

My heart breaks for families in western North Carolina

October 5, 2024 | Daily Courier, The (Forest City, NC) Author: Mike Causey Insurance Commissioner | Section: Archives | 346 Words OpenURL Link

As North Carolina Commissioner of Insurance, my heart breaks for the families impacted by this terrible storm. I hope you and your families are currently safe.

Hurricane Helene devastated much of western North Carolina, other parts of the state, and the neighboring states of Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina and Florida.

The mountains were hit hardest, with severe flooding and landslides, leaving many communities in ruin.

Special Agents from the Department of Insurance's Criminal Investigation Division are on the ground and have been since the flooding began.

A special thank you to the 12 agents that went door to door to homes and businesses evacuating people to save lives.

Sadly, too many people have already lost their lives to this storm and floodwaters.

The Department of Insurance is coordinating with law enforcement agencies, emergency management, fire departments, rescue squads, charities, churches and civic groups to do everything we can at the state and local level to assist the victims.

NCDOI will be coordinating on ways to reach those on the ground with insurance claims and other needs in the coming days and weeks.

Check the Department of Insurance website for updates: www.ncdoi.gov/helene

You can also donate to the North Carolina Disaster Relief fund at: https://pay.payitgov.com/ncdonations

Most importantly, if you are safe, please check on your friends, family members and neighbors. If your community buildings, churches and other buildings are unscathed, please consider opening it up to allow first responders, emergency personnel, or the community to use as a base of operations. Let us act immediately to help our neighbors.

The Department of Insurance is receiving reports of damage and insurance claims in areas of need.

Please call 911 for immediate emergencies or report to local authorities first, then to Emergency Management.

For assistance with insurance matters, contact the Department of Insurance's Consumer Services Division at 855-408-1212.

We are coming together to help rebuild and restore our communities.

Every human being, pet and livestock needs to be accounted for and make sure they're safe.

Please pray for our first responders, volunteers and public officials leading this rescue and recovery mission at this critical time.

May God bless each and every one of you.

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On a mission: Crew heads out west to areas impacted by Helene

October 5, 2024 | Daily Herald (Roanoke Rapids, NC) Author: Richard Holm rholm@rrdailyherald.com| Section: Local| 1420 Words OpenURL Link

ROANOKE RAPIDS — Volunteers headed out Friday morning with trucks of supplies donated from the Roanoke Valley area to those in the western part of North Carolina affected by Hurricane Helene.

According to the National Weather Service, Hurricane Helene became a Category 4 storm on the evening of Sept. 26 and made landfall in the Big Bend of the Florida Gulf Coast. The storm caused widespread flooding, resulting in fatalities and property damage.

According to Buddy Wrenn, Halifax County emergency management coordinator, as of Thursday, 215 people have died as a result of the storm, and at least 105 in North Carolina. Wrenn said reports suggest there are people still missing and, as of Friday morning, 229,000 power outages.

The impact on North Carolinians in the western part of the state sparked multiple efforts to provide disaster relief. Many in the Roanoke Valley have organized relief efforts, including the Rewritten Story Foundation, a nonprofit aimed at providing aid in times of crisis.

The organization rallied efforts at the Discount Automotive and Tire Service Center of Roanoke Rapids, where they collected donations in the area from individuals and groups to be taken to western areas of the state affected.

Tracy Story, the founder of the Rewritten Story Foundation, said they acquired a tractor-trailer full of \$42,000 worth of cat and dog food, water, and other supplies for animals donated by Pet Supplies Plus out of South Carolina. Additionally, Story said they have five 26-foot U-Haul trucks loaded with food and necessities from local donations.

"The outpouring was amazing," he said.

Story, who is known to organize disaster relief efforts in other states, said they had left Sunday last week to go to areas of Georgia and Florida that were impacted by the storm. He said that in an effort to be proactive, they began taking donations at his auto shop to take to western areas of North Carolina. Story said his crew returned on Wednesday.

"Well, it started with about half a truck, went to one truck, went to two trucks, three, four and five," he said about the donations coming in while his crew was gone. "I've never had the type of support that we've had for this mission. This goes to show you the love that we all have — brothers and sisters in North Carolina, it truly is amazing. We had schools collecting. We had businesses collecting. I didn't ask them. They did it. Just the love that we've gotten and the support we've seen throughout the community through this has just been unmatched. I've never seen anything like it."

