

'IT HITS DIFFERENT'

October 8, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: BILLY CHAPMAN wchapman@hickoryrecord.com| Section: It Hits Different| 1323 Words OpenURL Link

After Hurricane Helene hit western North Carolina, Olde Hickory Brewery cofounder Stephen Lyerly knew he wanted to take action.

Lyerly said the brewery had about 100 cases of new cans that had not been filled. Volunteers at the brewery began filling those cans with water instead of beer on Tuesday.

More cans were donated by Tap Hopper out of Greensboro. Lyerly said Olde Hickory planned to can about 340 more cases of water Friday.

Co-founder Jason Yates said the group plans to provide about 10,000 cans of water. Enough, he said, for a 30-day supply for about 100 people.

Some of the water will go to a nursing home in the Asheville area and some will go with Hickory Wrecker Service to areas where the service is dispatched.

Asked why the brewery decided to help this way, Lyerly paused and thought for a moment before shrugging and saying confidently, "It's obvious."

While volunteer organizations from within and outside of North Carolina use Hickory Regional Airport as a staging area for rescue missions, businesses around Catawba County have also decided the need to help was obvious.

Local businesses have committed to donating a portion of sales to relief eff orts. Some are collecting donations or providing meals to workers in the area helping to clean up after the storm.

Other businesses and business owners have taken a more direct approach, delivering supplies and meals to residents in nearby counties where infrastructure has been destroyed and communication is challenging.

Some business owners expressed the desire to help residents in distress in nearby counties.

These are not the only examples of businesses and residents aiding those affected by Helene, but provide a look at how some residents responded when fellow North Carolinians needed assistance.

Providing meals

Cranford Hospitality contracted with North Carolina to provide three meals per day to areas affected by Helene.

Zack Cranford said several of the business' restaurants are providing about 1,500 meals per day to areas around Hendersonville. Flat Rock and others.

He said Cranford Hospitality is providing 200 meals per day to Pardee Hospital in Hendersonville. Another 100 meals are going to a location in Flat Rock.

Some of the 1,500 meals are being distributed to volunteers assisting with search-and-rescue operations in the western part of the state. Meals also are being distributed to shelters.

Cranford said it took about two-and-a-half to three hours each way to travel to Hendersonville due to closures along

Interstate 40 earlier after the storm.

Cranford said he expects to provide meals for the foreseeable future.

"We're just trying to help our community more than anything," Cranford said. "We're thankful for the opportunity and to be in a position to step up."

'A bunch of 12-year-olds should not be having to do this'

Garrett Osborne went to work on Monday but it didn't feel right.

"I just thought, 'This feels weird,'" Osborne said. "I've been seeing all these videos and pictures and all this kind of stuff, and it just feels weird. We lived through ... all these natural disasters that are hours away and even in other countries and it's unique, it hits a little bit different when 30 minutes away from my house there are people that literally lost everything they own."

Osborne, owner of Osborne Real Estate Group, connected with colleagues and friends to provide help to western North Carolina.

With a convoy of pickup trucks, many towing trailers, Osborne and others traveled to Canton, West Asheville and Black Mountain on Tuesday to deliver about 100,000 pounds of supplies, food and water.

Osborne said his eagerness to help caused him to learn some lessons from that first day about coordinating with churches or other officials in areas impacted by the storm. Some places did not have the ability to accept donations, but he did donate in Canton and found a church in Black Mountain also willing to accept donations.

"The churches in those areas are inundated," Osborne said. "They're inundated with supplies and they're overwhelmed. They're not meant to be distribution hubs. They're meant to be churches."

Osborne said a youth group at the church in Black Mountain was managing the incoming donations.

"It's cool to see because it's the power of what people can do when they come together and there's love and support," Osborne said. "But a youth group, a bunch of 12-year-olds, should not be having to do this."

Wednesday, he coordinated with a fire station in Spruce Pine with help from the city of Hickory. When he got there, Osborne said the town did not have power or water.

"It's unclear how soon those areas will get infrastructure back," Osborne said. "You've got an entire town that's operating with no power, no water."

Osborne said he's developed a way for people to request welfare checks on friends and family. He and others in Hickory are coordinating with Baptists on Mission in Spruce Pine, who send individuals out to conduct welfare checks.

