

Unemployment assistance is available for disaster victims

October 23, 2024 | Cherokee Scout (NC)

Section: News 326 Words

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Raleigh - Following a federal disaster declaration resulting from the devastating impacts from Hurricane Helene, the Division of Employment Security has announced that 25 North Carolina counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina have been approved for Disaster Unemployment Assistance.

Disaster Unemployment Assistance benefits are available for residents of the following counties: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey counties as well as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina. Additional counties may be added to the list of those eligible for Disaster Unemployment Assistance at a later date.

People in these counties who are unemployed as a direct result of Hurricane Helene may be eligible for unemployment benefits under the Disaster Unemployment Assistance program. Business owners and self-employed individuals affected by the storm may also qualify for benefits.

People in the 25 counties as well as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina have 60 days from Oct. 1 to file an application for Disaster Unemployment Assistance at des.nc.gov.

Deadline to apply is Monday, Dec. 2. Disaster Unemployment Assistance is available in these counties for weeks of unemployment effective Sept. 29 and may last for up to 26 weeks. Eligibility for Disaster Unemployment Assistance is determined weekly, and you must continue to be out of work as a direct result of the disaster each week to get unemployment benefits.

To receive Disaster Unemployment Assistance benefits, all required documentation must be submitted within 21 days from the day the Disaster Unemployment Assistance application is filed.

Division of Employment Security will work with people who cannot provide all documentation to ensure that their unemployment benefits are not delayed.

Claims are filed through the Division of Employment Security website at des.nc.gov. If unable to file through the website, call the DUA Hotline at 919-629-3857 to apply for benefits.

Details: Visit des.nc.gov or call the DUA Hotline at 919-629-3857.

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How to apply for FEMA assistance after Hurricane Helene hit

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Raleigh - North Carolina homeowners and renters in 25 counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians who had uninsured damage or losses caused by Hurricane Helene may be eligible for FEMA disaster assistance. FEMA may be able to help with serious needs, displacement, temporary lodging, basic home repair costs, personal property loss or other disaster-caused needs. Homeowners and renters in Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians can apply. There are several ways to apply: Visit DisasterAssistance.gov, use the FEMA App or call 800-621-3362 from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. ET daily.

The telephone line is open every day and help is available in most languages. If you use a relay service, such as Video Relay Service, captioned telephone or other service, give FEMA your number for that service. To view an accessible video on how to apply, visit Three Ways to Apply for FEMA Disaster Assistance on YouTube. FEMA's disaster assistance offers benefits that provide flexible funding directly to survivors. In addition, a simplified process and expanded eligibility allows North Carolinians access to a wider range of assistance for serious needs. What you'll need when you apply: u A phone number where you can be contacted. u Your address at the time of the disaster and address where you are staying. u Social Security number. u A general list of damage and losses. u Banking information if you choose direct deposit. u If insured, the policy number or the agent and/or the company name. If you have homeowners, renters or flood insurance, you should file a claim as soon as possible. FEMA cannot duplicate benefits for losses covered by insurance. If your policy does not cover all your disaster expenses, you may be eligible for federal assistance. Details: Visit fema.gov/disaster/4827. Follow at x. com/femaregion4 or facebook.com/fema.

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Hurricane relief benefit concert features Quick Brown Fox band

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Hayesville - In response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene, the Clay County Communities Revitalization Association, presenter of the Friday night concerts, will host a benefit concert to raise funds for the ongoing recovery efforts in the impacted areas of western North Carolina. The family friendly concert will take place from 3-7 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 27, at the historic courthouse on the square in downtown. Quick Brown Fox will headline the show, kicking offat 3 p.m. The event is free to the public. Cash donations will be accepted and greatly appreciated. All funds raised will be directed to organizations involved in relief efforts in western North Carolina. Bring friends and favorite yard chairs and come out to enjoy the music to support a good cause. Food and beverages will be available for purchase, and free games for kids and adults.

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'Hurricane relief benefit concert features Quick Brown Fox band', *Cherokee Scout* (online), 23 Oct 2024 8B https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C622A534261900



Far-west reminds tourists its still open for fall

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Author: Randy Foster editor@cherokeescout.com | Section: News | 863 Words

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Murphy - The October edition of Our State Magazine, a statewide publication that promotes tourism, includes a series of articles about western North Carolina that project optimism for the coming fall colors season, but which wound up having a far darker side.

The magazine includes a map with dots over communities that it is featuring in each edition. October's map highlights western North Carolina's fall foliage locations, but it's nearly identical to maps that show parts of the state hardest hit by Hurricane Helene in late September.

With a 25-county swath of North Carolina still reeling in Helene's aftermath, roads remain closed, power is spotty, and even essential services like drinking water and sewage treatment remain out of service in many communities. While fall 2024 may be a bust for storm-affected counties, the influx of labor and recovery dollars to rebuild the region over the next year or two may more than make up for it.

Meanwhile, Helene barely touched Cherokee County. Although local residents are eligible for disaster unemployment assistance, because the county was not included in the federal major disaster declaration, local businesses are not eligible for disaster relief; no reconstruction or recovery are necessary. No help is on the way because, compared to its neighbors, no help is needed.

However, in far-western counties like Cherokee, where local businesses rely on fall tourism to help balance their books, a severe fall-offof fall tourists could be a huge problem.

A big industry Helene shut down the Blue Ridge Parkway indefinitely and will impact, if not cancel, there 2024 fall foliage tourism in most of western North Carolina.

Fall foliage tourism is a \$1 billion industry in North Carolina, according to an Appalachian State University study. A typical family of four spends \$400-\$1, 000 on a trip.

"That's no small chump change, and such expenditures are critical to the success of businesses in the mountains, many of whom depend on fall tourism to balance their books," the report says.

Appalachian State's website includes a map of fall color peak times for the North Carolina mountains. The peak season for much of the storm-affected areas occurred the week or two following Helene. Peak viewing in the farwestern state ranges from Oct. 13 through Nov. 28, with most of Cherokee County falling from Nov. 1-10.

According to drivenc.gov, a website run by the N.C. Department of Transportation that reports highway status throughout North Carolina, as of Monday, Interstate 40 remains closed at the Tennessee line. However, it is open through to U.S. 64/74 near Lake Junaluska, with most highways open west of there clear to Georgia and Tennessee. That's a big improvement since the week following Helene, when Cherokee County was cut offfrom the rest of the state. However, Cherokee and its neighbors are still dealing with the lingering perception that all of western North Carolina is shut down.

A large roadside billboard advertises "Visitors needed" and lists Franklin, Highlands, Cashiers, Sylva, Dillsboro, Cherokee, Bryson City, Robbinsville, Murphy, Andrews and Hayesville, according to a photo posted by Smoky Mountain Host of North Carolina, which offers travel information for the Great Smoky Mountains in North Carolina via its Facebook page, Visit Smokies.

Maggie Valley and Waynesville will be added to the list, Smoky Mountain Host posted. Visit Cherokee County, a website and social media for the Cherokee County Tourism Development Authority, shared the post on its Facebook page.

"We welcome your visit to Murphy, Andrews & Brasstown, NC," the site posted. "Our area is fully operational, as we fortunately were not impacted by Helene. We appreciate your support to our local economy this fall, as we rely on this season heavily. The efforts of our locals, alongside the resilience of the people, showcase the strength of our regions during this difficult time.

"At this time we ask that you get here safely and follow drivenc.gov guidance to avoid traveling through impacted areas."

Murphy Mayor Tim Radford posted a reminder on his Facebook page that Cherokee County and its neighbors are still open for business.

"Four western North Carolina counties - including Cherokee, Graham, Clay and Swain - are fully open and accessible via safe routes, according to local authorities. Despite the recent hurricane's impact on other areas, these mountain communities have largely escaped damage and are ready to welcome visitors," he posted.

