday, the building seemed fine, but by 11 a.m., it was completely under water.

"It was way over the sandbags, you can see the line on the building," Nelson said. "And we lost everything inside, we were able to confiscate a few things. Like our chairs and stuff, we were able to take a part, but just clippers, all that, just gone."

Customers help clean up

Last week, Amy Russell and Lisa Monteith were making progress on cleaning out their two flooded business locations. They gave much of the credit to loyal customers who had dropped by with heavy equipment to scrape out the mud, pizzas to feed the work crews, and help get K-9 Curriculum back in business. Russell, who is also a Clyde governing board member, was cheerful despite the circumstances.

She said it wasn't until she spoke with her mama that she broke down and cried.

Plans were to consolidate the two buildings and operate only the Main Street location.

Until then, Country Lane has offered Monteith the use of its building to continue the dog grooming aspect of the business, and a yard behind the store will continue to serve as the training area.

"It's been just amazing," Russell said. "From the very first day, people were stopping by to check on us, helping us clean. It's all been from our customers."

One saving grace

In the 35 years Ricky Jones has lived along the banks of the Pigeon River in Clyde, he's been flooded three times. He

doesn't count a fourth time that many others do since the 2004 flood events by Frances and Ivan were just 11 days apart.

There was 5 feet of water in his home in 2004 and 15 inches during Tropical Storm Fred.

This one, though, was by far the worst.

"I never thought I'd see water almost cover the roof," Davis said.

As he surveyed the inside of his home, there was nothing but a soggy mess of mangled furniture, personal effects — all he owned.

Surveying the damage, he said this will be the last flood that he will be part of in Clyde. With everything destroyed and a job in Brevard, it's time to move on.

The one saving grace occurred during a single pass he made through the house to retrieve any personal papers he could find. He was particularly interested to see whether his family Bible made it through the storm.

It turned out to be the one salvageable item in his home — and didn't look a bit worse for the wear.

"Look at this," he said. "You can read every word."

No tears this time

The first time Randy Burrell's building in Canton was flooded in 2021, he dropped to his knees and cried. This time, all he could do was count his blessings and hope the next time wouldn't be as bad.

"I said 'everyone has been through this before, my friends around this area downtown, and we'll come back, as they say, Canton Strong. But I couldn't believe it was so pervasive," Burrell said.

"Everyone is together in this deal, and you know who your friends are when an event like this happens and, thank God, between me and my son, we've got a lot of good friends, more than the ones you can count on five fingers."

Randy's son, Boyd, was in the building when the water started to rise. He tried to save as many tools and equipment as possible before the storm hit.

"We did what we could, moving the heavy equipment and vehicles," Boyd said.

Boyd had stayed overnight, but was startled awake when alarms went off, signaling the flood. He looked down at the concrete floor, which had turned brown, and realized water had started seeping in.

"I stepped in it before I could even put on shoes," Boyd said. He put on waders and watched as light objects, like papers, stayed in place while heavy items like barrels began floating around.

The neighbors across the street cheered as he sloshed his way through rising water. But no sooner did he cross the road, than he realized he had left the key fob to his car inside the warehouse — he would have to go back in.

When he went back, he grabbed his key, guitar and a mini hat he had embellished for a little kid across the street — who gave a gleeful "hat, hat" when he realized what was in his hand.

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Milll sale in limbo due to storm: Pactiv Evergreen sues prospective buyer

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Pactiv Evergreen is suing the potential purchaser of its Canton paper mill property, trying to force the sale to completion and saying the purchase agreement remains legally binding.

That purchaser, E.J. Spirtas Group and Two Banks Development, backed away from closing the sale on the Canton site immediately following record flooding by Hurricane Helene on Sept. 27. Now Pactiv Evergreen has turned to the courts to ensure the terms of the purchase agreement are followed.

The complaint was filed in Delaware against Two Banks Development, LLC and E.J. Spirtas Group, LLC.

Two Banks is a corporation formed by Spirtas owner Eric Spirtas as part of the purchase and development of the mill property.

Pactiv Evergreen also operates under the name Blue Ridge Paper Products, the company it purchased that was the former owner of the Canton mill.

"Spirtas first notified Pactiv Evergreen on Sept. 26 that they refused to close without major changes to the fully negotiated and signed agreement," Pactiv Evergreen wrote in response to questions from The Mountaineer. "We are pursuing all legal avenues to enforce our rights to ensure Spirtas fulfills their obligations to complete this transaction."

By Thursday, Sept. 26, in Haywood County, water levels were rising as Hurricane Helene was zeroing in on Western North Carolina, with the majority of rain falling through the night. Around midday Friday the Pigeon River broke all flood records, engulfing much of Canton and most all of the paper mill property.

Photos of the mill appear to indicate the September 2024 storm has damaged the property, including the wastewater treatment plant. As of this publication, almost two weeks after the storm, that treatment plant is not operating properly. (See related story on Page A2.)

The legal complaint alleges Two Banks/Spirtas agreed to purchase the Canton Mill site and assets on an "as -is, where-is" basis.

"To Blue Ridge's shock and dismay, just days before the deal was to close, defendants began making a series of evolving and baseless arguments to back out of the contract ...," the document states.

The suit refers to a Sept. 26 letter from Two Banks that indicated a 50% reduction in the purchase price would be needed for the sale to go through.

"Two Banks argued that it should receive this reduction because of a disagreement it was having with the town over a wastewater treatment services contract it was assuming as part of the deal, a purportedly surprising property tax bill, and other minor matters," the complaint reads. The suit also claims the buyer knew of these issues well before the sales agreement was finalized.

The complaint accuses the buyer of using the tragedy of Hurricane Helene as a final excuse for breaking the original agreement.

"On Sept. 29, Two Banks demanded a "substantial reduction in the purchase price" and an extension of the closing

date, while also making clear that they would not 'proceed with closing under the original terms' of the agreement," the documents state.

The suit claims the buyer agreed to take the risk that the site could be destroyed or damaged in the period between signing the sales agreement and closing. Under the deal, it states, Spirtas/Two Banks would not require the seller to repair any damage to the site, but would receive any insurance payouts on the mill.