Thursday, Osborne said welfare checks were conducted on 20 people. Thursday night, he said requests for checks were received on 70 new addresses.

He said the list for requests for welfare checks and missing persons is in the thousands.

Helping neighbors

Isaac Crouch, owner of Simply Green Recycling in Morganton, said while not able to collect recycling due to inaccessible roads, he wanted to keep doing what his business does: "Pick stuff up and take it somewhere else."

"As of Friday, we couldn't do that (collect recycling)," Crouch said. "We pretty much transitioned to using all of our operations for the relief efforts."

Crouch and Simply Green employees started assisting Saturday.

On Friday, the city of Morganton said it lost power to its water treatment plant. The city said it would take several days to restore operations at the water treatment facility.

"When we started to learn about how destructive (the storm) was, we had no idea how long it would be before we got power and drinkable water," Crouch said. "We started to put the word out on our personal social media pages and our business social media for people to reach out to anyone and everyone they knew outside of the disaster area that could get us enough water to pick up in our box truck."

Saturday, Crouch traveled with four SUVs and a trailer to meet friends and family around Statesville. There, water was collected to bring back to Burke County.

Crouch said they took water to Broughton Hospital and distributed some from the Simply Green parking lot in Morganton.

"Those first few days, there was a lot of hope and people helping each other, people willing to do anything and everything to get their neighbors what they need," Crouch said.

On Monday, 5,500 pounds — 140 cases — of bottled water was collected. Simply Green collected another 8,000 pounds of bottled water Tuesday and Wednesday.

Employees Ben Pannenbacker and Jon Gromm also delivered needed supplies Tuesday in a 20-foot box truck to the Jonas Ridge community in northern Burke County.

Wednesday morning, the city of Morganton reported the city was no longer under a boil water advisory and water operations were returning to normal.

Crouch will return to business operations now that areas around Morganton have drinkable water. He plans to continue to collect donations and take them where they are needed.

On Friday, Crouch picked up another 12,000 pounds of bottled water and 35 empty fuel cans to be filled and distributed in western North Carolina.

Crouch, who lives in Burke County and was also affected by Helene, said driving to collect, organize and distribute supplies was emotionally taxing. Seeing an area he grew up in, people he knows, devastated by flooding and mudslides caused him to have two emotional breakdowns.

He knows there is much work to be done but is hopeful that resilient communities in the region can continue to band together.

"Our ancient mountains have lost entire towns, and we are a long way from knowing how many have perished," Crouch said by email Thursday. "Those of us that continue on have also lost the lives we had before this. Give yourself grace and be kind to your neighbors."

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Appalachian State falls to Marshall

October 8, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: TOM FOREMAN JR. Staff Reporter | Section: News | 533 Words OpenURL Link

It may have been a lot to ask of Appalachian State to play a football game, but the Mountaineers have been through a lot already in a short period of time.

Hurricane Helene carved a devastating path through western North Carolina, and Boone was not spared. City streets were flooded, cellphone service was lost and so was power. The Mountaineers were scheduled to play Liberty about 24 hours after Helene had caused so much destruction, but the game was canceled. Classes at App State were suspended as students tried to put their lives back together in the storm's aftermath.

The football team regrouped in the midst of the chaos and traveled to play Marshall on Saturday. The Mountaineers outgained the Thundering Herd and picked up more first downs. But App State was assessed 15 penalties for 158 yards, and an old bugaboo — the explosive play — reared its head once again in a 52-37 loss in Huntington, West Virginia, on Saturday.

Marshall had eight plays that gained 10 yards or more, and of those, two covered 15 yards or more. One was a 75-yard pass play from Braylon Braxton to Jordan Houston at the start of the second quarter. There was also a 26-yard Braxton pass to Charles Montgomery for another score late in the third quarter. The first touchdown pass erased a 10-7 Appalachian State lead, and the other extended Marshall's lead to 45-24.

"Very disappointed," Appalachian State coach Shawn Clark said. "This is not what we came down here for, to play like we did. Too many mistakes on both sides of the ball. Too many penalties. You have almost 500 yards of offense but you have two turnovers. We have to limit the big plays. We can't give up those plays and be successful."

App State erased an early 7-0 deficit and climbed into a 10-7 lead after a Jackson Moore 42-yard field goal midway through the first quarter and a Kanye Roberts 10-yard touchdown run at the start of the second quarter. But Marshall scored on their next two possessions and threw in a pick-six to leave the Mountaineers in a hole they couldn't emerge from.