"Tourism is a critical part of the region's economy, and officials are encouraging visitors to explore the beauty of the mountains as a way to support local businesses and communities. Whether hiking, exploring scenic byways or visiting local shops and restaurants, tourists play a significant role in helping the region thrive, particularly in the aftermath of the storm.

"However, officials stress that visitors should avoid traveling to areas severely affected by the storm. Relief efforts are ongoing in these hard-hit regions, and it is essential that resources and infrastructure remain focused on recovery.

"Travelers are advised to check local road conditions and plan their routes carefully, ensuring they steer clear of the damaged areas while supporting those parts of the western North Carolina mountains that are open and ready to receive guests."

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Randy Foster editor@cherokeescout.com, 'Far-west reminds tourists its still open for fall', *Cherokee Scout* (online), 23 Oct 2024 2A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C622A4DB0680B8



Electric bus contract draws rebuke from commissioners

October 23, 2024 | Cherokee Scout (NC) Author: Randy Foster editor@cherokeescout.com| Section: News| 502 Words Page: 9A OpenURL Link

Murphy - Cherokee County commissioners approved \$288, 085 in sales tax expenditures for several Cherokee County Schools projects, but rejected one - \$69, 750, reimbursable by the state - for equipment to recharge the district's electric bus. The \$288, 085 covered eight projects, with most - \$241, 029 - going to Hiwassee Dam middle and high schools for parking lot paving and retaining wall projects. Hiwassee Dam also received \$7, 170 for a water tank installation. The next largest group of expenditures went to Murphy Elementary School for gym wall padding, cafeteria awning and gym restroom tiling at a total cost of \$27, 924. Ranger Elementary received approval for \$11, 962 in expenditures for chiller work. Funding for the projects came from Article 40-42 sales tax proceeds, leaving a balance of \$5.25 million in that account for schools' use. The board of commissioners approved the expenditures unanimously during the board's Oct. 7 meeting..

The request for \$69, 750 was a different matter. It was the second time the request came up after the board asked for more information when it was first requested. The board wanted to know of any future obligations if it approved the funding request. County leaders have questioned how effective an electric bus would be in a mountain environment, especially during cold winter months when batteries are far less efficient. By the time the request came up a second time, western North Carolina was severely impacted by the remnants of Category 4 Hurricane Helene in late September. The storm caused widespread power outages, putting recharging stations out of commission and causing fires when electric vehicles were exposed to flooding. During the second request, board members saw that electricity for the bus would be about \$300 per month. And the school district requires state approval to back out of the contract. The issue is essentially moot, however, since the school district already received the bus and the charging equipment in 2023, county attorney Darryl Brown said. Cherokee County Schools Superintendent Keevin Woody signed the agreement with the state in March 2023. "These bills are a year old," County Manager Randy Wiggins pointed out. Cherokee County Schools officials were seeking a way to pay the expense from sales tax proceeds rather than the district's fund balance. "We're just asking you for our own money," Woody said. County Commissioner Dan Eichenbaum described electric buses as a "money pit" and objected to the open-ended nature of the school district's agreement with the state. "I don't think it's a good deal," Eichenbaum said. Commissioner Ben Adams initially made a motion to approve the expense, but withdrew his motion when he realized the school district already signed the contract without commissioners' approval. Without board approval, the expense will have to be paid from the school district's fund balance. Either way, the \$69, 750 is reimbursable by the state - as long as the state approves how the money was used. Eichenbaum offered Woody this advice: "Don't sign contracts without checking with us," he said.

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Early voting draws 10.7% of voters

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Murphy - Voting for the 2024 general election began Thursday, with 2, 493 votes cast in Cherokee County as of Monday morning - including 2, 256 cast through in-person early voting.

As of Monday, mail-in ballots received included 223 civilian, two military and 12 overseas.

In Cherokee County, there are 11, 789 Republicans, 7, 813 unaffiliated and 3, 355 Democrats registered. Total voter registration as of Jan. 1 was 23, 114. As of Monday, total voter turnout in Cherokee County was 10.7%. In Clay County, there were 1, 429 in-person early votes cast as of Monday, with 107 civilian mail-in ballots, one military and eight overseas. Graham County reported 827 in-person early votes, with 53 mail-in civilian ballots, and zero military and overseas ballots. Statewide, 1.031 million votes had been cast - 13.24% of eligible voters, of which 939, 123 were from in-person early voting, 78, 162 were from civilian mail-in ballots, 2, 709 military mailedin ballots and 11, 216 overseas mailedin ballots.

While the numbers seem impressive, they fall short of 2020 election statistics as of 15 days remaining until Election Day. In 2020, there were just shy of 1.55 million early votes cast, although COVID-19 likely was a factor as voters sought to avoid Election Day crowds by voting early.

In 2016, there were 478, 550 early votes cast at this point. For the first day of early voting this year, Thursday's statewide numbers set a record, according to the N.C. State Board of Elections.

Thursday set a first-day record of 353, 166 ballots accepted at sites statewide, according to preliminary State Board of Elections data. The early voting numbers topped the previous record for the first day of early voting - 348, 559, set in 2020 - by 1.3%.

Through Monday, statewide, Democrats led voter turnout with 35.34% of ballots cast so far. Republicans came in second at 33.16%, followed by unaffiliated voters at 31.02%.

None of the other parties came in more than 1% of the proportion of voter turnout.

Democrats also led in voter turnout at 14.96%, followed by Republicans at 14.73% and unaffiliated at 10.84% Female turnout came in at 13.86% and 51.57% of the votes cast, followed by males at 13.48% turnout and 42.75% of votes cast. Undesignated gender was at 8.63% turnout and 5.68% of votes cast.

Voter registration and demographic statistics at the county level were not provided by the State Board of Elections.

Early voting begins Early voting began Thursday in Cherokee County, with long lines outside the Cherokee County Board of Elections in Murphy from the start.

On that first day, 1, 093 people voted early and in person in Cherokee County - 4.7% of eligible local voters.

Around lunchtime that day, about 80 people stood in line to vote in this important election, which will determine the next president, vice president, governor, lieutenant governor, congressional representative, along with a long line of other key state and county offices.

Long lines continued through the weekend into Monday.

Among local races, only one is contested - Cherokee County Board of Education, District II, with incumbent Republican Arnold Mathews running against unaffiliated candidate Paul Wilson.

What to expect If you vote early in Cherokee County, here's what you can expect. You can only vote early and in person at the Cherokee County Board of Elections office, 40 Peachtree St.

If early voting continues as it was Thursday, the end of the line will be along the county annex building offPeachtree Street. The line continues leftaround the corner to the building's front door.

People are ushered inside in small groups, where another line formed in the hallway. Past that is the elections office, where workers check your identification - don't forget to bring your photo ID - print out documentation and give you a blank ballot hand-marked with your voter precinct.

You will be asked to verify your information on the documentation before continuing to yet another line down a hallway that stops at the actual room with the ballot boxes. Voters are allowed in one at a time as ballot machines become available.

Once ushered into the ballot room, the blank ballot is fed into the voting machine, and voters are shown how the machine works and how to pick candidates. Candidates' parties are included with their names. Once done picking candidates on the touch screen, the ballot is returned to the voter, who then inserts the completed ballot into a collection machine that verifies the votes.

Voters then leave the room and, if they wish, can grab a sticker showing they voted. They then exit the building out a different door than the one they entered.

The whole process can take an hour, so come prepared for the temperature (Thursday was chilly and breezy) and bring something to drink and snack on. Bring a portable chair if you need to, because there are few opportunities to sit down.