Story said his crew took a large tractor-trailer with supplies out to Louisiana one time during a disaster, which was their biggest load to deliver at the time.

"This takes the cake," he said. "I had no idea that we could load five 26-foot trucks."

Story said one of their destinations is Mill Spring, where they have a designated base camp, and Swannanoa, where there is a Harley Davidson shop that has the equipment to assist with unloading supplies and implied donations would not be left in the hands the Federal Emergency Management Agency or the American Red Cross.

"This is not a FEMA effort, it is not a Red Cross effort — I'm not gonna say anything negative," he said. "I'm just

gonna say that I prefer to put it in the hands of the people. So this is going into the hands of the people. So our plan at this point is — I'm told that the hands of the people are coming to that Harley Davidson shop. So, the 18-wheeler will be unloaded there, and then two to three trucks will go there. The other two or three of the trucks will go with us to our base camp, where we already have folks and support set up there. There are horses there, and people are riding things in on horseback. We have side by sides, a four-wheeler, we have the ability to get stuff in as well. So that's the plan with the other two to three box trucks, which is to actually manually take it to the people."

When asked about FEMA stockpiling, Story said he experienced it firsthand years ago when they made a trip to Ocracoke after a hurricane, where his crew was directed to an airfield. He said they were told to unload the items to inventory.

"I just told the lieutenant or colonel there that was running the show I said, 'Buddy, I don't I need my stuff inventoried, and I'm not staging anything,'" Story said. "I said, 'We got to get it out to the people.' So that's what we, in turn, left with our items, and we went and did it. After that, it taught me a lot, and that was probably a good 10 years ago that we did that, and I learned a lot from that trip. So ever since then, I've been very funny about where we take it and what we do. We make a commitment to the people that donate to us. I think that's why we have the turnout that we have is because they know we will get it to the people.

"We're not just going to unload it, wave and leave and pray that it goes to them. Listen, if that's the best you can do, I get it, and I'm not downing that at all. Sometimes that's all you can do. Something is truly better than nothing. But when I make the commitment to the people that we're going to put it in the hands of the people, that's what we're going do."

Rumors have spread claiming that FEMA and other agencies are confiscating donated items.

According to the FEMA website, the agency does not ask or generally accept cash donations or volunteers for disaster response.

"We do encourage people who want to help to volunteer with or donate cash to reputable voluntary or charitable organizations," the FEMA statement reads. "After a disaster, cash is often the best way to help as it provides the greatest flexibility for these reputable organizations working on the ground to purchase exactly what is needed."

Additionally, FEMA addressed the rumors of turning away donations, stopping vehicles with donations, and confiscating and seizing supplies after a disaster.

"These are false," the FEMA statement reads. "FEMA does not take donations and/or food from survivors or voluntary organizations. Donations of food, water, or other goods are handled by voluntary agencies who specialize in storing, sorting, cleaning, and distributing donated items. FEMA does not conduct vehicle stops or handle road closures with armed guards — those are done by local law enforcement."

FEMA also stated that its organization has enough funds for immediate response and recovery needs and that funds have not been diverted to other non-disaster-related efforts.

The American Red Cross also stated the same.

"We are not confiscating, removing or discarding donated items," the organization said in a statement. "We focus on providing shelter, food, and relief after disasters. While we don't accept physical donations, as managing them takes time and resources away from our mission, we work with community partners who are better equipped with these resources to handle and distribute these items."

The crew assembled by the Rewritten Story Foundation for the departure took a moment for a briefing, which included a prayer by the Rev. Timothy Dean of Roanoke Rapids Church of God and Evangelist Donald Faucette of Bread of Hope Outreach Ministries.

One of the volunteers, Mack Taylor, owner of Taylor Construction, held onto his crucifix during prayer.

"I love the Lord — He pulls us through everything," Taylor said. "As a matter of fact, when I opened my truck that I'm going to ride today, the first thing I saw was a little bitty plastic Jesus on my dash, and I knew right then that it was going to be a good trip. So it was unexpected, but that's the first thing I've seen. Man, I love helping people — always. They're brothers and sisters, man, and I've needed help in my life, and these people need help, and I just love it."