Joey Aguilar threw for 293 yards and two touchdowns, but he had the two interceptions that Clark alluded to. Aguilar added 55 yards rushing to lead the ground game.

Clark said the ride back to Boone on Saturday night would include a film session to figure out what needs to be fixed. But he acknowledged that it's been a tough go of it for more than a week, and one way to help in the healing and recovery in western North Carolina would be to get a win. App State gets that chance next weekend at Louisiana. After an open week, officials have to decide whether they will play the scheduled home game against Georgia State in Winston-Salem or in Charlotte, primarily to divert traffic away from Boone as it continues its cleanup.

"It has been tough. You can't deny that a lot of people lost everything in Boone and Watauga County," Clark said. "Those fans, those residents of Watauga County have a lot of pride in Appalachian State football. We have to eventually come through for them."

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Red Cross blood drives set for Caldwell, Catawba in wake of Hurricane Helene

October 8, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: SPECIAL TO THE RECORD | Section: News | 382 Words OpenURL Link

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

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

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

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

Granite Falls

Oct. 24: 3-7 p.m., Dudley Shoals Elementary School Gym, 1500 Dudley Shoals Road

Lenoir

Oct. 17: 3-7:30 p.m., Trinity United Methodist Church Lenoir, 901 Seehorn RoadOct. 19: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Gamewell United Methodist Church, 2897 Morganton Blvd.

Claremont

Oct. 29: 1:30-6 p.m., Bethel Lutheran Church, 5759 Bolick Road

Conover

Oct. 8: 3-7:30 p.m., Woodlawn Baptist Church Conover, 610 Conover Blvd. WOct. 14: 2:30-7 p.m., St. Johns Lutheran Church, 2126 St. Johns Church Road

Hickory

Oct. 9: Noon to 4 p.m., Valley Hills Mall, 1960 Highway 70 SEOct. 9: 2:30-7 p.m., Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, 2780 N. Center St.Oct. 21: 2-6:30 p.m., St. Stephens Lutheran Church ELCA, 2259 12th Ave.Oct. 24: 2:30-7 p.m., Corinth Reformed Bost Hall, 150 16th Ave. NWOct. 31: 4-8 p.m., Valley Hills Mall, 1960 Highway 70 SE

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City power crew set to help in Florida

October 8, 2024 | High Point Enterprise (NC) Author: Paul B. Johnson ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER | Section: News | 277 Words OpenURL Link

HIGH POINT — A crew with the High Point Electric Utilities Department will travel to Florida to help restore power expected to be disrupted as Hurricane Milton barrels across the state.

The High Point crew will assist a public power agency serving New Smyrna Beach, a city south of Daytona Beach. The crew with six employees and equipment is scheduled to head toward Florida on Wednesday.

"This will allow them to stage around Savannah, Georgia, tomorrow (Wednesday) night and then report to New Smyrna Beach on Thursday once Hurricane Milton passes," said Tyler Berrier, director of the High Point Electric Utilities Department.

The city still has crews assisting with the restoration of power from Tropical Storm Helene. Two crews with nine workers have spent the past six days restoring electricity in Greenwood, South Carolina, Berrier said.

Crews from the High Point Electric Utilities Department previously helped restore power in the wake of Helene in Cherryville, Shelby, Tallahassee, Florida, and Easley, South Carolina.

The High Point Electric Utilities Department has a decades-long history of providing mutual aid power restoration after hurricanes, tropical storms and ice storms.

The High Point Police Department also is helping in western North Carolina.

A team of 10 officers left Tuesday for Biltmore Forest, a town adjacent to Asheville. The officers are expected to spend a week assisting local law enforcement.

"The men and women of the High Point Police Department are dedicated to serving those in need, Police Chief Curtis Cheeks III said. "Most of us won't see the hard work and actions of these 10 officers over the next week, but people in western North Carolina will. We are proud of them, their commitment, dedication and hearts for service."

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Curfew set nightly in Old Fort

October 8, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: FROM STAFF REPORTS | Section: News | 579 Words OpenURL Link

Old Fort will have a curfew set nightly, according to McDowell County Emergency Management.