Handicapped voters can drive up to one of two parking spots reserved for them along Peachtree Street in front of the building. A wire along the ground detects when a car arrives, so make sure you drive over the wire.

In-person early voting for the 2024 general election ends at 3 p.m. Nov. 2 in all 100 counties. Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 5.

Top 10 tips Statewide, 419 early voting sites opened Thursday across North Carolina.

"In-person early voting has been the most popular method of voting in recent general elections, and we expect that will continue in 2024," said Karen Brinson Bell, executive director of the State Board of Elections.

In 2020, 65% of North Carolina voters chose in-person early voting as their voting method. And in the presidential election of 2016, 62% of N.C. voters cast their ballot early.

The following are tips for voters as early voting begins from the State Board of Elections:

- 1. Early voting locations. Eligible voters may cast a ballot at the Cherokee County Board of Elections office. Other election sites in the county will be open only on Election Day.
- 2. Bring your photo ID. Voters will be asked to show photo ID when they check in to vote. Most voters will show their driver's license, but many other forms of photo ID will be accepted. Voters who do not have photo ID can meet the photo ID requirement by either (1) filling out a form explaining why they are unable to show ID, or (2) showing their ID at the county board of elections office by 5 p.m. Nov. 14. More information about the photo ID requirement is available at BringltNC.gov.

- 3. Free photo IDs. Any registered voter who needs a photo ID can get one for free from their county board of elections office during the early voting period, which ends Nov. 2. 4. Register to vote. The regular voter registration deadline was Oct. 11. But any North Carolinian who is eligible to vote may still register and vote during the early voting period. Registrants must provide proof of their residence address, which can be a driver's license or other government document, paycheck, utility bill, or bank statement.
- 5. Updating registration. During early voting, registered voters may update their name or address within the same county, if necessary.
- 6. Absentee ballot drop-off. Voters who vote by absentee ballot can return it by mail or hand it to an election official at an early voting site in their county. They can also drop it offin person to their county board of elections office. Voters registered in the 25 counties in the Helene disaster area in western North Carolina may return their absentee ballot to any early voting site in the state during early voting hours. Ballots will be kept secure and delivered to the voter's county board of elections for processing.
- 7. Voting in person instead of absentee. Voters who requested an absentee ballot but have not yet returned it may choose instead to vote in person during the early voting period or on Election Day. Voters may discard the absentee ballot and do not need to bring it to a voting site.
- 8. Peace at the polls. All voters should respect the rights of others to participate in the election. Election officials are trained to quickly address incidents that might interfere with a voter's ability to cast their ballot. Intimidating any voter is a crime. Voters who feel harassed or intimidated should notify an election official immediately.
- 9. Voters in need of assistance. Voters in need of assistance may bring an eligible person to help them enter and exit the polling place or to help them complete their ballot according to the voter's instructions. Election officials are also available to help voters. Curbside voting is also available for voters unable to enter the voting site.

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Problems linger in Helene's aftermath

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Hiwassee Dam - From lost truckers to incorrectly identified road closures, lingering side effects of Tropical Storm Helene continue to affect Cherokee County. Increased traffic among truck drivers headed to - or around - areas of North Carolina affected by Helene have caused traffic headaches in Cherokee County. Big rig and box truck traf-fic on N.C. 294 has resulted in accidents and road blocks. In one incident, a crash that blocked N.C. 294 led to a detour via Candy Mountain Road until it, too, was blocked by a truck accident. Traffic concerns have also been reported on U.S. 19/74 in the Nantahala Gorge. Meanwhile, drivers headed to Robbinsville from Cherokee County using Google Maps are shown a route through Tatham Gap Road, a winding gravel road, instead of the usual route from Topton to Robbinsville via U.S. 129. The confusion stems from the DriveNC.gov website that shows the Topton to Robbinsville route as being closed to truck traffic. Google Maps applied the restriction to all vehicle traf-fic. Apple Maps shows the route as open.

Helene's eye passed near Andrews on Sept. 27, with about 25 counties east of Cherokee County experiencing record rainfall and devastating flooding. Recovery continues Recovery and relief efforts continue in western North Carolina as local, state and federal partners work together to help those affected. Gov. Roy Cooper issued an emergency executive order authorizing the N.C. Department of Commerce, Division of Employment Security, to increase the amount of weekly unemployment payments available to North Carolinians in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. The order increases weekly unemployment benefits from a maximum of \$350 a week to a maximum of \$600 a week. To ensure that these workers receive necessary benefits in the wake of Helene, the order will also increase benefits by \$250 a week (up to the \$600 cap) for all eligible workers. This order is tied to the State of Emergency for Helene, and will only remain in effect until the end of the emergency or until it is rescinded. Unemployment insurance The Division of Employment Security added 12 counties including Cherokee County approved for Disaster Unemployment Assistance because of the devastating impacts from Hurricane Helene, which brings the total approved for DUA to 39 counties, plus the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina. DUA benefits are available for residents of the following additional counties: Cabarrus, Cherokee, Forsyth, Graham, Iredell, Lee, Nash, Rowan, Stanly, Surry, Union and Yadkin, in addition to counties previously included in the disaster declaration. Additional counties may be added to the DUA availability designation. People in the 12 newly approved disaster-declared counties, plus Mecklenburg and Swain counties, who are unable to continue working as a direct result of Hurricane Helene, must file an application by Dec. 9. If you became unemployed as a direct result of the effects of Hurricane Helene impacting North Carolina, you may be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits under the DUA program. Business owners and self-employed individuals affected by the storm may also qualify for benefits.

People and business owners must meet the following criteria to be eligible for benefits: u No longer have the job that provided their primary source of income. u Are unable to reach their place of unemployment. u Cannot work because of an injury caused by the storm. u Were unable to begin employment or self-employment due to the storm. u Have become the major supplier of household income due to a stormrelated death of the previous major supplier of household income. DUA is entirely funded by the federal government. You first need to file for state unemployment benefits. If you are determined to be ineligible for state unemployment or have exhausted your state benefits, then you may be eligible for a DUA claim. DUA is available for weeks of unemployment beginning with the week of Sept. 29, and may last for up to 26 weeks, which ends March 29, 2025. Eligibility for DUA is determined weekly, and you must continue to be out of work as a direct result of the disaster each week to get unemployment benefits. Claims are filed through the DES website at des. nc.gov. If you are not able to file through the website, you can call the DUA Hotline at 919-629-3857 to apply for benefits. A Spanish language DUA hotline is available at 919-276-5698. DUA benefits are available for residents of the following counties: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Cabarrus, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Forsyth, Gaston, Graham,

Haywood, Henderson, Iredell, Jackson, Lee, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Nash, Polk, Rowan, Rutherford, Stanly, Surry, Swain, Transylvania, Union, Watauga, Wilkes, Yadkin and Yancey, as well as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina. Details: Visit des.nc.gov/dua. Education waivers University of North Carolina institutions will waive application fees for all students from 39 disasterdeclared counties, including Cherokee and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, during College Application Week from Oct. 21-27. College Application Week is a statewide initiative to encourage high school seniors to pursue higher education, and many colleges and universities in North Carolina waive their application fees during this period. For details about application fee waivers and other resources for applying to college, visit the N.C. Countdown to College website. The institutions offering free applications to high school students from disaster-declared counties are: Appalachian State University; N.C. State University; UNC at Chapel Hill; UNC at Charlotte; UNC at Greensboro; and UNC at Wilmington. In addition, the following UNC universities will waive application fees for all North Carolina high school students this week regardless of where they live: East Carolina University; Elizabeth City State University; Fayetteville State University; N.C. Agricultural & Technical State University; N.C. Central University; UNC at Asheville; UNC at Pembroke; UNC School of the Arts; Western Carolina University; and Winston-Salem State University. Several universities will also extend fee waivers beyond College Application Week for students from the disaster-declared counties, including N.C. State, UNC at Chapel Hill and UNC at Wilmington. Details are available on each university's website. The disaster-declared counties are Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Cabarrus, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Forsyth, Gaston, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Iredell, Jackson, Lee, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Nash, Polk, Rowan, Rutherford, Stanly, Surry, Swain, Transylvania, Union, Watauga, Wilkes, Yadkin and Yancey, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