In the suit, Pactiv attorneys argue that unwinding the agreement would put the company in the impossible position of having to operate the wastewater treatment facility and other operations at the Canton Mill site indefinitely. Blue Ridge may be unable to find another buyer with matched experience and expertise, it states.

Even if Pactiv could identify an alternative buyer with similar experience and expertise, it would be required to invest more resources and time to socialize the new buyer with the town, and there is no guarantee that the alternative candidate would be satisfactory to the town, the legal document states.

Before the May decision to negotiate exclusively with Spirtas Worldwide to sell its Canton mill and associated properties, Pactiv Evergreen said the company was one of 30 competing to buy the Canton site. At the time, Pactiv Evergreen spokesperson Beth Kelly said Spirtas' wide experience working with closed paper mill sites, plus having funds in hand, gave the company an edge.

When contacted Thursday night, Eric Spirtas said he'd be able to provide a response in time to accompany this story. The response did not arrive before press deadline.

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On a mission to feed the masses, Eight Days of Hope rolls into Canton

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Eight Days of Hope rolls from one disaster to the next, providing hot meals and hot showers to victims of Mother Nature's wrath. Following Helene, they rolled into Canton to help with victims of the storm.

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Becky Johnson, 'On a mission to feed the masses, Eight Days of Hope rolls into Canton', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C19B5D6A742230



Haywood's athletic fields suffer massive damage across county

October 9, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Aarik Long | Section: Sports | 223 Words OpenURL Link

While Pisgah Memorial Stadium will get most of the attention following flooding from Helene, Haywood County Schools are dealing with numerous fields with extensive damage.

Alongside the football field in Canton, both Pisgah and Canton Middle's softball and baseball fields took severe damage. Tuscola's baseball and softball fields also had significant damage.

The fields were looked over on Tuesday to assess damages. An engineer will also be coming out to check on the wiring and electrical set ups for those fields.

The hope is that play will be able to take place on all of the fields in the spring.

"We can't guarantee anything because there's always a lot of variables, but we'll do our best to make that happen," Assistant Superintendent Graham Haynes said.

The cost for most of the repairs is expected to come from insurance on the facilities, but the fields themselves are not insure-able.

"Fencing, dugouts, any kinds of buildings would be covered by insurance. The fields themselves are not," Haynes said. "The fields will have to be assessed, repaired and fixed where needed. Some of that we may have to rely on FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency) for."

There is one advantage the district has in repairing the baseball and softball fields that they don't have with trying to quickly repair Pisgah Memorial Stadium.

"We've got a little more time with those," Haynes said.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Aarik Long, 'Haywood's athletic fields suffer massive damage across county', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C19B5D714670E0



New playoff schedule set for high school sports

October 9, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Aarik Long | Section: Sports | 354 Words OpenURL Link

The North Carolina High School Athletics Association decided Wednesday morning on how the fall sports season will proceed following the devastation from Helene.

Several sports will see postseasons pushed back, and the limit on the number of games that can be played in a single week will be raised.

In football, playoffs have been pushed back one week. Previously, only one game could be scheduled per week for football. Now, there just needs to be at least three days between contests — opening the door for some weekday makeup games as the season winds down.

Soccer will move playoffs back five days and the reporting deadline back seven days. A change was also made to allow up to four matches per week — a step up from the previous limit of three in a week.

Volleyball's playoffs and reporting deadline both moved back three days.

The change shifts each playoff round back to the scheduled date of the following playoff round. For example, the first round is played when the second round would have been, the second round is played when the third round would have been. This applies until regionals, which will be held on Oct. 31 instead of Oct. 29. State championships remain on Nov. 2.

Volleyball also got an increase in the number of games they can play in a week. That limit was previously four matches in a week but has been increased to eight matches. The daily limit of four matches still applies.

The tennis individual championships will have the reporting deadline pushed from 3 p.m. Oct. 14 to 11:59 p.m. that same night. The tennis team championships will be pushed back seven days through each round.

Cross country's reporting deadline moved back three days to Oct. 22, The regional championships remain on Oct. 26 and state championships remain on Nov. 2.

Girls golf rescheduled two of its three conference rounds, but will have a reduction in the required rounds to qualify for regionals. Typically, it's a minimum of five nine-hole scores. That has been reduced to three nine-hole scores.

Cheerleading has no changes.

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Citation (aglc Style)

Aarik Long, 'New playoff schedule set for high school sports', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C1B2E415559FC8



Raw sewage going into Pigeon after Canton wastewater plant damaged by flood

October 9, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 232 Words OpenURL Link

Flood waters and mud from Hurricane Helene have overwhelmed Canton's wastewater treatment system, releasing raw sewage into the Pigeon River.

Pactiv Evergreen acknowledged the wastewater treatment system had been breached, as was the case in previous floods. Raw sewage began being discharged directly into the Pigeon River starting at 7:08 a.m. Friday, Sept. 27.

"Pactiv Evergreen is committed to restoring wastewater treatment service to the town as quickly as possible. We thank our hardworking team in Canton for their unwavering commitment and dedication to restoring operations and supporting the local Canton community," the statement read.

Pactiv Evergreen still owns the treatment plants as of today," Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers said Tuesday. "My understanding is, they suffered a large amount of damage to the treatment plant, and that they are currently repairing it." A contractor who supplies machine parts to the mill's wastewater plant, Michael Indimine of Canton, has seen the ongoing work at the site. He said repairs to the wastewater treatment plant are in good hands with the seasoned workers who stayed on to run the facility after the mill shut down.

"They are all Cantonites. They know what they are doing," he said. "They are the ones who dug out in 2021, even though it's worse than 2021. They are staying and being responsible for it. The guys on the ground have all taken responsibility and are stepping up. They are good people."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Writer, 'Raw sewage going into Pigeon after Canton wastewater plant damaged by flood', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C19B5D3489A560



Haywood more prepared and further along in recovery than most of WNC

October 9, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Becky Johnson | Section: News | 861 Words OpenURL Link

Haywood County was better prepared for Hurricane Helene than the rest of WNC thanks to a been-there-done-that mentality from past floods.