The curfew, which started Saturday, requires residents to stay inside or on their own property from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m. every night, emergency management said. Exceptions are allowed for work and emergency travel.

"This curfew is in place to protect life, safety, and property due to the current State of Emergency and increased theft issues," a county notice said.

The curfew is in place until further notice, the county said.

Law enforcement from around the state are patrolling the area, the county said.

Old Fort's water system is expected to start working again in the next few days, the town said Saturday. A boil advisory was issued.

"The town of Old Fort is pleased to announce that within the next few days parts of the water system are projected to be restored," an alert from McDowell County said.

Residents are asked to boil all water that will be consumed for at least one minute.

Missing persons, searches and rescues

Emergency services said the county is working to find anyone reported missing. As more people get power and cellphone service, more reports are coming in, emergency management said.

On Saturday, there were 350 federal, state and local search and rescue workers in McDowell County working on the reports.

"Our mission continues. Each day, our dedicated search and rescue teams are conducting thorough searches throughout the county," McDowell County Emergency Services Director Will Kehler said. "We will not stop until all our citizens are accounted for. I am proud to see the dedication of our rescuers and the neighbors helping neighbors spirit throughout our community."

On Friday, the county reported its first confirmed hurricane-related death. The county did not release the name of the victim. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Resources said a woman was found dead in a collapsed home on Thursday in McDowell County.

Shelters, water and food in McDowell County

There are two shelters in McDowell County for those impacted by Hurricane Helene.

- Glenwood Baptist Church, 155 Glenwood Church Road, Marion
- Corpening Memorial YMCA, 348 Grace Corpening Drive, Marion Supplies, food and water distribution will happen at the following locations at 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., while supplies last:

- Old Fort: 1 Walter St., Old Fort
- Dysartsville: Solid Rock Freewill Baptist Church, 7860 N.C. Highway 226 South, Nebo
- New Manna Baptist Church: 225 E. Court St., Marion
- Zion Hill Baptist Church: 1036 Zion Hill Road, Marion Community meals will be served at Grace Community Church, 5182 U.S. Highway 70 West, Marion, from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 4-5:30 p.m.

FEMA help centers

McDowell County has two FEMA recovery centers, emergency management said. The centers enable people to speak with FEMA representatives, register for disaster assistance, get claim updates and ask questions.

The centers are open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

- McDowell Senior Center, upper level, 100 Spaulding Road, Marion
- · Glenwood Baptist Church, 155 Glenwood Baptist Church Road, Marion

Medical, oxygen support

The following pharmacies are open for those needing medications:

- Ingles Pharmacy: 625 W. Henderson St., Marion
- Marion Pharmacy: 232 S. Main St., Marion
- Prescription Pad: 1211 N. Main St., Marion
- Walmart Pharmacy: 2875 Sugar Hill Road, Marion
- CVS Pharmacy: 555 N. Main St., Marion Call the Helene Hotline at 828-652-3241 if you are isolated and need insulin, or if you are homebound or without power and in need of oxygen cylinders or charging oxygen concentrators.

N.C. Highway 226 closed

As of Friday, N.C. Highway 226 is closed at Maces Park, according to N.C. State Highway Patrol.

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More counties eligible for disaster unemployment benefits

October 8, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: RICHARD CRAVER WinstonSalem Journal | Section: News | 388 Words OpenURL Link

Residents in four northwest North Carolina counties — Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga and Wilkes — have been declared eligible for federal disaster unemployment assistance benefits, the N.C. Division of Employment Security said Oct.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Those eligible include:

- No longer have the job that provided their primary source of income;
- Are unable to reach their place of unemployment;
- · Cannot work because of an injury caused by the storm;
- Were unable to begin employment or self-employment due to the storm; and
- Have become the major supplier of household income due to a storm-related death of the previous major supplier of household income.

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

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

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

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Burke County family homes destroyed by Helene

October 8, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: CHRISSY MURPHY Morganton News Herald | Section: News | 1186 Words OpenURL Link

With mud caked to the floor and her boots, Libby Morgan shuffled through books scattered along the wood floors of her home alongside the Catawba River in Burke County.

Most of the things she and her husband, Jim, had in their home had already been thrown into a pile outside and declared unsalvageable after torrential rain from the remnants of Hurricane Helene flooded their home. But in the pile of sopping wet books, Libby hoped to find a treasure more than 50 years old.