The application fee waiver will be extended to any counties that may be added to the federal disaster declaration for Helene prior to the end of College Application Week on Sunday. State aid On Oct. 9, the N.C. House of Representatives reconvened in Raleigh and passed the first emergency disaster relief bill following the devastation of Hurricane Helene. More than \$273 million is appropriated in HB149, "Disaster Recovery Act of 2024" from the rainy day fund for recovery. This legislation funds urgent needs to rebuild communities, support small businesses, meet water and transportation needs and make election changes to ensure voters in western North Carolina will be able to vote in the upcoming election. Various provisions of the bill include: u Provides critical flexibility for school calendars, allowing remote instruction days for districts impacted by Hurricane Helene. u Guarantees that teachers and staffwill receive full compensation for any instructional days missed due to the hurricane, ensuring that educators are supported as they work to maintain continuity in students' education during this challenging time of recovery. u Expands absentee ballot return options, allowing voters registered in affected counties to submit their ballots at any county board of elections office statewide.

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Nixon's Catering feeds 11K in western NC

October 23, 2024 | Chowan Herald, The (NC) Author: Vernon Fueston | Section: Local | 496 Words OpenURL Link

A crew from Leon Nixon's Catering recently spent two weeks in western North Carolina, helping feed 11,000 people displaced by flooding in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

The relief effort depended on volunteers, most of them Nixon's employees, with the local company footing the cost for equipment, food, and fuel for two trips to the storm-battered region, one on Sept. 30, the other on Oct. 4.

Contributions from the community also helped defray the cost of the trips, and Nixon's is seeking additional contributions to cover the cost of future relief trips to western North Carolina counties.

Lynn Trueblood, a manager at Nixon's Catering, made the two trips with his wife, Amber, and their two children, Blair and Jayden. Volunteers included Steve and Sheila Evans, Catherine Stallings, Chris Evans, Dennis McClenney, Lisa Evans, Don Bunch, Cindy Phthisic, and Peggy Bunch.

Trueblood said the project was a joint effort between Leon Nixon's Catering, Nixon's Restaurant, and Nixon's Fishery.

On Sept. 30, the Nixon's crew arrived in Boone, where they found a scene of complete devastation. Power was out to 30,000 people. People had no access to food. Stores were swept away or flooded out. They fed community members from their mobile catering truck — between 1,000 and 1,100 people a day. In the first week, they fed 6,552 people.

The efforts were hosted by a local church, which provided tables and servers. Their second effort started on Oct. 4 with volunteers taking the food out to satellite drop-off sites, taking 50 to 200 servings at a time. Between the two trips, the local volunteers served more than 11,000 meals.

"I spoke to Senator Norman Sanderson several times, Trueblood said, referring to the state senator who represents the 1st state Senate District, which includes Chowan. "About 30,000 people were without power, and there were still about 95 people unaccounted for.

"There was a water treatment plant that was under 20 to 40 feet of water and a mudslide," he said. "They had no clue when they would ever get water back because it had completely destroyed the plant."

Trueblood said he saw cars flipped over and half buried in mud by the fast-moving waters, houses completely washed from their foundations, and hillsides that collapsed during the rains, burying everything in the mud's path.

"Of course, the weather's turning cold in the mountains, and they've already had some snow over the last couple of nights. They're really in dire straits for blankets, hoodies, sweatshirts... anything warm," he said. "They need portable propane heaters and propane bottles to stay warm as well as canvas and stuff like that."

Trueblood said the need in western North Carolina will be around for a while and he plans to take the portable kitchen back up to provide more assistance. The effort has been expensive, but the Chowan community has pitched in with contributions to help.

If you want to participate, mail contributions to Leon Nixon's Catering Service, 749 Virginia Road, Edenton, NC 27932. Donors with credit cards may call the business at (252) 482-5660.

• Citation (aglc Style)

Vernon Fueston, 'Nixon's Catering feeds 11K in western NC', *Chowan Herald, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C63E7D5A35CEF0



Severe Flood Risk Threatens Over One-Third of Global Population, Report Finds | Insurify

October 23, 2024 | Courier-Times, The (Roxboro, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: National | 637 Words OpenURL Link

Recent hurricanes Helene and Milton poured trillions of gallons of rainwater across multiple states, causing catastrophic flooding. But the problem of increasingly elevated flood risk isn't unique to the U.S.

Changing weather patterns, population movement, and other factors affecting inland and coastal waters expose 3 in 10 people worldwide to significant flood risk, according to a recent report from data and insights company Moody's. North America's population faces comparatively low risk among global regions; Southeast Asia and the Middle East experience the most flood risk over 10-, 30-, 50-, and 200-year periods.

Moody's report, though, didn't analyze flood risk to properties — only to populations.

"North America's population exposed to 10-year coastal flood events is remarkably low," the report reads. "This should however not be confused with property at risk, where in some regions the population exposed to frequent coastal flooding is low but the proportion of high-value homes being affected leads to more headline news."

What causes flooding that leads to costly insured losses?

Thunderstorms or severe convective storms mainly occurring in the U.S. accounted for 70% of global insured losses in the first half of 2024, according to the Swiss Re Institute. Strong winds characterize these storms, which often include tornadoes, hail, and heavy rain. Those conditions, in turn, can cause storm surges and overflowing waterways.

In just the first half of 2024, these storms led to \$42 billion of global insured losses, according to Swiss Re. Twelve U.S. storms led to \$1 billion or more each in insured losses, accounting for around 30% or more of global losses.

"Insured losses from severe thunderstorms have been growing due to a mix of factors including inflation, which has contributed to rising construction costs," said Jérôme Jean Haegeli, group chief economist for Swiss Re, in a release. "And, with economic development, overall exposures will continue to increase. That's why investing in protective measures — such as shielding vulnerable communities from floods or improving building codes to protect homes from severe hailstorms — is vital."

Floods specifically caused above-average losses, and events in the United Arab Emirates, Germany, and Brazil accounted for 14% of losses, Swiss Re reported. Torrential rain causing flash floods in the Arabian Peninsula led to at least \$2 billion of insured losses in the UAE alone.

As in Moody's report, Swiss Re noted severe weather isn't the only factor.

"While heavy rainfall is expected to increase in a warmer climate, swift urban growth, land use alteration, scarce drainage systems, and dry soils intensify loss severity," reads an August release.

What's next: How losses affect U.S. insurance costs

Since homeowners insurance policies don't cover flood damage, the financial burden of insured flood losses falls on the Federal Emergency Management Administration's National Flood Insurance Program or private flood insurers. Many homeowners also go without flood coverage, shouldering that burden themselves.

As Haegeli suggests, more factors than severe weather affect the cost of insured losses. Severe storms also cause

more damage than just flooding. These climate catastrophes affect home and car insurance rates in numerous states, especially when legal system abuse and inflation exacerbate claims costs, according to Insurify analysis.

Florida, Louisiana, and Oklahoma have the highest home insurance rates in the U.S., according to Insurify's home insurance report, and all experience significant weather-related losses largely from hurricanes and tornadoes.

The increased incidence of flooding also affects car insurance rates, since the comprehensive coverage portion of a full-coverage auto insurance policy covers flood damage. In August, Insurify identified North Carolina as a state where car insurance rates are rising fastest, largely due to flood damage. The recent Hurricane Helene underscores that risk.

