

Terror

From A1

"By the time I got there, the water was already up over the front door," Wallace said.

Wallace pried the door open, fighting against the current, and water started to pour into the home. Once McDaniel and Max were out of the house, they all piled into the canoe and tried to make it across the water to higher ground.

The canoe capsized.

"I'll never forget Wendy's face," Wallace said. "She's 70 years old, maybe 71 now, and sheer terror because it was a rushing, raging river."

They fought against the water for a while, seeking refuge behind a building that ended up getting washed away.

The three adults and one dog needed another plan.

"In the back of that building, we stopped and I called out to Jesus," Wallace said. "I said, 'Please help us!'"

A tree fell, landing against another tree, and they climbed it. For hours, they prayed the tree would hold, watching as McDaniel's home was washed off its foundation. Mike swam to higher ground.

Moments later, another neighbor, Jessica, floated by them on top of a round bale of hay. Wallace yelled for her to get in a tree.

"I hear her scream and yell and holler, and then just nothing," Wallace said. "I thought for sure Jessica was dead. It was that serious of a scenario."

Eventually, though, the water started to come down. Jeremy strobed a flashlight at a neighbor who was driving down the road, the first contact he made with another person since seeing Mike and Jessica. A little while later, he saw Kelsey walking by.

"I couldn't shake my arms enough to express how happy I was to see her," Jeremy said.

Groom rescues wedding planner

While Jeremy and Wendy held strong in their tree, Kelsey was on higher ground, rounding up their children — Lexi, 13, Ruthie, 4, and Caleb, 2 — to take them to higher ground. When she realized what was happening, she and her friend, Jessica, tried to help.

"There was no plan, it was just to help, because that's what we do. We help people, right?" Kelsey said. "That's what we're supposed to do."

It was a rescue mission that went awry within moments. Kelsey had to shed her sweatshirt and rain boots to keep from getting dragged down into the water. Jessica was about 20 feet in front of Kelsey when she disappeared, only to reappear climbing a hay bale.

Kelsey realized she needed to find higher ground quickly, climbing atop a dump truck on the property.



XAVIER MARTIN PHOTOS, HICKORY DAILY RECORD

Monica Meda cleans up outside the home of Brown Mountain Beach Resort managers, Jeremy and Kelsey Wallace on Oct. 4, 2024. The home was flooded during Hurricane Helene on Sept. 27, 2024.

Who's who?

Kelsey Wallace: Manager of Brown Mountain Beach Resort, helps plan weddings. Married to Jeremy Wallace. Lives on property.

Jeremy Wallace: Manager of Brown Mountain Beach Resort. Married to Kelsey Wallace. Lives on property.

Wendy McDaniel: Owns Brown Mountain Beach Resort. Lives on property.

Mike: A neighbor and kayaker who helped Jeremy and Wendy.

Jessica: A neighbor who helped Kelsey.

Trevor: The groom who was set to get married the weekend Helene hit western North Carolina.

Eric: A neighbor who helped rescue Kelsey.

Max: McDaniel's dog, a golden doodle.

Amy and John Moore: Owners of Brushy Mountain Builders and friends of Kelsey and Jeremy.

Kelsey said she heard shrill screams. "I had no clue what's going on because I can't see anything," she said.

Sitting on top of the truck, she heard someone yell for her to come grab on to a gas tank that was tied to a rope. Another neighbor, Eric, and a groom who was set to get married that weekend, Trevor, had thrown the gas can into the water and were going to use the rope to pull her to safety.

The rope came up about 20 feet short, so she jumped to a horse trailer and crawled across it to get closer to the rope. Once she got into the water and grabbed hold of the gas can and rope, she was getting hit in the stomach with logs as the rapids tumbled trees down the river.

Trevor and Eric helped pull her to shore. The mother of the bride opened her suitcase and gave Kelsey new clothes to wear.



Wendy McDaniel's home sits in ruins on the Brown Mountain Beach Resort on Oct. 4, 2024. Flooding from Wilson Creek moved the home from its original location next to the carport on the right.



A canoe full of river water and leaves rests beside other paddlecraft at the Brown Mountain Beach Resort on Oct. 4, 2024. Resort manager Jeremy Wallace used one of the resort's canoes to navigate his way through floodwaters to rescue his mother-in-law, Wendy McDaniel during Hurricane Helene.

"That was really the beginning of people just loving simply because we're human," Kelsey said.