"The lessons learned from Tropical Storm Fred did make a difference this time. Haywood County was the best prepared to deal with this," Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers said during a joint press conference with N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper Friday. "Instead of hours, we had days and we took advantage of that. Still, there's only so much you can do when 28 feet of water comes through your hometown."

Smathers noted how businesses were able to save inventory by moving it out of the storm's path ahead of time, making the road to reopening easier.

The early planning also helped save lives. Haywood County had five known fatalities as of Oct. 8, compared to 230 known fatalities across the storm's footprint.

"I am so impressed with the preparation that was done here, understanding what storms could do, but not expecting the magnitude of the storm that actually hit," Cooper said.

Haywood County is also further along in recovery. Even before the first raindrop fell, a comprehensive response plan ready to roll out as soon as the storm lifted — from quickly repairing washed out roads, searching for survivors, and pushing food and supplies into the affected communities.

"We have power back on, water back on, and we are eager to get out there and start helping our neighbors," Smathers said. "They had our back three years ago, and we will have their back now."

Smathers said it's what mountain folk do.

"This is one mountain family, and there is something special about mountain folk. We know what it is to have the odds stacked against us, but we endure and keep going. These are tough times but mountain people are tougher," he said.

Tour through Haywood

Gov. Cooper was joined by an entourage of high-level state and federal officials during a swing through the flood-ravaged counties of Western North Carolina, including the head of FEMA and the N.C. Secretaries of Public Safety and Health and Human Services.

"What I see in Canton is the best of people in the worst of times," Cooper said. "This town has so many dedicated, resilient and determined people."

A swarm of state and national media tagged along as the group toured Canton's supply distribution site for storm victims, walked the streets of downtown Canton talking with flooded out merchants, talked with Haywood County Schools officials, and held dual press conferences at Pisgah Memorial Stadium and the Haywood County Sheriff's Office.

One of the stops was Riverview Farm and Garden in downtown Canton — where Cooper fist-bumped two middle schoolers volunteering with clean up.

"We need some help," owner Chris Watkins said, shaking Cooper's hand.

"I know you do," Cooper told him. "It is mind boggling what the situation is across all of Western North Carolina."

During a press conference up the street on Pisgah's field, Cooper pledged state assistance in the recovery and rebuilding process.

"We are committed 24-7 around the clock to make sure Western North Carolina recovers," he said.

He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket, unfolded it, and read from a list of resources the state has put on the ground.

"It goes from water to medical cots to swift water rescue teams to nurses to canine search teams, hazmat specialists, highwater clearance vehicles, cellular on wheels, ambulance strike team," Cooper said. "It's amazing what you take for granted when you no longer have it, and now we have to work to make sure it gets back up to speed again."

Smathers praised Cooper and the state for being on the ground pre-flood and continual assistance since.

Smathers said gathering at Pisgah Stadium was symbolic of the Haywood Strong motto.

"We're still here," Smathers said. "That's important for our citizens and neighbors to hear."

Cooper held the honor of the coin toss for the first game played on Pisgah's home field last year following flood repairs from 2021.

During those repairs, the electrical box was mounted five feet higher than the high-water mark in 2021, per FEMA advice. But the water got the electrical box this time anyway, by a good two feet, Smathers said.

He asked that the state specifically set aside funding for the school system, which again had facility damage along with the havoc wreaked on the athletic fields across the county.

School board members David Burnette and Ronnie Clark, and Assistant Superintendents Jill Barker and Graham Haynes had a chance to speak directly with the governor during his visit.

"I think he understands," Burnette said. "I think we'll get help."

The governor briefly touched on the communication challenges that have all but paralyzed certain parts of the disaster response where not even emergency workers could communicate with each other.

The immediate push is to get the systems up, which is an "hour by hour" challenge, Cooper said.

At the Haywood County Sheriff's Office, Cooper and the other officials held a meet-and-greet with leaders from Clyde and Waynesville, sat in on a private briefing with emergency services, and shook the hands of emergency responders and firefighters.

"It's an honor to be here with the heroes, hearing the stories of first responders who went into water to pull people out of their homes, saving their lives," Cooper said.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Becky Johnson, 'Haywood more prepared and further along in recovery than most of WNC', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C19B5D313002B0



New site in the cards for Pisgah stadium?

October 9, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Aarik Long | Section: Sports | 700 Words OpenURL Link

For the second time in just over three years, Pisgah Memorial Stadium has been ravaged by flooding. This time, however, the stadium could be set for a much guicker comeback — albeit temporary.

The Haywood County Board of Education on Monday approved plans to attempt to get the facility back up and running. Those plans include cleaning and repairing the Astroturf and the fence around the field itself, work that began on Tuesday. The contract is for 12 days.

Work will also be done on the electrical components and ensuring that the stands are safe for spectators.

"There's a hope," Assistant Superintendent Graham Haynes said on returning to Pisgah Memorial Stadium this season. "If we can make the structural engineer's timeline work and the integrity of the home side checks out, then we should be able to get back on Pisgah Memorial Field in a few weeks. That's our goal."

However, this round of flooding, the fourth in just over 20 years, has prompted the board to begin to consider moving the facility.

"The plan is to move the stadium — to relocate," Haynes said. "The board and we realized the kids need a place to play now. It's impossible to renovate and relocate at the same time. The board is dedicated to finding a new home for Pisgah Memorial Stadium due to the fact that it has flooded so many times."

Currently, it's too early in the process to know where the stadium could move.

"We've talked about stuff in the past, but I think this happening again has really put the emphasis on moving," Haynes said. "We'll have to evaluate sites and possibilities. We'll also have to figure out funding."

The repairs to the turf and fence around the field will cost over \$300,000. Luckily for Haywood County Schools, the majority of that will be covered by insurance. There is a \$100,000 deductible the school system will have to meet, but everything beyond that will be covered.

"We're going to fix it. We're going to play there," Haynes said. "But we're going to simultaneously be looking to relocate as soon as possible."