"As we experience tornadoes, hail, and flooding in places where they weren't necessarily a major threat before, the increased frequency and severity of these events will need to be considered in pricing," Betsy Stella, vice president of carrier management and operations at Insurify, said in Insurify's car insurance report.

Related articles

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Thousands of US Communities Forgo Federal Flood Insurance | Insurify

October 23, 2024 | Courier-Times, The (Roxboro, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: National | 1408 Words OpenURL Link

Catastrophic inland flooding in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee has made headlines across the country in recent months. Severe flooding in areas not typically associated with flood problems may have Americans wondering if they should buy federal flood insurance.

But National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) coverage may not be available to everyone who wants it.

Nationally, 2,279 communities don't participate in the voluntary program that provides insurance against flood damage, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and most homeowners policies won't cover flood damage. Property owners in non-participating municipalities can't buy federally backed flood insurance.

Often, non-participating communities are rural, and many have very small populations. Other communities may seem to have little to no risk of flooding, though some may be unaware of the true risk in their area.

Communities that don't participate in the NFIP often "have horrible, inadequate flood maps," Chad Berginnis, executive director of the Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM), told Insurify. "FEMA's limited mapping budget goes to areas with risk, and your areas of higher risk are going to be bigger. In smaller communities, you're going to have old, approximate flood data."

A lack of good data and floodplain maps is a widespread problem for communities, Berginnis said.

"We have 3.5 million miles of streams, rivers, and coastlines in the country. We've mapped 1.2 million miles of them. We've only mapped a third of our floodplains."

How the NFIP works

FEMA manages the NFIP, which Congress created in 1968 with the National Flood Insurance Act. Homeowners, businesses, and renters can buy flood coverage through the NFIP Direct system or more than 50 insurance companies that work with FEMA.

In order to participate in the NFIP, communities must agree to regulate residential and commercial development in any floodplains that fall within the municipality's boundaries. Communities can participate in the NFIP only if their adopted and enforced regulations meet or exceed NFIP criteria.

In participating communities, any property is eligible to buy NFIP coverage — even those outside a mapped floodplain. Currently, the NFIP underwrites approximately 5 million policies in over 22,600 communities across all 50 states and six U.S. territories.

Any area that receives rain can be at risk for flooding, and flooding is the most common natural disaster, causing the costliest damages, according to FEMA. Yet nearly one-third of all NFIP claims originate in areas outside high-risk flood zones.

Impacted by Hurricanes Helene or Milton?

Federal and state governments have made extensive resources available to victims of recent damaging storms. For helpful information and links to resources, visit the Association of State Floodplain Managers post-flood resources page.

Why communities don't participate

Berginnis, who spent a decade in Ohio's state floodplain management office before joining ASFPM, said communities may forgo NFIP participation for multiple reasons.

Some have no identified floodplains in their boundaries. Others may have flood zones that are already off limits for development. Some may have considered the relative costs of initiating a floodplain management program — a prerequisite for NFIP participation — and chose not to participate in the program.

In such situations, town officials may decide participating isn't worth the effort — especially if they don't see demand from residents for flood insurance. A lack of penalties for non-participation may also be a factor, Berginnis said.

"Essentially, joining the [NFIP] is a very simple and straightforward proposition," he said. "Typically, the community passes a resolution of intent to join the program. That's something the [town] council could do, literally at their next meeting. Then, they adopt a set of regulations and standards that include designating someone to be the floodplain manager."

Every state provides model fill-in-the-blank ordinances to make it easy for communities to create the regulations required to participate in the NFIP, he said. Once communities commit to participation, they must administer and enforce the regulations they adopted around development in floodplains.

"We've kind of made it easy in this country, in my opinion, for communities to participate, and remove all obstacles for them participating," Berginnis said. "They just need the political will to do it."

Consequences of non-participation

Residents of non-participating communities can't buy federally backed flood insurance. They may also struggle to find private flood insurers willing to cover their properties, as some private insurers won't sell flood coverage in areas that don't take part in the NFIP.

Additionally, residents won't be able to use federally backed mortgages, such as loans from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Federal Housing Administration, or Rural Housing Services, to buy or build a home in a Special Flood Hazard Area. And, if disaster strikes — as it did on Sept. 27 for many Western North Carolinians — non-participating communities won't be able to secure financial assistance from the federal government to repair or rebuild structures in SFHAs.

The tragic example of North Carolina

Perhaps no state is a better example of the potential consequences of unprotected flood risk than North Carolina. Most of North Carolina's 550 municipalities participate in the NFIP. But 27 don't — including Mills River, which experienced damage in Hurricane Helene.

Helene ripped through the northwestern part of the state on Sept. 27, decimating communities in North Carolina's largely rural Blue Ridge and Appalachian mountain ranges. The storm killed more than 225 people, and about half of those deaths were in North Carolina. As of October, authorities were still unsure how many people remained missing.

Flood damage to homes and businesses in affected communities is extensive. Since many affected communities are participants in the federal program, the NFIP could cover those losses, at least in part. But few property owners in those areas purchased NFIP policies before Helene.

For example, Asheville, with a population of more than 95,500 and 47,606 housing units, saw nearly 10 inches of

rainfall that caused devastating flooding. But city residents and businesses had just 447 NFIP policies in force, offering total coverage of just under \$152 million. Helene's total cost could range as high as \$250 billion, according to AccuWeather.

North Carolina's non-participating communities

At least one Tarheel community that saw damage from Helene doesn't participate in the NFIP.

The town of Mills River in Henderson County lies south of the Asheville Regional Airport — and the Mills River. After Helene, the town's Mills River Park became a distribution point for food, water, and supplies, and offered a mobile shower station, and mobile kitchen serving hot meals for storm victims.

The town was home to more than 7,300 people, according to the North Carolina League of Municipalities. Because the community doesn't participate in the NFIP, most — if not all — homeowners and businesses in the town lack flood insurance and will have to shoulder the cost of rebuilding without federal funding.

Many of the North Carolina communities that don't participate in the NFIP have very small populations of fewer than 1,000 residents. Like Mills River, they also tend to be rural. Many exist in close proximity to a number of waterways, from large rivers and lakes to creeks and streams. With inland waterways comes an elevated risk of inland flooding.

What's next: Will communities rethink non-participation?

Helene's severe effect on many inland communities across multiple states took many people by surprise. But with climate change driving more frequent and stronger hurricanes and other weather events, it's likely more communities will face situations similar to Helene's effect on Western North Carolina.

Smaller communities may be unaware of the elevated risks they face.

"In counties and rural areas, you need to pick up 10 to 20 square miles of drainage before a FEMA flood map starts picking up on the floodplain area, yet you have flood risk even if there's only a square mile of drainage," Berginnis said. "These small communities way up in the hollows, they have significant flood risk. [But] we've not mapped it, and that's, I think, on us as a country."

Property owners can take steps to protect themselves, even if they're in a non-participating community, he said. The federal government has been working for more than a decade to support the development of a private flood insurance market. People in communities where NFIP coverage isn't available may be able to purchase private flood insurance. Homeowners and businesses can also ask their town leaders to begin participating in the NFIP.

Above all, Berginnis cautioned, communities should continue to prepare for flooding — even those that have already experienced a catastrophic flood event.

"Do not delude yourself to think it can't happen again, or it won't happen again. It will," he said. "And it could happen next week, it could happen next month, it could happen a year from now — the same extreme event."

Related articles

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Hurricanes: Six states request fiscal aid from Congress

October 23, 2024 | Courier-Times, The (Roxboro, NC) Author: Alan Wooten | The Center Square | Section: State | 460 Words OpenURL Link

(The Center Square) – Citing fall harvest losses at the top of a list, respective state House of Representatives leaders from North Carolina, Florida, Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama have petitioned Congress for fiscal assistance.