Another volunteer who is riding with Taylor was 19-year-old Harrison Dill, who said this will be his first disaster relief trip.

"I've been working for Discount [Automotive] for about two years now. I have always helped out as far as what we do here," Dill said. "This is the first trip that I'm going to help these other people out there. It means a lot because these people really need some help."

The crew headed out a little after 9 a.m. toward the west.

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Mitchell Oakley: Easterners must to do all they can for western counterparts

October 5, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Bobby Burns| Section: Local | 783 Words OpenURL Link

I haven't visited western North Carolina since Hurricane Helene struck because I couldn't if I wanted to. Google Maps is such a divine app that if you try to find a route to some places there, it won't map it because most of the roads are closed.

My daughter lives in the western part of our great state. Fortunately, the hurricane didn't create any harm for her other than lost electricity, a neighbor's tree on her fence, and some foul cellphone service. The map shows I can't get there via I-40 but could take a circuitous route beginning at Winston Salem.

My preface is designed to let you know I have no first-hand knowledge of what is going on in the west. Suffice it to say that the damages our communities in Pitt County have suffered from two rounds of flooding pales in comparison. It's heartbreaking and gut-wrenching.

In 1999, Grifton was shocked when floodwaters from Hurricane Floyd crept into the town proper. Our own Grifton Times building in September was flooded with 6 feet of water. It was a result of 30 inches of rain in about two weeks. Other areas of Pitt County and the state wrestled with flooding as well. In the state, there were 51 deaths. The event became known as the "Flood of the Century."

Seventeen years later, Grifton, and other parts of the state flooded again when Hurricane Matthew struck on Oct. 9, 2016. There were 4 inches of water in the Grifton Times building. The hurricane brought 10 inches of rain and 26 deaths in the state.

The flooding in North Carolina mountains is far worse. My daughter is served by Blue Ridge Energy. Blue Ridge Energy CEO Doug Johnson, in a video provided to customers, said he became CEO in 1989 when Hurricane Hugo hit the North Carolina mountains. "This storm is going to be worse than Hugo." He added that the storm has been devastating to their electric system.

Duke Energy furnishes electricity to a chunk of the mountain area. My daughter also received a text from Duke that said, "We've never seen a storm like this in our company's history. Helene left behind catastrophic damage across our Carolinas service territory, particularly in upstate South Carolina and western North Carolina."

The company says its infrastructure damage is extensive, some of its systems will have to be rebuilt, and the company is working with local and state officials to get access to the hardest-hit areas of their system.

The mountain area suffered from dangerous mudslides, raging water roaring downhill with extreme force, downed power lines, downed trees, homes moved off foundations and floated downstream, extensive debris piled up, bridges gone, roads undermined and washed away and other unimaginable issues. People are suffering from power outages, cell service issues, not having water, limited supplies, a dwindling food supply, no access to gasoline, and an inability to travel. Some areas of the mountains are accessible only by air.

Asheville was flooded and major roads in the mountains are either fully or partially closed. U.S. 19 to Burnsville is completely washed out, which brings to mind a social media post by my friend Lisa Heenan, who pointed out many small towns in the mountains were negatively affected in addition to Asheville. Rainfall in the mountains during Helene was reported as 17 inches in the Asheville area while Gov. Roy Cooper reported a high of 29 inches.

"Boone, Blowing Rock, Banner Elk, Vilas, Sugar Grove, Elk Park, West Jefferson, Black Mountain, Swannanoa, Sylva, Cullowhee, Brevard, Bryson City, Hendersonville, Cherokee, Waynesville, Burnsville, Candler, Canton, Spruce Pine,

Chimney Rock, Lake Lure, Linville, Marshall, Maggie Valley, Newland, Grandfather, Beech Mountain, Sugar Mountain, Old Fort, Morganton, Marion are just a few of the cities and towns that have been flooded and/or destroyed," according to her post on Facebook.

The devastation is real in our beautiful North Carolina mountains. Although I don't pretend to be an expert, I suspect the death toll may wind up being extremely high. I suspect it because there was a lot of water flowing in western North Carolina and I believe it surprised people who never gave a thought about how serious the ensuing event would be.

I hope easterners will collect money and supplies for our mountain neighbors. It will take some planning to make certain what is needed there and how it can be delivered and an all-out effort to collect the supplies and funds, but at the end of the day, it is our duty.