Family filled with hope despite losses

With the property damage and the loss of revenue, Kelsey esti-

mated the business would lose more than \$1 million. She and Jeremy are without a home after it was flooded, and the McDaniel home was destroyed by the flooding.

Now, they are focusing their efforts on getting their business up and running. "We have a responsibility to these employees," Kelsey said. "That's what we signed up for. We gotta get food on tables, not just ours. There's several people relying on this business to put food on their table, too."

Everyone is safe besides bumps, bruises, scratches and bug bites. Even Max, Wendy's golden doodle, wandered back home a few hours after the ordeal. The family's alpacas, goats and donkeys survived. About 25 chickens did not.

The real story, Kelsey said, is how the community pulled together to help during the storm, and the show of support since the storm. "People are good," Kelsey said. "There's so many good people, and that's how we survive. We don't survive with the government's help, it's just help from our neighbors. That's what makes America, America."

She said she thinks people need to take a step back from the daily vitriol politics can cause and see how good their neighbors can be.

"Look around you," Kelsey said. "How wonderful. People just love to love."

She said a few days after the storm, her friends Amy and John Moore texted that they were coming up with their employees from Brushy Mountain Builders to get started on cleanup.

"I said, 'Amy, I don't know where to start. We don't have a home,'" Kelsey said. "She said, 'Well, let's just start. Let's just start together!'"

The group started small, just picking up insulation.

"We call it moving rocks ... that's what we do with our family, we just move rocks and get over trauma and talk about it and heal together, and now here we are moving rocks again," Kelsey said.

Brushy Mountain Builders paid their staff for two days to come out and help at Brown Mountain Beach Resort. On the third day, many came back to help volunteers.

"It's who we are," Amy said. "There's a lot of people helping (everywhere). It's overwhelming to see how many people."

Kelsey said it made her speechless to see folks coming together to help after Helene.

"Look around," Kelsey said. "There's so much love and hope."

She added, "Our job is to help, and now, to see people coming out, it's world-moving. ... That's how the change starts."

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Businesses

From A1

County calls were answered by Catawba County because Burke's system rolled over there for a short time.

Burke County emergency crews also conducted 31 water rescues and 322 welfare checks.

"None of those turned up to be missing people or anything like that," White said. "So to our knowledge, we don't have anybody missing."

Burke water, food donation center closing

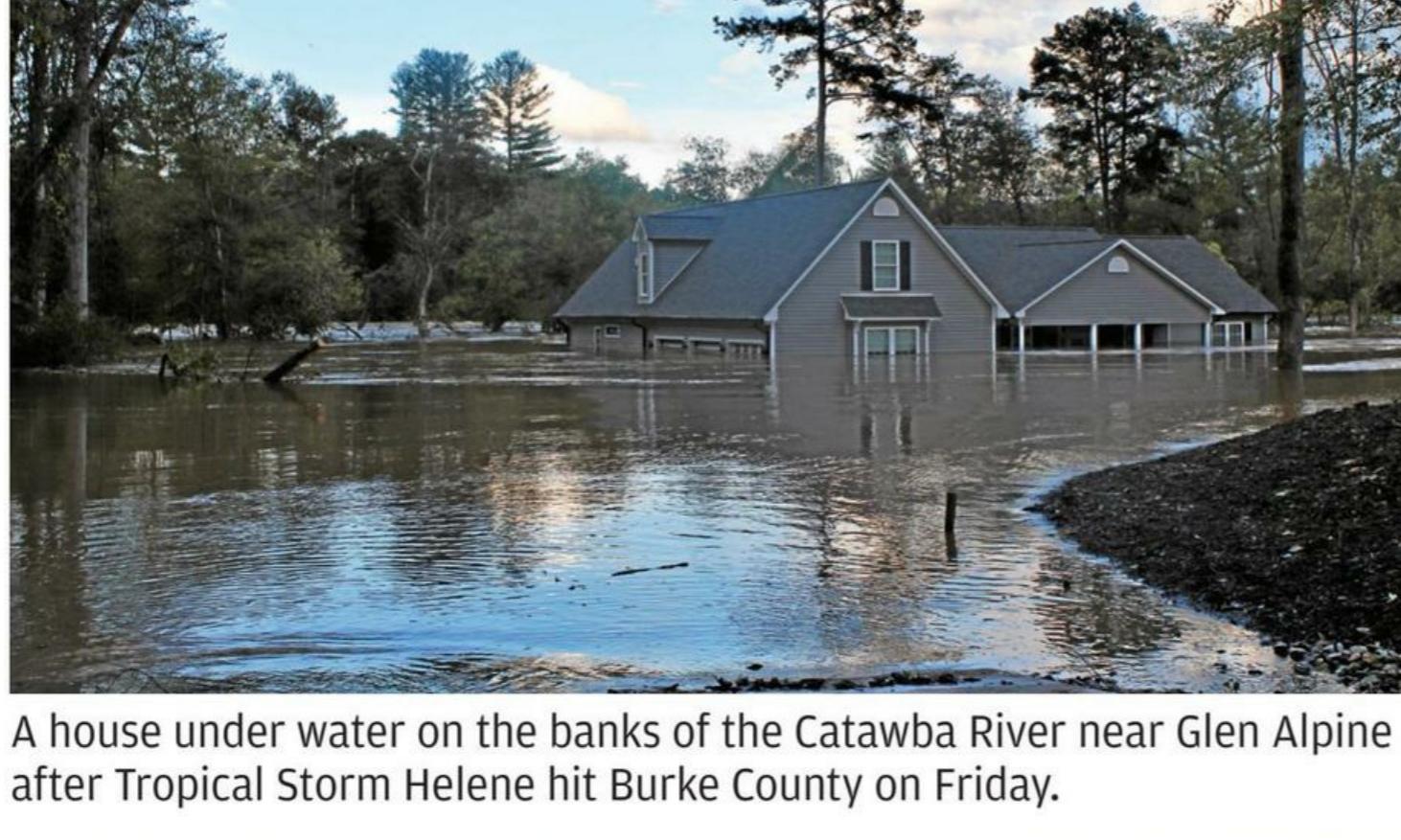
The county is going to stop accepting donation by 8 p.m. Tuesday due to the abundance of supplies that have been donated, a news release from the county said. Donation center shopping will end at 5 p.m. on Thursday, the county said.