The Monday letter to U.S. Sens. Chuck Schumer and Mitch McConnell and U.S. Reps. Mike Johnson and Hakeem Jeffries said Hurricanes Debby, Helene and Milton had major impacts "especially in rural areas where agriculture is the lifeblood and economic engine for small communities." The three hurricanes all landed in Florida over a span of 66 days, and subsequently generated damage across the South.

Respective Republican Speakers Tim Moore of North Carolina, Paul Renner of Florida, Cameron Sexton of Tennessee, Murrell Smith of South Carolina, Jon Burns of Georgia and Nathaniel Ledbetter of Alabama asked for sufficient time allowing land grant institutions to assess direct and indirect losses.

Financing toward next year's crop was cited, in particular how Congress aided after Hurricane Michael – a Category 5 force – hit Florida in 2018. The lawmakers requested "a block grant that can be administered quickly and efficiently by the states."

The group asked for consideration of emergency funding toward long-term recovery, and for "additional funds for infrastructure rebuilding. Roads and bridges have been destroyed along the path of these hurricanes and rebuilding our infrastructure will take significant time and resources," they wrote.

The state lawmakers asked that funding be routed through the Federal Highway Administration's Emergency Relief Program "to ensure that FHWA can fulfill the requests of the affected states to rebuild this critical infrastructure."

Debby made landfall as a Category 1 hurricane near Steinhatchee, Fla, on Aug. 5, Helene made landfall as a Category 4 hurricane in Dekle Beach, Fla., on Sept. 26, and Milton made landfall as a Category 3 hurricane near Siesta Key, Fla., on Oct. 9.

Estimated to have killed more than 200 and possibly more than 250, only Katrina (2005, deaths 1,392), Audrey (1957, deaths 416) and Camille (1969, deaths 256) are responsible for more deaths by hurricane in the last three-quarters of a century than Helene. This week, the fourth of recovery, began with an estimated 26 people in North Carolina still unaccounted for and 96 confirmed dead – most of any in seven states with fatalities.

Helene dissipated over the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee, dumping more than 30 inches of rain in multiple places. Flooding was catastrophic, arguably the worst storm for North Carolina since Hurricanes Floyd in 1999 and Hazel in 1954 – the latter the only Category 4 hurricane to make landfall on state shores, the former causing a once in 500 years flood.

Schumer, D-N.Y., is majority leader of the Senate and McConnell, R-Ky., the minority leader. Johnson, R-La., is speaker of the House, and Jeffries, D-N.Y., the House minority party leader.

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Editorial: Legislature must fund learning recovery

October 23, 2024 | Daily Advance, The (Elizabeth City, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Editorials | 510 Words OpenURL Link

Last January the state Department of Public Instruction reported North Carolina public school students, on average, were making academic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of the 2022-23 school year, elementary school students showed improvements in reading, math and science.

Those improvements were not uniform across the state's 115 school districts. Economically disadvantaged students, those from schools in poor communities or economically challenged rural school districts, lagged.

While noting the laudable learning recovery achievement, state Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt was reserved in her assessment and offered a cautionary request: "We need to continue designing academic programming in subjects where students need additional support while allowing us to better target resources."

The state legislature has ignored the need, even as evidence continued to pile up as to the urgency to help public school students. While approving half a billion dollars in taxpayer-funded aid for private school students, no state learning-loss recovery funds have been included in legislation sent to Gov. Roy Cooper.

Six months after Truitt's remarks, the national Education Recovery Scorecard said too many North Carolina students were being left behind in learning recovery.

"No one wants to leave poor kids footing the bill, but that is the path North Carolina is on," said Tom Kane, faculty director of the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University and co-author of the report (who grew up in Winston-Salem). "Even if North Carolina schools manage to continue improving at last year's rate of recovery, they will not have caught up by the time the federal funds run out."

As Kane warned — and two weeks ago we learned — with the loss of federal funds that paid for the learning recovery programs during the pandemic, many students who still need help won't get it. And that doesn't account for the impact of Hurricane Helene on disrupted public schools in the western part of the state.

Without the state stepping up, too many North Carolina students will continue to lag in acquiring basic learning skills.

The loss of those temporary federal dollars — about \$1 billion for learning recovery — paying for the programs means scaled-down or eliminated programs in the state's public schools. Loss of these programs jeopardizes continued improvement and gains in learning.

Rachel Wright Junio, director of the state Department of Public Instruction's Office of Learning Recovery, described the situation facing public schools as a "fiscal cliff."

Cooper included, in his updated budget proposal for 2024-25, \$217 million to increase support for disadvantaged students.

But the leaders of the General Assembly don't share those concerns for the learning progress of all the state's public school students, instead using \$289 million in taxpayer dollars to subsidize non-needy kids' private school tuition.

Legislators have been playing politics with state spending and failed to pass an updated state budget. It is public school children who suffer.

It is past time that the General Assembly fulfilled its duty to provide for the education of North Carolina's students. There's plenty of money available to fund learning recovery for ALL public school students. The need is there. It must be a top priority.

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Industrial project in Forest City proposed; 26 new jobs

October 23, 2024 | Daily Courier, The (Forest City, NC)
Author: VICTORIA MCGUINN YOUNG vyoung@thedigitalcourier.com| Section: Archives | 698 Words
OpenURL Link

FOREST CITY — Project Igloo, an economic development project, is expected to be headed for Forest City soon.

During the joint meeting of the Forest City Board of Commissioners and the Rutherford County Commissioners this Monday, it was announced that an industrial project — proposed to be located in the town — is expected to create 26 new full-time jobs and bring an investment of at least \$12.5 million in the town over three years. The average salary of the new jobs is expected to be \$52,808.

Project Igloo is expected to be awarded a \$75,000 One NC Fund grant, which is a cash grant awarded by the governor to competitive job-creation projects. The One NC Fund grant is performance-based and will be distributed in stages. The project is also expected to receive a \$200,000 Building Reuse grant, which assists with building improvements to property that will lead to creating new, full-time, private sector jobs, according to the North Carolina Department of Commerce. The grant is awarded as a loan that is forgiven once jobs are created and maintained, according to the Department of Commerce. These grants require a cash match.

To continue with the grant process, the boards also approved a local industrial grant "equal to 50% of personal property taxes paid once certain thresholds are achieved and could extend for up to five years provided jobs, investment and wage levels are met and maintained in support of Project Igloo," according to the approved resolution. The local industrial grant will be applied to a portion of the local qualifying match for the One NC Fund and Building Reuse grant cash match.

Following the Project Igloo public hearing and resolution approval, the county board adjourned, and after a five minute break, the town continued its meeting.

Hurricane Helene related itemsThe town board approved a resolution in support of modifying Rutherford County's occupancy tax legislation wording in order to aid in the recovery and rebuilding of county tourism assets, according to the resolution.

The storm damage from Hurricane Helene severely affected Lake Lure and Chimney Rock, two of the largest tourism destinations for the county. The Rutherford County Tourism Development Authority has asked the county to put forward a resolution to help funding go toward rebuilding.

The current legislation states that at least two-thirds of funds remitted to the TDA will be used to promote travel and tourism and the remainder is used for tourism-related expenditures.

This resolution calls for at least 50% of remitted funds to be used in promoting travel and tourism and and 50% for tourism-related expenditures.

In line with storm recovery, the board also approved a debris removal interlocal agreement, which several other towns have also approved.

The town also needed a budget adjustment due to storm recovery expenditures.

"The disaster recovery response has required an extraordinary effort on us all and that includes on our budget as well," town manager Janet Mason said.