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." — Galatians 6:2

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." — Romans 8:28 KJV

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hurricane helene aftermath - Test of patience and fortitude - WNC residents digging in for the long haul

October 5, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The (NC)
Author: Keith Sharon, Tiana Kennell, Iris Seaton and Kelly Puente; USA TODAY NETWORK Section: News | 1008 Words
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The toughest test of will, patience, fortitude and faith is coming for the residents of Western North Carolina.

As the searches for missing people continue, as the receding water reveals horrors that had been submerged, as the roads (slowly) re-open, as FEMA representatives scramble and stumble, how do people who have lost so much get their lives back to some semblance of normalcy?

COVID may have seemed like the toughest test, but the virus may prove to be a practice round for local business owners, government officials and families. COVID didn't knock out roads. COVID didn't lift homes off their foundations. COVID didn't change beautiful countryside into dangerous terrain.

"We're going through this and we're still trying to recover from the pandemic," Asheville bartender Alex Cohn-Derrick said.

The daily death counts have become more grim in the wake of Tropical Storm Helene.

President Joe Biden surveyed damaged Western North Carolina from a helicopter — after a similar trip to Greenville, South Carolina — on Wednesday afternoon. The president has said he wants to "jump start" the recovery effort by asking Congress to approve a supplemental bill to help cover federal costs for Helene relief efforts.

Biden has directed up to 1,000 active duty troops to immediately deploy to assist with response and recovery efforts in communities hit by Helene, the White House said on Wednesday.

National Guard members this week were dropping supplies in Blackhawk helicopters in Helene-devastated mountain towns that have largely been cut off from the world for days.

Cohn-Derrick was displaced from her home in Candler after it was consumed by rushing water from a nearby creek. She sought shelter with her Cantina Louie co-workers, Elizabeth Bryan and Trevor Cox. Though the water has retreated, the damage and mold have made her home uninhabitable.

"We've all been fighting for many years to get a fair living wage since COVID, so this hit us hard," Bryan said. "Being in this industry with so many restaurants out of business we don't know what to do from here."

Bryan said many aren't unaware of how to file for unemployment.

The Trinity Fairview Church southeast of Asheville has been serving as a hub where the community has been gathering supplies and working on plans to reach others that have been cut off by downed trees and demolished roads.

"We don't have any cell service, we haven't heard anything," said resident Gina Fowler. "But everyone has been coming together."

Dozens of adults and even their small children formed an assembly line to unload water and other supplies from the helicopter.

They said they were grateful to get bottled water after drinking well water for several days.

Wilkerson said he was glad to be able to personally deliver supplies to his church as a National Guard member, but had to fight back tears.

"It's hard to see them like this, but they're making it," he said.

More than 100 nurses as well as physicians arrived at Mission Hospital in Asheville from sister hospitals across the nation within the HCA Healthcare system, which owns Mission and is headquartered in Nashville, HCA spokesperson Harlow Sumerford said.

They've set up mobile units with kitchens, bathrooms and handwashing stations and are setting up mini marts inside the hospital and in other HCA hospitals across the region to provide doctors, nurses and other hospital staff with free groceries, including food, water and toiletries.

"Though the level of destruction is immense, I am proud of the dedication of our colleagues, who have continued to support our patients, our community and one another," said Greg Lowe, president and CEO of Mission Health. "We remain dedicated to helping our colleagues through this time, just as they have selflessly served their community and supported patients without hesitation."

Vulnerable animals are being shipped out of town for their safety.

The Asheville Humane Society has evacuated around 100 animals to shelters outside of Western North Carolina.

AHS facilities weren't damaged severely during the storm. But a lack of potable water caused by outages affecting all of Asheville and many surrounding areas made it impossible to provide adequate care for a large amount of the animals at the Buncombe County Animal Shelter.

"Potable and clean water is an essential resource for keeping the animals happy and hydrated, but it's also necessary for cleaning the kennels and ensuring that hands are sanitized in preparation for medical procedures," AHS Content Coordinator Colleen Daly said. "And it's extremely difficult, if not impossible, to take care of the number of animals in our care given those circumstances."

For humans, drinking water may be difficult to find for weeks.