The fence around the entire stadium will have to be repaired, as well.

"It should be covered by insurance as well. We'll get some quotes on that and get moving," Haynes said.

Pisgah head football coach Ricky Brindley went down to the field the morning of the flood. On his first visit, flood waters had not reached the field, but on a return visit, he witnessed the waters sweeping through the bleachers and over the turf.

"Walking around and just looking, I was devastated," Brindley said. "But not for myself — for our community and our kids, especially those seniors that were looking forward to finishing up the conference season with several games at home and hoping to play at home in the playoffs. I'm very frustrated for them — very upset for them."

Brindley spent his high school years playing on the field at Pisgah Memorial Stadium.

"This atmosphere down here on this river — playing on the banks of the Pigeon River is something that you can't duplicate," he said. "The fact that I was able to do it as a player and a coach makes it that much more special for me."

The players are itching to get back on the field, as well.

"They're ready to go," Brindley said. "They're excited about being able to prepare and play. I've had many of them tell me 'We're going to play somebody somewhere.' Hopefully, they're going to get the best version of us."

Football also provides the Pisgah players with a much-needed escape from the chaos surrounding them following Helene.

"To be able to put all of their focus and all of their energy into what we're trying to accomplish as a team is something that's needed," Brindley said.

The players got just what they wanted on Monday as they returned to practice.

On Friday, the team will take the field at Bethel Middle School. They'll host West Henderson in the Bears' first game since Sept. 20.

"We've got options," Brindley said. "Bethel to me has a fantastic facility now with the turf and the new bathrooms and concession stands. We'll play somewhere, and hopefully our seniors will get a great finish to their season."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Aarik Long, 'New site in the cards for Pisgah stadium?', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C19B5D7781D2D8



What is going to happen with the County Clash football game?

October 9, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Aarik Long | Section: Sports | 285 Words OpenURL Link

The annual County Clash football game between Tuscola and Pisgah high schools is currently scheduled for next Friday, Oct. 18.

That game, which typically draws more than 10,000 fans, was supposed to be hosted by Pisgah. That is all up in the air now, after flooding from Helene brought significant damage to the Bears' home stadium.

"We are diligently working to make all necessary repairs and considering an alternative date," said Haywood County Schools Superintendent Dr. Trevor Putnam. "We are considering all options."

Typically, preparations for the game begin weeks in advance. Tickets go on sale in-person the Monday before the game, but are typically available online before that. This year, ticket sales have not yet begun.

On top of that, food for the concession stand must be purchased and schools have to figure out which staff are working the game.

That seems like a monumental task in 10 days, especially since school doesn't even resuming until next Tuesday — which would leave just a four-day window.

One option is to reschedule County Clash later in the season, potentially allowing Pisgah Memorial Stadium to undergo the repairs needed. Pisgah missed hosting the County Clash for its normal rotation in 2020 because of Covid (though the game was played with a limited capacity in the spring), and 2022 because damage to the field from flooding in 2021.

Finding a date later in the season could depend on whether North Carolina High School Athletic Association agrees to delay playoffs. Multiple school districts in Region 8 (the 17 westernmost counties in the state) have asked to delay playoffs.

"We are awaiting a decision from the North Carolina High School Athletic Association about the possibility of delaying the start of playoffs for region eight," Putnam said.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Aarik Long, 'What is going to happen with the County Clash football game?', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C19B5D7AEF6700



Hope After Helene: Car show, donation drive set for Autumn Leaves Festival

October 9, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Staff Report | Section: News | 292 Words

OpenURL Link

Many groups in this part of the state have decided to take up collections of donated goods to support those in the Western parts of the state who are recuperating from the aftermath of Helene.

During the Autumn Leaves Festival this week, there will be several events at Veteran's Park, 691 W. Lebanon St., Mount Airy, that will double as fundraising and collection events for Helene relief.

Chasing SS Cars & Vintage Steel are hosting a three-day car and bike show with a swap meet at Veteran's Park. The event kicks off Thursday morning at 8 a.m. and runs until 5 p.m. with the same hours of operation on Friday and Saturday as well.

Admission to the event is \$3 on Thursday, \$5 for Friday, and \$7 for admission to Saturday's events; kids under the age of 12 are admitted free of charge. Saturday will include a judged card, truck, and bike show with a \$15 entry fee. Also, vendor spaces can be secured for \$30.

Finally, the group is hosting a Model Car Contest on Saturday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. for ages fourteen and under. Prizes will be awarded to the top three finishers in each class.

To learn more about the car show, model car contest, or swap meet contact Erik Herdman at 540-577-9672.

Chasing SS Cars partnered with Alliance Bible Fellowship and Samaritan's Purse for a collection drive to gather supplies for both residents of Western North Carolina and those still involved in rescue or cleanup operations.

By now, the requested items list for those in the disaster zone may be familiar to many. For those who are not sure what to donate the group recommended water, canned food, pet food, first aid supplies, feminine hygiene items, baby formula, diapers, gloves, and socks.

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Staff Report, 'Hope After Helene: Car show, donation drive set for Autumn Leaves Festival', *Mt. Airy News, The* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C1B4AD03E6B010



Parkway woes may benefit Surry

October 9, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Tom Joyce tjoyce@mtairynews,com| Section: News | 437 Words OpenURL Link

Aside from all the other impacts from Hurricane Helene is the effect on the tourism economy, including the leaf season along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

However, the Parkway's losses could be Surry County's gains in light of closures announced, one local official believes.

At last report during the weekend, officials of the scenic highway meandering through western North Carolina announced that the Parkway is remaining closed for its entire length.

This has been done to enable crews to continue their assessment of the damage from Hurricane Helene.

Meanwhile, the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation has decided to close all state parks west of Interstate 77 through at least Oct. 31.

This includes Stone Mountain State Park nearby.

The shutdown of state parks, also key autumn destinations, has occurred so state personnel can assist with emergency and rescue efforts in western North Carolina.

Operations are being scaled back across the state to allow staffs to continue to assist with critical deployments.