The budget amendment was for the electric, water and sewer, and general funds, all of which needed amendments

for the disaster recovery response. There was a \$300,000 amendment to the general fund, a \$200,000 amendment to the water and sewer fund, and a \$700,000 amendment to the electric find.

The town is also documenting these funds in order to apply for reimbursement from FEMA.

Awarded projects

The board awarded Piedmont Automation Inc. the project to put in a new SCADA system at the water treatment plant.

While Piedmont Automation Inc.'s bid was the second lowest at \$735,000, Ulteig's \$154,932.67 bid did not include the entire scope of work that needed to be done, Mayor Steve Holland said.

Piedmont Automation Inc. is currently in phase four of replacing the SCADA for Broad River Water Authority.

The Harmon Street water system improvements project was awarded to Carolina Specialties Construction, LLC at \$337,887. The work will include the installation of approximately 1,400 linear feet of 8-inch water line.

At the close of the meeting, Mayor Holland took a moment to thank town employees for their work following the storm.

"We had a storm ... that we have never seen before. But our employees — the county — stepped up," he said. "So many people volunteered ... everybody has stepped up so much."

The Forest City Board of Commissioners is scheduled to meet Nov. 4.

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Scrappy's will host community event

October 23, 2024 | Daily Courier, The (Forest City, NC) Author: SCOTT CARPENTER scarpenter@thedigitalcourier.com| Section: Archives | 146 Words OpenURL Link

CHASE COMMUNITY — Scott and Colleen Boisvert, owners of Scrappy's Food and Fuel, care about their community, and often look for ways to give back.

After Hurricane Helene tore through the area about a month ago, they decided to offer a free lunch. Scrappy's will be hosting its "First Responders & Loyal Customers Appreciation Day" on Saturday, Oct. 26, from 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

The meal will feature hot dogs, baked beans, pasta salad, and chips.

"We are doing this in the spirit of community, and neighbor helping neighbor," Scott Boisvert said. "Come enjoy lunch on us."

They say it is important to give back to the community when they can, and are looking forward to seeing many of their customers, others in the community, and the emergency first responders who worked so hard during the recent storm.

Scrappy's is located at 5337 U.S. Highway 221 South, in the Chase Community.

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Final FAB event of the season is Friday; Live music, costume contest featured

October 23, 2024 | Daily Courier, The (Forest City, NC)
Author: SCOTT CARPENTER scarpenter@thedigitalcourier.com| Section: Archives | 580 Words
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RUTHERFORDTON — Rutherfordton Food, Art & Brew, also known as FAB, will hold its last event of the season Friday, Oct. 25, starting at 6 p.m.

FAB is a series of street festivals held once each month, from April through October. The focus is Central Street, but also includes nearby areas of downtown Rutherfordton.

The October FAB will feature the usual mix of artist vendors, several food options, and live music.

This FAB will also be different, because it will serve as a fundraiser to support ongoing recovery efforts in the Chimney Rock/Lake Lure area of northwest Rutherford County. This was the area hardest hit by Hurricane Helene.

FAB is also a nonprofit organization which runs the festivals and other community events. The FAB board issued a statement explaining the desire to support the recovery efforts.

"Like many of you, there's an uneasy balance between being grateful for making it through the storm, guilt from recovering more quickly than our western North Carolina neighbors further west, and a sense of grief from the surrounding loss," FAB officials stated. "However, our community-oriented culture is our strength. We've all seen incredible acts from community members across western North Carolina and beyond amidst the devastation. With this in mind, we recognize the need for our community to come together, to make steps toward regaining normalcy, to share our experiences, and to support those who were less-fortunate in the aftermath."

FAB will be donating all profits from the October event to the official Chimney Rock Village Disaster Relief Fund. FAB profits come from vendor booth fees, and beer and merchandise sales.

"We also encourage all of our attendees to engage with our vendors," the statement continued. "Many of these vendors financially depend on events like FAB, but especially now when some of their work may have been damaged or lost from the storm."

Mayce Mattox, FAB director of marketing, and a board member, said this event is special because of the support for storm recovery efforts. And, this even will be even more focused on local talent.

"Both of the bands this Friday, The Ruff'tons, and Y'all 're, are Rutherford County based," she said. "Both are fun, high-energy, punk-rock bands. We're very excited to have both of them. They have great stage presence, and have in the past drawn large crowds who enjoy their performances. It will be a good time."

The October FAB will also feature a Halloween costume contest. There will be three categories: kids age 10 and under, youth age 11-16, and adults age 17 and up. A total of \$700 will be awarded in costume contest prizes. (For more information visit the Rutherfordton FAB Facebook page).

The FAB festival series began in 2018, and is a collaboration between the FAB nonprofit and the Town of Rutherfordton. A growing variety of craftspeople, artists, musicians, and small business owners and growing public support, make FAB a success.

FAB officials intentionally work to make FAB events welcoming to all. But it is, by design, non-political. Political organizations are not allowed to have a presence at the events. Political parties or candidates are not allowed to set up booths.

"We say repeatedly, FAB is not about politics," Mattox said. "We are about bringing people together, supporting small businesses, artists, and craftspeople, and creating a sense of community. We want people to meet up with old friends, make new friends, and have a good time in downtown Rutherfordton."

FAB officially begins at 6 p.m. The bands will play on the Main Stage from 6-7 p.m., and 8-9 p.m.

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Attorney General honors local heroes

October 23, 2024 | Daily Record, The (Dunn, NC) Author: From staff reports | Section: Business | 408 Words OpenURL Link

State Attorney General Josh Stein honored two Johnston County difference-makers with Dogwood Awards. The accolades recognize people who work to improve the health, safety and well-being of their fellow North Carolinians.

Johnston County District Attorney Susan Doyle and Johnston County E-911 Communications were honored for fighting crime and helping those in need.

"As district attorney, Susan Doyle has been dedicated to keeping people safe and holding people accountable for committing crimes," Stein said as he presented Doyle her award on Monday. "She works each day to make the people of Johnston County safe."

Doyle has been a career prosecutor for more than 30 years and started as an assistant district attorney serving Johnston, Harnett and Lee counties in 1994. She served as an ADA for 13 years before she was elected Johnston County's first female district attorney. She's held that role now for 18 years.

"It is a tremendous honor to receive the Dogwood Award from Attorney General Josh Stein," Doyle said. "As District Attorney for Johnston County, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to my entire staff, who works tirelessly to ensure our community is a safe place to live and work. I am humbled to accept this honor on their behalf and to stand alongside my fellow recipients of this prestigious award."

Always to the rescue

Stein honored Johnston County 911 Communications for always coming to the rescue when called for help.

"After Hurricane Helene, Johnston County 911 Communications quickly stepped up to help the people ... of western North Carolina," Stein said on Monday. "When I was in Canton, I heard about how Johnston County 911 provided resources to get a local radio station ... back on air to provide safety updates to people in Haywood County. They selflessly stepped up to get reliable information to a community in need all the way across the state, and I appreciate their hard work."

Johnston County E-911 provides 24/7 access to emergency services for residents and agencies within Johnston County.

"The privilege to serve in public safety is one of the highest honors that I feel anyone can possess," said Brett Renfrow, director of Johnston County 911 Communications. "The ability to serve others in their time of need is a true blessing from God and it is one of the most satisfying feelings to know that in some small way you made someone's quality of life better."

Stein's office created the Dogwood Awards in 2017. More than 182 people and groups have received the honor.

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From the coast to the west, Michael Lee shares senate plans for NC aid

October 23, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Nichole Heller | Section: Local | 463 Words OpenURL Link

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He addressed his interest in continuing his work in the areas of economic growth, education, environment, and disaster relief. His plan includes a focus on economic development incentives and other ways to promote job creation in North Carolina.

According to his campaign website, Lee is a husband and father of four with prior years in the state senate position during terms from 2014 to 2018 and 2020 to 2024.