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kody Kinsley warned western North Carolina residents that well water in addition to municipal water sources may not be safe to drink because of contamination from the flood damage.

"Only use bottled, boiled or treated water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene," Kinsley said.

There is no timetable for running water restoration in some of the most devastated areas said Asheville Assistant City Manager Ben Woody.

Biltmore Church is supplying community members with water, ice and meals at its Arden campus, 35 Clayton Road.

The Arden campus, in addition to supplying community members, is also a staging ground for groups of Southern Baptist disaster recovery teams that will go out to the community with chainsaws to help clear paths and help with access to homes.

Many of the supplies Biltmore is providing out of its Arden campus were sent from fellow Southern Baptist churches across the state. The Arden campus supply center is open to community members from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on October 2.

"The total recovery will be many, many months but the urgent needs right now would be trying to help people survive this early thing," said Bruce Frank, Biltmore's lead pastor, in an interview.

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Appalachia's terrain slows recovery - Remote roads and homes in NC are badly damaged

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MEAT CAMP – Carolyn and Clifford Coffee's home is less than 10 miles from Boone, a North Carolina mountain town popular with tourists and home to a college campus, set between a creek and steep hillsides.

The two-lane road to reach it, which winds past cornfields and cattle farms, heading upwards along Meat Camp Creek, is now dotted with washed-out pavement and bridges, downed power lines and damaged homes.

The couple, Carolyn, 77, and Clifford, 80, have lived here for 40 years. Clifford built their home himself by connecting two trailers. But Hurricane Helene's torrential rains, which caused deadly landslides and floods, left Carolyn terrified. "We just prayed to God," she said.

Their home survived, but getting help into such rural mountain areas has proved difficult. Many lack power, water and cell service. And it's likely to take a long time to rebuild the area or make it safer from floods or landslides.

"I want to move," she said, looking at her husband. "He don't want to."

Days after Hurricane Helene contributed to rainfall totals of up to 30 inches in some parts of North Carolina and left at least 203 people dead across the Southeast, residents of nearby Boone are cleaning up flood damage to homes and infrastructure. Power, cell service and many businesses were back in operation.

But in more rural areas of Watauga County and others nearby, where landslides scarred Appalachian slopes and the storm sent water thundering into narrow valleys, damage to roads, homes and the power grid was more severe. About 200 county roads remained inaccessible. Rescue crews had taken to foot and horseback to reach some residents.

The same factors that made the storm so devastating also make recovery and rebuilding slower and more difficult, according to officials, recovery volunteers and residents.

"There's just so many hollers," said Chris Blanton, who is leading a Baptist volunteer recovery effort in and around Boone this week. "It's going to be years, probably, instead of months, trying to get back to normal."

Lindsey Miller pulled into a drive-through feeding kitchen at a church in Boone this week, thanking volunteers who handed her plastic foam boxes with hot dogs and green beans.

Miller lives in a home built on a hillside near Todd, north of Boone, with her autistic son and baby. The storm washed out her gravel drive, damaged the roads and toppled power lines.

She can still reach her fast food job, but on Tuesday, there was no power, cell service or water. Nearby residents hauled buckets of river water to flush toilets. Neighbors shared food and supplies.

Her mother, who lives next to her, doesn't have insurance. She said the storm was a wake-up call to be better prepared. "I told Mom, 'You need some kind of insurance.'"

William Holt, Watauga County's Emergency Services director, said on Tuesday that the county fielded more than 2,000 calls to 911 the first day of the storm. Two people died in landslides, he said. Several dozen remained sheltered at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and more were staying with family or friends. Many

hotels were renting rooms only to locals or storm recovery workers.

Help has poured into the city from volunteer groups, water rescue teams, the National Guard, power utilities, tree companies, the Red Cross and others. Officials said they were working to add more locations for water, hot meals, showers, restrooms and cellphone charging stations.

He said the storm constituted "the worst natural disaster in modern history" in his county.

In an interview, Holt said recovery would be complicated by the terrain and housing patterns, with homes often scattered along creeks that turned into torrents.

"And it's not quick fixes," he said.

In Boone on Tuesday, restaurant staff were cleaning out mud from floors and parking lots. In one neighborhood, mud coated a street of flooded homes where volunteers helped families. About 200 structures have been deemed unsafe, officials said.