Local opportunity

While no one is voicing a desire to capitalize on others' misfortunes, there could be a silver lining in the disruption of opportunities for viewing red, yellow and orange leaf hews this fall.

"Mount Airy and Surry County remains open and offers an incredible opportunity for visitors to experience the beauty of fall foliage, festivals and events even while portions of the Blue Ridge Parkway are closed and undergoing recovery," explained local tourism official Jessica Roberts.

"The scenic backroads of Surry are perfect for those looking for an alternative to the Parkway for fall foliage," added Roberts, the executive director of the Mount Airy Tourism Development Authority and the Tourism Partnership of Surry County.

She said the end result can be the same.

"The autumn colors are usually just as breathtaking, and our roads lead to many gems — vineyards, restaurants, charming small towns, local farms and outdoor trails that offer a true taste of North Carolina's fall beauty."

Coupled with the closure of state parks in the area, Roberts said Mount Airy/Surry County wants to be a resource for locals and visitors coming to this vicinity.

"And at the Mount Airy Visitors Center we are making sure our staff is aware and promoting our scenic byways in the area, including the Sauratown Scenic Byway, Yadkin Valley Scenic Byway, Surry Scenic Bikeway routes and other various beautiful country roads with stops along the way," Roberts advised. In the coming weeks, Blue Ridge Parkway assessment teams will utilize the data from their inspections to determine the full extent of the damage, including the timeline and cost estimates for repairs.

A projected reopening date of any section of the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina had not been established at last report.

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Board hears of Surry County's Helene response efforts

October 9, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Ryan Kelly | Section: News | 988 Words OpenURL Link

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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NCHSAA announces schedule modifications for Fall Sports

October 9, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Cory Smith | Section: Sports | 559 Words

OpenURL Link

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

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

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

Women's Tennis

Individual

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

Regionals: October 18-19

State Championships: October 25-26

Dual Team

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

Seeding: October 18

First Round: October 21

Second Round: October 23

Third Round: October 28

Fourth Round: October 30

Regionals: November 5

State Championships: November 9

Volleyball

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

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

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

First Round: October 22

Second Round: October 24

Third Round: October 26

Fourth Round: October 29

Regionals: October 31

State Championships: November 2

Cross Country

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

Regionals: October 26

State Championships: November 2

Men's Soccer

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

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

Seeding: November 7

First round: November 9

Second Round: November 12

Third Round: November 14

Fourth Round: November 16

Regionals: November 19

State Championships: November 22-23

Women's Golf

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

No calendar changes

Cheerleading

No calendar changes

Football

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

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

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

First round: November 15

Second round: November 22

Third round: November 29

Fourth round: December 6

Regionals: December 13

State Championships: December 20-21

Special Provision

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

Prior approval from NCHSAA

The contest cannot exceed the daily or weekly limitations

The contest must exceed the season limit for both schools

The contest MUST NOT be entered into MaxPreps

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Cory Smith, 'NCHSAA announces schedule modifications for Fall Sports', *Mt. Airy News, The* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C1F18EF9E10FF8>



In Helene's aftermath, FEMA teams now search for victims

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Adam Wagner; The Charlotte Observer Section: News 1010 Words

Page: 15A OpenURL Link

SWANNANOA, N.C. When the excavator's claws clenched and lifted the white Dodge Charger out of the Swannanoa River on Sunday, brown water and mud poured from its undercarriage.

Once the car had landed on the ground with a loud thunk, four men dressed in blue swarmed it with crowbars and shovels. These were members of Maryland Task Force One, a federally funded Montgomery County, Maryland-based urban search-and-rescue team that has been part of FEMA's response to Helene.

FEMA has sent more than 1,200 urban search-and-rescue personnel to North Carolina as part of the Helene response.

On Sunday, part of that task force was scrambling across a hillside on the southern bank of the Swannanoa River, just east of the Whitson Avenue Bridge. They were looking for people who died during Helene, as search team dogs had indicated there could be human remains in the Dodge Charger partially sunk into the bank and in the debris of a structure that had been smashed against the U.S. 70 embankment by the floodwaters.

Moving brush and debris

Largely using chainsaws, team members dismantled what was left of the building. They pulled off a piece of sheet metal here, lifted a two-by-four wood plank away there, quickly but methodically taking the ruins apart to try to find whatever the dog had smelled.

Before Helene, the area where the team worked had been a forested bank of the Swannanoa, tucked between the river and U.S. 70.

Now, many of the trees had fallen and cars were littered throughout the area, some of them tossed onto their sides by a river that had risen to historic levels. It was impossible to tell what building the long ribbons of sheet metal high up in the trees had started on, or whether they'd started nearby at all.

Many of those cars were marked with a spray-painted X. That's a sign that the car or structure has been searched.

When members of the search team enter the structure, they spray paint a slash mark to indicate that they're in it. They also spray paint the date and time. When they leave, they put another slash, along with the number of people found there and symbols for any known hazards, Robert Lipp, a FEMA spokesman, explained as he walked past several buildings and cars marked with different colors of paint.

That's partially for safety, in case something happens while the searcher is inside the building, and partially to keep rescue teams from duplicating efforts.

Teams have helped more than 6,500 people

As of Sunday afternoon, nearly 50 search-and-rescue teams working in Western North Carolina had rescued, evacuated or helped 6,586 people, according to a release from Gov. Roy Cooper's office.

While the unofficial death toll from Helene is well over 100 in North Carolina, Cooper's office said 77 deaths have been confirmed by the state medical examiner's office. That number will rise as the Maryland team and others like

it locate victims.

"It's one of those things where somebody's got to do it and we hate to see a disaster happen, but the majority of us are firemen, and if there's a disaster and somebody needs to help, we want it to be us," Josh Kurland, the leader of Maryland Task Force One, told The News & Observer.

Kurland's team was originally deployed to Georgia on Sept. 25, arriving by noon the next day. Helene hit in the early hours of the 27th, and Maryland Task Force One was woken up at 4 a.m. to respond to a two-story brick building that had collapsed in Valdosta, Georgia.