Historically, Lee has looked at familiar cases including his past involvement in disaster recovery when he cosponsored the Hurricane Florence Act which brought in over \$100 million in extra relief aid for Hurricane Matthew, according to his website.

Lee will be going to Raleigh on Thursday to make progress on relief for Hurricane Helene which has impacted 25% of the counties in North Carolina which he noted will continue to make a significant impact on North Carolina as a whole.

"As a state, we have already passed one initial relief bill literally within a few weeks of the hurricane. We're going back on Thursday and we're going to be working on another relief bill that will provide additional funding and support. It's likely we're going to have to keep coming back because we don't know what all the needs are just yet because they're still in that mode of assessment. The federal government, I'm hopeful, is going to come through with a relief package in addition to what FEMA provides."

The plan for an additional bill can include a split that acknowledges both the economy and agriculture undertaken. Lee acknowledges the lives that have been lost and the ongoing support of charities that have been a part of the support from the beginning.

"I think a lot of people from our area, the eastern part of the state...we understand that the immediate relief a lot of times comes from the nonprofit community, in addition to the federal and state government."

Additionally, Lee shared his outlook on education for the state as Chairman of the Senate Education Committee with more plans toward education funding and parental choice through high-quality education including advocacy for students with special needs.

"From an education perspective, we increased funding to traditional public education every single year. We are tweaking the charter school approval process to make sure that good schools are approved and can continue. We also have Opportunity Scholarships for students that aren't inside of the traditional public school system or they don't have a charter school near them or one that really works for their child's needs," he said.

"Hopefully everyone that wants to, will have the opportunity to take advantage of these programs."

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Editorial: Legislature must fund learning recovery

October 23, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Editorials | 510 Words OpenURL Link

Last January the state Department of Public Instruction reported North Carolina public school students, on average, were making academic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of the 2022-23 school year, elementary school students showed improvements in reading, math and science.

Those improvements were not uniform across the state's 115 school districts. Economically disadvantaged students, those from schools in poor communities or economically challenged rural school districts, lagged.

While noting the laudable learning recovery achievement, state Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt was reserved in her assessment and offered a cautionary request: "We need to continue designing academic programming in subjects where students need additional support while allowing us to better target resources."

The state legislature has ignored the need, even as evidence continued to pile up as to the urgency to help public school students. While approving half a billion dollars in taxpayer-funded aid for private school students, no state learning-loss recovery funds have been included in legislation sent to Gov. Roy Cooper.

Six months after Truitt's remarks, the national Education Recovery Scorecard said too many North Carolina students were being left behind in learning recovery.

"No one wants to leave poor kids footing the bill, but that is the path North Carolina is on," said Tom Kane, faculty director of the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University and co-author of the report (who grew up in Winston-Salem). "Even if North Carolina schools manage to continue improving at last year's rate of recovery, they will not have caught up by the time the federal funds run out."

As Kane warned — and two weeks ago we learned — with the loss of federal funds that paid for the learning recovery programs during the pandemic, many students who still need help won't get it. And that doesn't account for the impact of Hurricane Helene on disrupted public schools in the western part of the state.

Without the state stepping up, too many North Carolina students will continue to lag in acquiring basic learning skills.

The loss of those temporary federal dollars — about \$1 billion for learning recovery — paying for the programs means scaled-down or eliminated programs in the state's public schools. Loss of these programs jeopardizes continued improvement and gains in learning.

Rachel Wright Junio, director of the state Department of Public Instruction's Office of Learning Recovery, described the situation facing public schools as a "fiscal cliff."

Cooper included, in his updated budget proposal for 2024-25, \$217 million to increase support for disadvantaged students.

But the leaders of the General Assembly don't share those concerns for the learning progress of all the state's public school students, instead using \$289 million in taxpayer dollars to subsidize non-needy kids' private school tuition.

Legislators have been playing politics with state spending and failed to pass an updated state budget. It is public school children who suffer.

It is past time that the General Assembly fulfilled its duty to provide for the education of North Carolina's students. There's plenty of money available to fund learning recovery for ALL public school students. The need is there. It must be a top priority.

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Helene's North Carolina death toll at 96

October 23, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Wire reports | Section: State | 722 Words OpenURL Link

North Carolina officials this week reported that 96 deaths have been confirmed from Hurricane Helene as Buncombe County authorities said they overcounted deaths by as many as 30.

Official numbers released by the state Department of Health and Human Services on Tuesday show that 42 people were killed in Buncombe County, 11 in Yancey, seven in Henderson and five in Haywood.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Raleigh typically reviews weather deaths and makes a ruling on causes before reporting numbers through state officials, a process it has used in past storms for years. But in the chaos following Helene, a number of counties reported fatality numbers independently of the state. The state's tally has gradually increased through Tuesday, but the climb has slowed as bodies have been examined.

State Department of Health and Human Services spokesperson Kelly Haight Connor said in an email Tuesday that all examinations are complete for storm-related deaths, but she wouldn't rule out additions if other cases emerge. The state reported 96 deaths from Helene statewide on Tuesday.

Buncombe, home to Asheville, overcounted deaths caused by Helene by as many as 30, according to a statement Tuesday from its sheriff's office and data from the state. Buncombe County officials, who previously reported 72 deaths, are now deferring to a state tally of 42 deaths for the county.

The county's number dates back to an Oct. 3 news release in which county officials reported that "72 lives have been lost due to Hurricane Helene," repeating a number cited by Sheriff Quentin Miller at an earlier media briefing.

State officials, relying on reviews by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, have consistently reported a number lower than that for the county. The number for Buncombe County included in the state's tally has stood at 42 since at least Oct. 10.

On Tuesday, the Buncombe County Sheriff's office acknowledged in a statement that the number of deaths in the county was lower than the number it provided. The statement, attributed to Public Information Officer Christina Esmay, cited factors ranging from updated causes of death to communication challenges after the storm knocked out cell service and electricity in multiple mountain counties.

"In the early aftermath of Hurricane Helene all deaths were being classified as storm-related and from Buncombe County. However, as the days progressed BCSO was able to identify who had passed away due to the hurricane, who was in fact from Buncombe County, and who passed away from other causes," the statement said. "Compounded with the lack of consistent communication, due to widespread outages, the Buncombe County fatality number that was initially provided to Sheriff Miller has decreased."

The sheriff's office did not provide additional information on how they arrived at their tally, and spokesman Matt Marshall said any other questions about how deaths have been investigated and counted should be sent to state officials. In response to a request to interview the sheriff, Marshall said he would look into his availability.

Another county, Henderson, had previously reported two more local deaths than the state, but said on Tuesday that it agrees with the state's number.

The Associated Press had tallied at least 246 total deaths across multiple states due to Helene through Monday, including 128 in North Carolina, based on data from the state and counties, including Henderson and Buncombe.

With the disclosure from Buncombe County that its number was inflated, the AP has adopted the state's total of 96, so the news organization's multistate tally now stands at 214.

North Carolina has entered its fourth week of recovery since Helene made landfall in Florida on Sept. 26 as a Category 4 hurricane.

Some areas are still getting supplies and moving about by horseback, according to Gov. Roy Cooper's office. The state's DriveNC.org on Tuesday listed more than 400 secondary road closures along with closures on 39 state roads, 31 on U.S. highways and two on interstates. A release from the governor said 789 closures have been reopened.

The state Department of Transportation reported it has about 2,000 personnel and 900 pieces of equipment involved in the recovery process. The U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration approved \$100 million to North Carolina on Oct. 5; state Senate President Pro Tempore Phil Berger told The Carolina Journal it helps but "is just a drop in the bucket" of what is needed.

Seven school districts have yet to reopen; 28 have opened.

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