Holt said the storm's fallout may take an economic bite in the area, impacting everyone from small-business owners to those relying on tourism. Right now, officials are asking tourists not to come so that recovery work can proceed.

Further outside of town, people were mucking out homes and putting mattresses and belongings by the road. Some residents and crews worked to temporarily patch washed-out sections of road along Meat Camp Creek to make it navigable.

Roy Dobyns Jr., a Baptist pastor in Boone who lives outside of town, said it has taken a toll on some people's mental health. And it's created long-term struggles for people who will have to wait weeks for power or repairs.

"All the bridges and roads blew up, so they can't get to them. A five-minute drive takes an hour," he said. In Meat Camp, a community thought to be named because hunters once dressed animals there, Clifford sat on his porch sipping tea mixed with orange juice. Across the yard were chickens kept for their grandchildren. Nearby was a tree branch he'd used to prop up a fallen power line, its lines splayed across the yard.

Clifford, in his eighth decade, still works mowing several lawns. When he suggested he sometimes struggled to get it done, Carolyn interjected. "You do good," she told him, arguing that he could still outwork a 30-year-old.

If they could afford to leave, Clifford – unlike his wife – doesn't want to. Even if he had known how bad the storm was going to be, he said he'd have probably chosen to stay put in their place framed by scenic mountains. His wife pointed out that he navigated the broken roads to get to church the day after the storm.

But she worries another, similar storm will take down the hillside or cut them off again: "Like you need to go to the doctor, you can't," she said. "You can't get in touch with anybody."

Whether to move away from an area that people may decide is too risky in Helene's wake, Holt said, is a difficult conversation many may be having in the months to come.

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Donald Trump holds town hall in Fayetteville: Here's what he talked about

October 5, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Rachael Riley, Fayetteville Observer | Section: News | 1014 Words OpenURL Link

(This story was updated to add new information.)

In his first visit to Fayetteville in his bid to seek another term in the White House, former President Donald Trump told a crowd of more than 5,000 at the Crown Arena on Friday night that he would restore the name of the world's most populated U.S. military installation.

Formerly known as Fort Bragg and named after Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg, the home of the airborne and special operations forces was renamed Fort Liberty last June.

"We did win two world wars from Fort Bragg ... So, this is no time to be changing names... We're going to do everything we can to get it back. We're going to bring our country back," Trump told the crowd that roared with applause and chanted, "Fight, fight, fight!"

Ahead of Trump's remarks, Sanford resident Chelsea Ruston said she is a military spouse and does not think renaming the installation was worth the money.

Ruston said she came out to support Trump.

"He cares for America, everything to make America great again, closing our borders ... I liked gas prices better (when he was in office). I liked that inflation was down and interest rates," she said.

Trump's visit to Fayetteville lasted little more than an hour and included questions from several North Carolina residents and others.

Topics included what Trump has said was a lack of response to those affected by Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina, and illegal immigration, but the majority of the questions centered on military topics.

Dwight Francisco, a Marine Corps Vietnam veteran, who had presented Trump with a Purple Heart that Francisco had been awarded, said he was moved to see Trump stand up after being grazed in the ear by a bullet during an assassination attempt at a June rally in Butler, Pennsylvania.

Francisco asked Trump what he would do to help homeless veterans.

Trump said it upset him to see homeless veterans in front of hotels, while "illegal immigrants, many who are killers, drug dealers and terrorists" can walk into the same hotel and sleep there.

He said he would support border policies written during his last term, he would empower local law enforcement to arrest people illegally in the country who have committed crimes and claimed that hundreds of thousands of migrant children were missing under the current administration. A Department of Homeland Security report noted in August that more than 32,000 unaccompanied migrant children failed to show up for immigration court hearings.

Trump also said the U.S. is sitting on "liquid gold" and that money from drilling oil and gas would be used "to take care of our veterans properly."

Trump was asked by John, who said he was a former Green Beret kicked out of the military over a COVID-19-vaccine mandate, what he would do to hold military leaders accountable over the former Department of Defense mandate

for service members that Congress overturned.

Trump said there should have never been a vaccine mandate and that he would take care of the accountability.

"We lost a lot of great people — a lot of people were forced into doing things they didn't want to do," he said.