After working there for two days, the team was sent to Cherokee, North Carolina. Operating from, they worked in Haywood County for two days before being sent to Swannanoa.

A typical day right now in Helene's response lasts from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., with a lengthy drive on each end.

"They're long days," Kurland said, also acknowledging that at this point there are fewer rescues and more recoveries of those who died in the storm.

A car full of mud

On the banks of the Swannanoa, the search team knew that it needed to reach the Charger. First, though, a member of a construction crew who was operating an excavator needed to move a silver Toyota SUV and several trees that had either fallen or were leaning precariously where the floodwaters had rushed past.

Claw-full by claw-full, the excavator worked through the brush and debris until he reached the Charger itself. Then, after some discussion with rescue team members about where it should go, he lowered the claw, closed it around the car's hood and dragged it out of the mud.

When the car came down with a thud, the search-and-rescue team members surrounded it.

They smashed out its remaining windows using shovels and a baton handed over by a U.S. Border Patrol Agent who was watching.

When the front doors opened, the car's interior was filled nearly to the windows with mud. A foul odor hit some onlookers.

The search and rescue team pulled the silt out gently, shaking it out on the ground to make sure they weren't missing anything important.

Then they moved to the backseat, asking the construction crew to bring in a smaller excavator that could pull the rear door of the car off entirely. With the crunching of glass and mangling of twisted metal, the excavator did just that.

As the mud was lifted out of the car, it became clear that no one was inside. In fact, the owner arrived, searching for the wallet he thought he'd left in the center console. He had to settle for the pair of prescription sunglasses that were in the car, still sealed inside their case.

Lipp, the FEMA spokesman, recalled seeing similar small pieces of people's lives recovered after other disasters.

"It seems really tiny," Lipp said, "but for him I'll bet it's a little bit of a bright spot in his day."

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The story behind how NC - gets ready for disasters

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Jim Martin | Section: Editorial/Opinion | 691 Words Page: 9A

North Carolina is reeling from its worst natural disaster since 1900. While forecasts were increasingly urgent as Helene raced northward, for North Carolina's resourceful mountainfolk it proved far more destructive than anyone dared imagine.

For a back story. I vividly remember my early introduction to emergency preparations as governor from 1985 through 1992. I still find it inspiring that thousands of state workers and volunteers from here and across America come dig us out, repair roads and utilities, and restore power, communications and commerce, as we do for them.

Effective response to a natural disaster is more complex than anyone could fully anticipate. Fortunately for us, North Carolina puts major emphasis on preparation. Early in my first year, I attended a special NC innovation: practicing for storms, forest fires and tornadoes.

The scene was a high school gym, with tables set up for coordinators of each type of responder in the region. There was a separate table for highway patrol, national guard, prison sheriffs, Red Cross, Salvation Army, ham radio operators (cellphones weren't invented!), school superintendents, clergy, electric utilities, NC Forest Service and many more. One table hosted NC's own home improvement retailer Lowe's, side-by-side with Home Depot, Ace Hardware and other competitors. They practiced as a team estimating special tools, like generators and chain saws, each would deliver.

They worked through a realistic rehearsal for a forest fire, for that season would soon begin. Similar maneuvers would rehearse appropriate steps months later to prepare for hurricane season. Each table would practice exactly what their duties would be and when and where to deploy, responding to various scenarios. They also would understand the tasks to be handled by every other table, all orchestrated in advance. Tactics might be improvised as real disasters unfolded, but the strategic assignment of responsibilities was settled.

During my eight-year watch, there were two major fires, three monster tornadoes, 13 hurricanes - and one freak red tide at Beaufort Inlet. My rookie year, there were 12 Atlantic hurricanes, and North Carolina caught eight of them. The next seven years, we had only five of 35. We believed practice sessions helped speed our response to a storm.

Hugo in 1989 was the worst hurricane for my administration. It went through North Carolina east of the mountains with heavy rainfall and 60 mph gale-force winds, occasionally gusting to 100. Hugo blew down trees and flooded low-lying spots - but showed little to guide our response to Helene.

Eastern North Carolina took a horrible loss from the vast flooding of coastal plains by Floyd in 1999. Across relatively flat terrain, many homes were flooded to the ceiling or higher. With little lateral flow, it took days for the high water to recede. Helene was more comparable to the infamous 1889 Johnstown Pennsylvania flood. An upstream dam collapsed, sending a torrent of water 30 feet deep crashing through the unsuspecting town at up to 40 mph. Caught entirely off guard, 2,209 lives were lost.

Few understood "flooding" would mean river tsunamis, sweeping everything downstream. Few expected that one or two feet of rain over 2-3 days on mountains would create cascading torrents of water scouring the flood plains where thousands of homesteads had stood for decades.

Looking ahead, some observers have considered Helene's likely disruption of the general election. While Asheville

and Boone vote Democratic, the other 21 counties west of Hickory vote heavily Republican, normally with a net 120,000-vote advantage for Republicans. This far exceeds Trump's 74,483 margin carrying the state in 2020. While every effort will be made to assure the polls are ready for them, we cannot imagine the daily burdens they face just meeting their families' vital needs. These are hardy citizens, famous for their enduring spirit. I'm confident they will do what they can.

Jim Martin, a Republican, was N.C. governor from 1985-93. He is a regular contributor to our pages.

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NC counties hit - hard by Helene can change voting plans

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Kyle Ingram; Staff Writer | Section: News | 634 Words

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RALEIGH The North Carolina State Board of Elections voted on Monday to give the counties hit hardest by Tropical Storm Helene broad authority to change their election plans to respond to the storm's disruption.

The resolution, approved in a unanimous vote by the bipartisan board, allows counties to change their early voting and Election Day polling sites, gives them greater flexibility in appointing poll workers and gives voters in the affected counties more options to receive and deliver absentee ballots.

"We will continue to make voting accessible to voters," said Stacy "Four" Eggers, a Republican board member.
"Whether we need four-wheelers, horses or helicopters, this disaster highlights the need for consistency in our work and making sure that we get to the locations that the voters expect us to be."