Their wedding album. The white photo album was found on the other side of the room last week, mostly intact, though now covered in dirt and the photos soaking wet. The pictures show the couple in their early 20s, before Jim Morgan would start building their house on Libby's family's land on Powerhouse Road in Morganton.

'Starting life over at 82'

Jim, 81, built the A-frame house on the property when he was 32.

"I never built anything bigger than a picnic table," Jim said, looking at the still-standing home. "And I think I built it about as perfect as you could build a house."

Several additions have been made to the home since the initial A-frame was built. An office, separate from the house, then later a large hallway were added on. Eight years ago, he built a large bedroom with a sunroom on it, where the couple enjoyed a morning cup of coffee.

"It really was just perfect," Jim said.

The couple heard Hurricane Helene was expected to bring some flooding to the area but did not imagine water levels would be like Hurricane Frances in 2004. In the 2004 storm, the water came up to just under the floors of the home, but never got into the house. The couple couldn't get flood insurance after Frances, and had not tried to get it in recent years.

This time, though, the water got as high as the attic. Jim had been out of the country on a trip to Canada. He drove five days to get home.

"I got back, and I started laughing," Jim said. "I thought, 'This can't be true.' I just laughed. I laughed, and this morning I woke up weeping. ... Then I couldn't do anything but weep. I slept in my car again last night, and I can't see when — in six months — how we could sleep on this property.

"I'm turning 82 soon. I'm in good health, but do I want to spend the next three years, from 82 to 85, trying to get this house livable? It doesn't make sense," Jim said.

Jim said his childhood was turbulent. He left home at 14 and has been supporting himself ever since.

"This is really the only place I've ever thought of as home ... This is really gonna be an adventure, for sure," Jim said. "It's like starting life over at 82. ... I just don't know if I'm up to it."

Houses, memories washed away

Up the street, Libby's sister, Hilda White, sat in a lawn chair, three days after the storm. Her daughter, Lori Stock, and grandson, Spencer Stock, sorted through picture albums and set photos out to dry.

Another wedding photo, the only one of Hilda with her late husband, Ralph, was among the pictures. A teapot a relative brought from Russia survived without a single chip on it.

But White's house is gone. The family tried to save some of her belongings by putting them in a moving truck and putting it at the top of the driveway, but even the truck was washed down the road, getting pushed into some trees and stuck in a ditch. Spencer tried to move the truck when they found out how bad the flooding was but was unsuccessful.

"We've been pulling photo album after photo album after photo album out of here," Spencer said. "We moved everything up here to keep it dry and safe."

Ralph's boat was moved to the top of the driveway, too. The boat still hadn't been found, but the trailer was.

"I burst into tears when I saw my daddy's boat trailer," Lori said. "It's like losing my daddy all over again."

Hilda has moved in with Lori. She canceled her flood insurance in 2021 when it got too expensive to keep.

"Mama won't ever live up here again," Lori said.

Family history on Catawba River

The land has been in the family since 1948 when Rom White bought all the land for farmland. Over the years, the property has been divvied up between descendants.

Cindy and Keith White live in another home on the White family property.

"Devastated, just devastated," Cindy said. "Just no words."

The White family wants to keep the property in the family, passing it down through generations.

"We had gutted our house, so proud of it," Cindy said. "My kids — this was going to them. It goes to each generation."

In Cindy and Keith's home, the chandelier over the dining table was mangled. Furniture is strewn about inside the house. Buildings, roofs and more litter the yard.

But just like with Hilda White and the Morgans, there are some treasures to be found.

A military plaque honoring Keith's dad, World War II Navy Seaman 1st Class Roy Edward White, remains in the ground though coated in sand.

When Keith's dad, Roy White, died, the first military plaque that came for his grave was chipped. The family kept it and just a couple months ago placed it in the ground with some other flat rock to make a cozy spot by the river for a fire pit. The plaque and the fire pit survived the storm.

The family also found a quilt protected by a vacuum-sealed bag. The quilt, handmade by a grandmother, didn't appear to have any water or stains on it.

"(It's) the place where my kids grew up," Cindy said. "It's just things in life, but it meant so much."

Standing under a sign that reads, "The river restores my soul," Cindy said she didn't know what the family would do.

They, too, had just canceled their flood insurance to make sure their home on the coast had full flood coverage.