Austin, an active-duty service member at Fort Liberty, told the crowd he was at Friday night's forum in a personal capacity and not on behalf of the Army or Department of Defense.

Austin asked Trump about Iran launching missiles toward Israel this week and what Trump's thoughts were on the Iron Dome Missile System used to protect Israel and if America should have a similar system.

"We have to be totally prepared, and we have to be absolutely prepared ... hit the nuclear and worry about the rest later," Trump responded.

Trump said that World War III could start before the election and referenced the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

He said the attacks between Israel and Iran and between Russia and Ukraine wouldn't have happened if he were president and claimed there were no attacks during his four years in the White House.

Following a similar assertion by Trump at a rally in New Hampshire in 2023, CNN reported that during his presidency, the Justice Department brought charges related to an alleged terrorist attack in lower Manhattan on October 31, 2017, which resulted in the deaths of eight people and injured 12 others. The DOJ said the attack was carried out in support of ISIS; and a 2019 attack at Pensacola Naval Air Station in 2019 that killed three service members was motivated by jihadist idealogy and was carried out by a longtime "associate" of al Qaeda.

"We defeated ISIS. I rebuilt the military, and we have great generals," Trump said.

Asked by a Marine veteran who said he is also a "Latino for Trump" about what he would do for accountability over the 2021 withdrawal in Afghanistan that resulted in the deaths of 13 service members, Trump called the withdrawal an "embarrassing moment in the history of our country."

Trump said that during his last few months in office, troops were getting out of the Middle East, and about 5,000 service members were in Afghanistan.

He said the U.S. should have never given up Bagram Air Base and said that no service members were killed during his last 18 months in office.

"Then we had the election, these guys took over, and it all started up again ...," Trump said. "We lost 13 and left \$85 billion worth of equipment behind. We left Americans behind. Everything was wrong."

Trump said he would fire the generals involved. Former U.S. Central Command commander, Marine Gen. Kenneth "Frank" McKenzie, has since retired.

The last question of the night was asked by former Space Force Lt. Col. Matthew Lohmeier, who sat on stage during the town hall along with Francisco and John, the former Green Beret.

Lohmeier said he was relieved of his command and lost his pension after he criticized DOD training on diversity, equity and inclusion.

"These trainings are still dividing our troops," Lohmeier claimed.

He asked Trump if he would fire the "few woke generals" who are a problem.

Trump said he'd appoint Lohmeier to a task force to look into the matter if elected president.

Staff writer Rachael Riley can be reached at rriley@fayobserver.com.

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hurricane helene aftermath - Test of patience and fortitude - WNC residents digging in for the long haul

October 5, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC)
Author: Keith Sharon, Tiana Kennell, Iris Seaton and Kelly Puente; USA TODAY NETWORK Section: News | 1008 Words Page: A1
OpenURL Link

The toughest test of will, patience, fortitude and faith is coming for the residents of Western North Carolina.

As the searches for missing people continue, as the receding water reveals horrors that had been submerged, as the roads (slowly) re-open, as FEMA representatives scramble and stumble, how do people who have lost so much get their lives back to some semblance of normalcy?

COVID may have seemed like the toughest test, but the virus may prove to be a practice round for local business owners, government officials and families. COVID didn't knock out roads. COVID didn't lift homes off their foundations. COVID didn't change beautiful countryside into dangerous terrain.

"We're going through this and we're still trying to recover from the pandemic," Asheville bartender Alex Cohn-Derrick said.

The daily death counts have become more grim in the wake of Tropical Storm Helene.

President Joe Biden surveyed damaged Western North Carolina from a helicopter — after a similar trip to Greenville, South Carolina — on Wednesday afternoon. The president has said he wants to "jump start" the recovery effort by asking Congress to approve a supplemental bill to help cover federal costs for Helene relief efforts.

Biden has directed up to 1,000 active duty troops to immediately deploy to assist with response and recovery efforts in communities hit by Helene, the White House said on Wednesday.

National Guard members this week were dropping supplies in Blackhawk helicopters in Helene-devastated mountain towns that have largely been cut off from the world for days.

Cohn-Derrick was displaced from her home in Candler after it was consumed by rushing water from a nearby creek. She sought shelter with her Cantina Louie co-workers, Elizabeth Bryan and Trevor Cox. Though the water has retreated, the damage and mold have made her home uninhabitable.