All county board of election offices are now open for business, after 14 closed last week in Helene's wake. However, many election officials in Western North Carolina are still without power or water in their homes and several previously designated polling sites will now be unusable due to damage, inaccessibility and staffing issues.

"Our struggles are not over," Karen Brinson Bell, executive director of the board, said. "That is why we need the board to take action to give the flexibility necessary to carry out these elections and to be of the best service to the voters that we can be."

Brinson Bell emphasized that disruptions from Helene's aftermath will not affect the state's election schedule, and early voting will begin on Oct. 17 in all 100 counties, as planned.

The counties included in Monday's resolution are Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga and Yancey.

Election officials in those areas will now be able to change voting sites to account for any sites that were destroyed or otherwise rendered unusable. Any changes will have to be approved by a bipartisan majority vote of the county's board of elections.

County election boards are currently structured to have three Democrats and two Republicans, but any change to polling sites would need approval from members of both parties.

"This requires that a change is not going to be a Republican change or a Democrat change and that it's required to meet the needs of the voters and the administration of our elections," Eggers said.

There are 40 early voting sites among the 13 counties included in the resolution. State officials are uncertain how many of those will need to be replaced, though Brinson Bell noted that even if some buildings are unusable, officials may be able to erect temporary voting facilities in the parking lots of those sites.

To address potential issues with staffing, Monday's resolution will allow affected counties to bring in poll workers from other areas across the state and reassign existing workers to new locations.

The resolution also allows for more flexibility with absentee voting. Voters within the affected counties will be able to request an absentee ballot in person at their county board of elections office, including voters who already requested a ballot, but may have lost it in the storm.

Since many voters may have been displaced by Helene, the board also voted to allow affected voters to turn in their absentee ballots to any county board of elections office - not just the one in their home county. Voters will be able to deliver those by mail or in person up until 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 5.

The resolution also expands the use of Multipartisan Assistance Teams. These groups traditionally assist voters in nursing homes or assisted living facilities with requesting and completing absentee ballots. Now, counties will be allowed to send those teams to disaster shelters where they can help displaced residents vote absentee.

Brinson Bell said the board may need to approve future changes to election administration in Western North Carolina as recovery efforts continue.

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13 state parks closed in Western NC after Hurricane Helene. Estimated reopening timeline

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 282 Words Page: 8A OpenURL Link

After the deadly destruction of Hurricane Helene, over a dozen of North Carolina's state parks will be shut down for several weeks.

As cleanup continues across the southeast, The North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation announced that all state parks west of I-77 are closed through at least Oct. 31, 2024, along with most programs at all state parks.

The Division of Parks and Recreation is assisting with statewide emergency and rescue efforts in Western North Carolina in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene," the division announced on Oct. 2. "As a result, we are scaling back operations across the state to allow staff to continue to assist with critical deployments."

According to the division, 13 of North Carolina's 39 state parks and recreation areas will be closed until at least the end of the month, including:

Chimney Rock State Park

Crowders Mountain State Park

Elk Knob State Park

Gorges State Park

Grandfather Mountain State Park

Lake James State Park

Lake Norman State Park

Mount Jefferson State Natural Area

Mount Mitchell State Park

New River State Park

Rendezvous Mountain

South Mountains State Park

Stone Mountain State Park

Along with one third of North Carolina's state parks being closed, so are several other roads around the area, including the famous Blue Ridge Parkway.

"We continue to discourage unnecessary travel in and to Western North Carolina. Limiting travel helps prioritize sending lifesaving resources and repairing vital infrastructure repairs in the communities hit hardest by Helene. Many roads continue to be closed due to unsafe conditions," NCDPR's website says.

If you have any reservations made for any of the state parks west of I-77, including cabins, campsites and picnic shelters, full refunds will be distributed, according to the division.

You can find more information and updates on park closures online at ncparks.gov/closures.

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'It threw us back': People living in public housing in Asheville cope in post-Helene life

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Ryan Oehrli; Staff Writer | Section: News | 686 Words

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Asheville Since Helene struck, Kyesha Nelson and TJ Wilson have been making long walks across Asheville because her baby needs special milk.

To avoid the worst of Helene, they had left their home in the Fairview area to stay with Wilson's mother in Hillcrest, one of the city's public housing communities.

"I just have to get my baby somewhere I can walk around," Nelson remembered thinking. Her six-month-old, Tykwon, was born prematurely.

But Hillcrest has no power or running water, a common struggle for people in Asheville and Western North Carolina since the historic storm.

They don't have a car. Without the city's bus system running, people without transportation - including those living in low-income housing like Hillcrest - are on foot in Asheville's winding, hilly roads.

"When you have smaller children, walking is not always the best thing you can do," Nelson said. "Or the safest."

A common issue

In a Sept. 28 notice, the city said buses had been redirected to relief efforts. ART - or Asheville Rides Transit - brought 578 people to shelters, that notice said.

"The service also continues to face power outages, road conditions, and staffing shortages," it said. All services are suspended "until further notice."

The city later announced that on Monday the bus system will "begin operating a modified schedule on select routes where road conditions have improved."

In West Asheville's Pisgah View Apartments, Cicely Rogers is dealing with "more stress" without a way to get around town, she said.

She has family in the area, but not nearby. Amboy Road flooded early, making it a challenge for them to get to her, she said. And she's not even sure what the roads are like where her sister lives in Buncombe County.

Water is the chief concern for many because many in the city are without fresh water. Asheville Mayor Esther Manheimer has warned that it will take some time, at least weeks, for it to return.

Pisgah View had power Thursday, drawing in family members, said Tykerria Robinson-Williams. Her focus was stocking up as much water as she could, unsure how long necessities would be hard to come by.

She worried how far back the storm would set the people living in Pisgah View.

"We really can't afford to leave our homes behind. We weren't doing too good before, so now... it threw us back 10 more steps when we're trying to get 10 steps ahead," she said.

Friends, family and neighbors have been helping each other across the region.

"Really, I'm just counting on my friends to look out for me," said Reggie Moore, who lives in Deaverview, another public housing community that's close to Aston Park. He's worried about older people there, who can't get out.