"Thanks to your incredible outpouring of support, the community is saturated with clean water, food, hygiene supplies, blankets, and other items," the release said. "Both functions can be reorganized should the need arise."

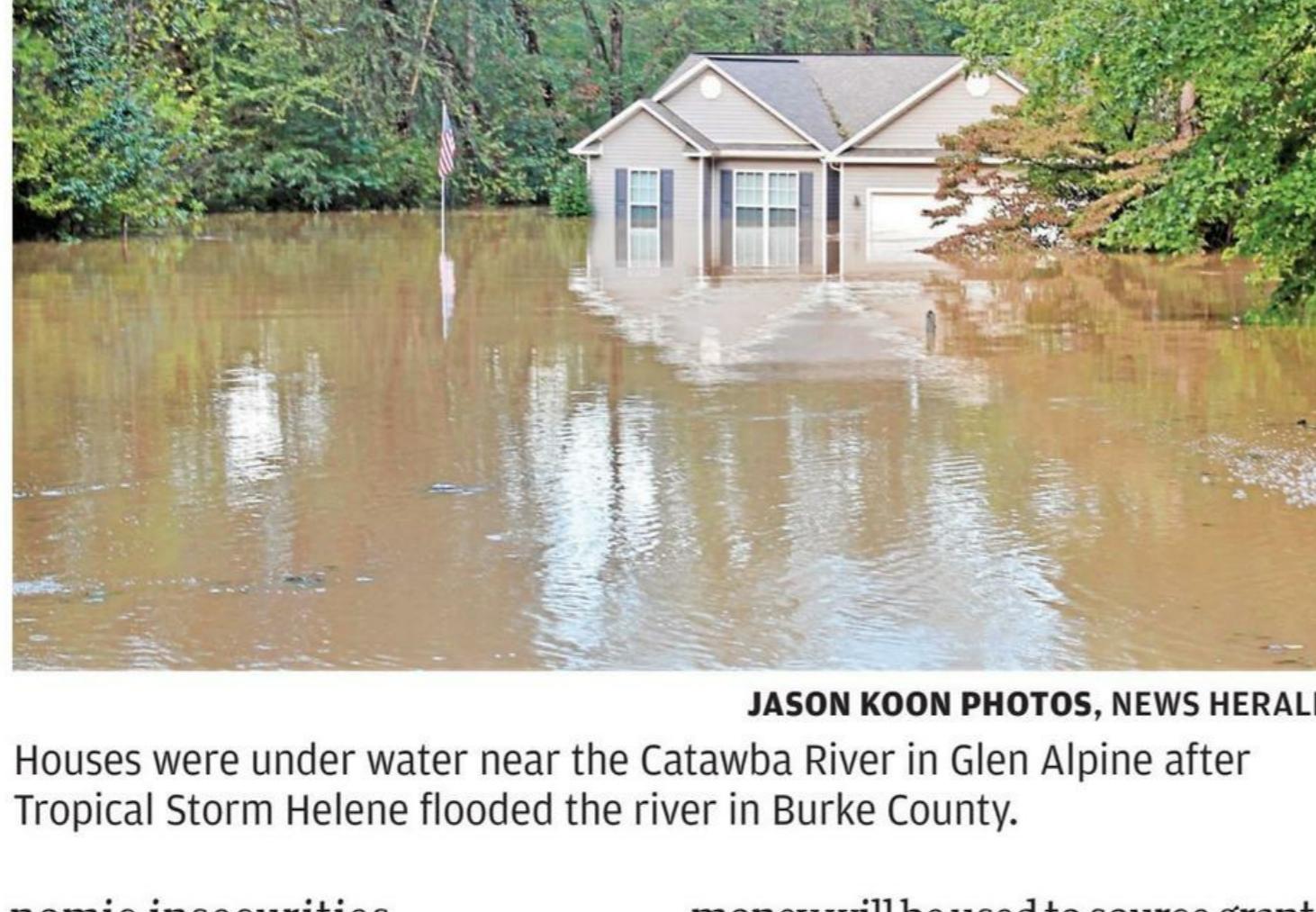
White said the distribution centers have served around 1,200 people a day, but that has diminished this week. The county's distribution centers served 600 people in four hours on Sunday, White said.