"We've got to decide," Cindy said. "Are we going to demolish it? Are we going to try to (save it)? It's a lot. It's a lot."

Community gathering center lost

When Rom White bought the land by the river, the first cabin he built was for church and family gatherings.

Through the years, it has been used for birthday parties, church gatherings and civic organization activities. Emergency rescue teams have even used the building as a place to stay during swift water rescue training events.

The building washed away Friday. Parts of the cabin were strewn around the White family property on Powerhouse Road and down the river.

Some parts of the cabin are still standing, like the kitchen and bathroom. Most of the walls are gone, making it look like a dollhouse with one side open.

It's not the first time the cabin has been washed away. It also was lost during Hurricane Frances in 2004, but the community helped the family recover.

The Whites are hoping to get that same support this time.

Chrissy Murphy is a staff writer and can be reached at cmurphy@morganton.com or at 828-432-8941.

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North Fork River shifted in flooding

October 8, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: DAN CRAWLEY dcrawley@mcdowellnews.com | Section: News | 697 Words OpenURL Link

When the rains of Hurricane Helene caused the North Fork River to overflow in northern McDowell County, the communities of Ashford and North Cove were overwhelmed.

The raging river decimated the North Cove Leisure Club and Disc Golf, Mountain Paradise Campground and the bridge over the North Fork at U.S. Highway 221.

This water and debris ultimately made it to Baxter Laboratories on Pitts Station Road where it took out a part of the bridge going into the plant and covered the property in water and mud. The Baxter plant in North Cove provides about 60% of IV solutions made nationally.

In many locations, the river has altered course from where it was pre-Helene and is has now taken on a new shape all along the valley.

The English Homestead Cheese located just south of Linville Caverns is a sixth-generation farm in North Cover. The family operation reduced its stock of cattle earlier this year and as of Saturday its livestock, while scattered about the property, has been mainly accounted for. While the residences along the farm remained safe during the storm, the fields are piled with rocks and sediment from what flowed from the ridgetops above.

"It's changed the look of the valley forever," said Susan English who lives on the farm with her husband Terry. "We have had our share of floods, 2004 comes to mind, but this is just completely different from anything we have seen."

Susan estimated the power of the water and debris shifted the North Fork at least 40 feet to the west, which placed it further into the valley and away from U.S. Highway 221 which dissects the farm. Susan and Terry both live on the opposite side of the highway from the river.

"For whatever reason, the river shifted to the right about 40 feet," added English. "Which, if the force of everything had moved it in the opposite direction, the highway would have likely caved in. In contrast, when you look at things to the right of 221, you wouldn't have even known this all happened.

According to English, the rage of the river and debris was at its peak during the morning hours of Friday and lasted for about 4-6 hours, but then quickly receded late in the day.

"One of the biggest memories I'll have from this was just how loud everything was as the river, debris and large rocks were all moving downstream," said English. "That sound will also resonate with me."

North Cove residents help each other

During the immediate aftermath of the storm, northern McDowell was isolated from the rest of the world with no power, water or cell service. What the people did have was each other.

Holly Sills, an academic facilitator and Title 1 coordinator at North Cove Elementary School, was one of many who helped lead the charge in the first hours of recovery. Living on Peppers Creek Road, Sills and her family left their residence once it was safe and went around the neighborhood checking on others. Collaboration allowed the community to get a head start on the recovery effort that kicked into high gear once state and national resources began to flow in.

A lifelong resident of the North Cove community, Sills said she is proud to see that the deep bond of everyone in the area remains to this day.

"I have lived in North Cove my whole life and I have always knew it was a very special place. However, I have truly seen just how special and extraordinary it is through these difficult days," said Sills. "I have seen numerous people come together to help with food, water, supplies, cutting trees, medical assistance, resources, or just encouraging words and a hug. Seeing the resilience of North Cove and our whole county banding together is a true blessing."

Community seeing progress

As of Saturday afternoon, signs of progress were visible in Ashford and North Cove. Crews were dedicating time to the property around the Baxter plant, cleaning up the property and starting the journey to reopening the plant.

Meanwhile, utility crews were quickly replacing powerlines along highway 221. The highway 221 bridge at Mountain Paradise Campground is still collapsed but Old Linville Road is open and passable for local traffic and utilities.

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