"I think they need a bit more help than what they're getting," he said.

One such woman, who asked not to be named, said she relies on the bus system. Even if she walked downtown, she might not find an ATM with cash or a store that's stocked, she said.

'We all need to pull our part'

Buncombe County Manager Avril Pinder said the county has been working with community partners to distribute food to public housing communities.

"Community paramedics have been on the ground since this began, taking water to our housing authority areas," Pinder said.

Some residents told The Charlotte Observer about food and water being dropped off, and even a food truck cooking hot meals.

Lolita Ray also rides the bus. She's lived in Hillcrest for about five years. Without it, she's relying on her daughter for rides to and from Sam's Club, where her daughter works.

Water cases rested at a neighbor's front door Friday. Ray put them there. And she spent her morning cleaning up trash on the streets in Hillcrest. The trash irked her.

"Right now, we all need to pull our part and come together," she said.

By the afternoon, there was some new and much-needed relief at Hillcrest. The community center filled with donations, and water stacked high outside. Residents carried out diapers, snacks, water and more.

Observer staff writer Jeff A. Chamer contributed.

Ryan Oehrli: @oehrli

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JD Vance to host town hall in Greensboro, criticizing Harris on immigration and Helene

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi; Staff Writer | Section: News | 431 Words

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Republican vice presidential candidate JD Vance is coming back to North Carolina this week, this time to host a town hall in Greensboro.

Doors for the town hall at the Koury Convention Center will open at 4 p.m. on Thursday, with Vance slated to speak at 6 p.m. Topics will likely include the economy, illegal immigration and Hurricane Helene.

The remnants of Hurricane Helene, which began to be felt in North Carolina on the last Thursday of September, devastated the western part of the state, bringing historic flooding, destruction and death.

The Trump campaign has heavily politicized the ongoing recovery efforts. Most recently, former President Donald Trump, during a town hall meeting in Fayetteville on Friday night, said that the federal government's response to the devastating storm had been "terrible." The news release announcing Vance's town hall said Vice President Kamala Harris "completely left North Carolinians behind in the wake of devastation post-Hurricane Helene."

The Harris campaign responded to Vance by pointing to Harris's comments about Trump being "extraordinarily irresponsible" in pushing "disinformation" about Helene relief aid.

Many on social media platforms like X have also taken to criticizing the response despite federal responders working in the area alongside their local and state counterparts. Conspiracy theories have also spread on social media.

President Joe Biden surveyed the damage in North Carolina by air on Wednesday and pledged more resources. Harris visited Charlotte on Saturday, announcing Mecklenburg County would also be eligible for federal disaster aid.

The Trump campaign's news release hones in on the fiscal impact of immigrants living in the United States without legal authorization, citing research by the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a nonprofit, anti-immigration organization.

"While Kamala Harris continues to ignore these critical issues," says the release, Trump "has a proven track record of putting North Carolinians first."

"President Trump understands the importance of lowering taxes, securing the border and stopping the unchecked flow of illegal immigration that drains resources from American citizens. President Trump has always fought for the people, and he will continue to fight to restore economic stability, security, and prosperity in North Carolina," says the release.

Vance's visit to Greensboro is his fifth trip to North Carolina since becoming Trump's running mate.

In mid-September, he held a rally in Raleigh. Before that, he was with Trump in Asheboro. He has also visited Greenville twice.

Trump, Harris and Democratic vice presidential candidate Tim Walz have also visited the battleground state often this year.

Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi: @LucianaPerezUb

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Volunteers in Emma offer outreach services post-Helene

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Ryan Oehrli; Staff Writer | Section: News | 513 Words

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EMMA At El Porvenir Cultural Center, volunteers who live nearby used walkie-talkies as cars came and went on volunteer missions to quickly deliver supplies to flood victims.

Usually, El Porvenir is a community center for Buncombe County's Emma, a largely Hispanic area. The center is home to quinceañeras and weddings. But since Sept. 30, it's been a lot of things.

The back - where people dropped off donations - had become a sort of volunteer-run, free Amazon-esque warehouse. Crews delivered those donations to neighbors. Others cut down trees and repaired homes. There was a daycare, too.

They have been going through Emma, but also to communities like Swannanoa and Fletcher, said Andrea Golden, the director and founder of the community group Poder Emma.

Her group and several others made up La Milpa, an existing coalition of community groups now helping guide the operation out of El Porvenir.

'Love shining through'

Carol Alcantar made one of the day's first deliveries. She lives in East Asheville, and wanted to help Emma in particular because of her Mexican heritage.

The trip was quick and light, only a five-minute drive to drop off some meat, tortillas and produce to a woman who lives near El Porvenir.

It proved fruitful in more ways than one. The woman who got the food explained that someone in Biltmore Village - about 15 minutes from Emma - had two trailers of supplies available for distribution.

Alcantar spoke with her in Spanish, thanked her for the information and relayed the message to others working at the distribution center.

"I think the love is shining through for the community more than anything," Alcantar said.

'We're all neighbors'

"Comida? Agua?" Diego Romero asked later in the day as he went door to door on Deaverview Road.

He and the other volunteers who filled several trucks had much more than food and water, though. There was toilet paper, Dayquil, soap, shampoo, nonpotable water to fill buckets and bathe with, diapers and toys for kids.

Power, cell service and food have been returning to the area. Water is the biggest concern. Asheville Mayor Esther Manheimer has said it will take a while for the city's water system to work again.

"And I'm not talking about days," the mayor told the Asheville Citizen Times. "We want them to plan for longer than that."

Families stepped outside their homes on Saturday to grab what they needed as the volunteer convoys arrived, and thank their neighbors.

Soon, the convoy would go to a new neighborhood near Johnston Elementary School, and then others until truck beds ran out of water.

In an interview as he rode from house to house, Romero explained that he hasn't heard much about a government response in Emma. But people are looking out for each other.

"We're all neighbors, just looking out for people, you know?" he said.

And if he needed help, he knew they'd be there for him.

Ryan Oehrli: @oehrli

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