The items being given out at the distribution centers include water, nonperishable food, toiletries, diapers, baby wipes and batteries.

The county said relief efforts are transitioning to a more long-term relief strategy that supports housing, food and eco-



A house under water on the banks of the Catawba River near Glen Alpine after Tropical Storm Helene hit Burke County on Friday.



Houses were under water near the Catawba River in Glen Alpine after Tropical Storm Helene flooded the river in Burke County.

More Information

If you are still in need of supplies, contact one of these fire departments:

- George Hildebrand Fire/Rescue, located at 7470 George Hildebrand School Road, Connelly Springs
- Longtown Fire Department, located at 7765 South Mountain Institute Road, Nebo.
- Enola Fire/Rescue, located at 2510 Enola Road, Morganton.
- Brendleton Fire/Rescue, located at 5157 U.S. Hwy. 64, Morganton
- Jonas Ridge Fire Department, located at 8224 Buckeye Hollow Rd., Newland.

county.org/grants.html

Storm debris

Valdese Mayor Charlie Watts, who retired as the town's fire chief, said if tree debris is in the street or street right-of-way, the cleanup would fall to the North Carolina Department of Transportation or the municipality.

Watts said FEMA also has a debris program in place to help if a property owner can get the debris to the street, then NCDOT will pick it up. He said if the tree is on private property, municipalities can't clean it up.

Property owners should not take debris to the landfill. The county has contracted with a hauler to manage debris collection directly from residential areas.

Watts said after a storm, if the town has a lot of trees fall into roads, it's standard operation for

the town to get at least one lane open and then move on to the next street with trees down. The town will then come back and clear the street later, he said.

Residents are requested to move storm debris to the street curb and separate it into three distinct piles:

- Vegetation (tree limbs, branches, etc.)
- White goods (appliances like refrigerators, washing machines)
- Building materials (construction debris, wood, drywall)

Burning debris

For those who are thinking about burning debris such as trees, limbs or brush, the North Carolina Forest Service is advising caution.

"Recent tropical weather, most notably Hurricane Helene, has left piles of debris in its wake. Once safe to do so, many people will have significant yard cleanup and may choose to dispose of leaves and other yard debris by burning it," Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler said in a release. "Outdoor fires left unattended can get out of hand quickly, becoming wildfires that threaten lives and property."

Typically, wildfires occur more frequently in October through early December. In 2023, the N.C. Forest Service responded to nearly 2,000 wildfires during those months, with response to more than 1,200 of those fires taking place in November.

Troxler said before residents choose to burn debris, they need to obtain a valid burn permit and keep an eye on the weather.

You can obtain a burn permit at any N.C. Forest Service office or Burke County Fire Marshal, or online at www.ncforestservice.gov/burnpermit.