"We've all been fighting for many years to get a fair living wage since COVID, so this hit us hard," Bryan said. "Being in this industry with so many restaurants out of business we don't know what to do from here."

Bryan said many aren't unaware of how to file for unemployment.

The Trinity Fairview Church southeast of Asheville has been serving as a hub where the community has been gathering supplies and working on plans to reach others that have been cut off by downed trees and demolished roads.

"We don't have any cell service, we haven't heard anything," said resident Gina Fowler. "But everyone has been coming together."

Dozens of adults and even their small children formed an assembly line to unload water and other supplies from the helicopter.

They said they were grateful to get bottled water after drinking well water for several days.

Wilkerson said he was glad to be able to personally deliver supplies to his church as a National Guard member, but had to fight back tears.

"It's hard to see them like this, but they're making it," he said.

More than 100 nurses as well as physicians arrived at Mission Hospital in Asheville from sister hospitals across the nation within the HCA Healthcare system, which owns Mission and is headquartered in Nashville, HCA spokesperson Harlow Sumerford said.

They've set up mobile units with kitchens, bathrooms and handwashing stations and are setting up mini marts inside the hospital and in other HCA hospitals across the region to provide doctors, nurses and other hospital staff with free groceries, including food, water and toiletries.

"Though the level of destruction is immense, I am proud of the dedication of our colleagues, who have continued to support our patients, our community and one another," said Greg Lowe, president and CEO of Mission Health. "We remain dedicated to helping our colleagues through this time, just as they have selflessly served their community and supported patients without hesitation."

Vulnerable animals are being shipped out of town for their safety.

The Asheville Humane Society has evacuated around 100 animals to shelters outside of Western North Carolina.

AHS facilities weren't damaged severely during the storm. But a lack of potable water caused by outages affecting all of Asheville and many surrounding areas made it impossible to provide adequate care for a large amount of the animals at the Buncombe County Animal Shelter.

"Potable and clean water is an essential resource for keeping the animals happy and hydrated, but it's also necessary for cleaning the kennels and ensuring that hands are sanitized in preparation for medical procedures," AHS Content Coordinator Colleen Daly said. "And it's extremely difficult, if not impossible, to take care of the number of animals in our care given those circumstances."

For humans, drinking water may be difficult to find for weeks.

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kody Kinsley warned western North Carolina residents that well water in addition to municipal water sources may not be safe to drink because of contamination from the flood damage.

"Only use bottled, boiled or treated water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene," Kinsley said.

There is no timetable for running water restoration in some of the most devastated areas said Asheville Assistant City Manager Ben Woody.

Biltmore Church is supplying community members with water, ice and meals at its Arden campus, 35 Clayton Road.

The Arden campus, in addition to supplying community members, is also a staging ground for groups of Southern Baptist disaster recovery teams that will go out to the community with chainsaws to help clear paths and help with access to homes.

Many of the supplies Biltmore is providing out of its Arden campus were sent from fellow Southern Baptist churches across the state. The Arden campus supply center is open to community members from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on October 2.

"The total recovery will be many, many months but the urgent needs right now would be trying to help people survive this early thing," said Bruce Frank, Biltmore's lead pastor, in an interview.

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Vote planned on Helene relief funding

October 5, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Author: RICHARD CRAVER Staff Reporter | Section: Main | 901 Words

Page: 3A OpenURL Link

Republican legislative leaders said Friday that next week's scheduled one-day session will include a vote on an initial disaster relief package to launch the state's funding response to Hurricane Helene.

When the regular part of the 2024 session was adjourned, the legislature established specific dates to return to address certain pending legislation and to hold potential veto override votes.

The next date is Wednesday, which was expected to involve veto override votes of House Bill 10, which features Republican priorities of \$460 million in K-12 Opportunity Scholarship funding for the 2024-25 school year, and would require all sheriffs to cooperate with federal ICE officials.

A joint statement from Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, and House speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, said "we are still working to determine what needs to be included in that legislation."

There is about \$5 billion in the state's so-called "rainy day fund" that has been a set aside funding priority of Republican legislators toward natural disaster relief efforts.

"Over the past week, we've heard directly from residents in Western North Carolina and have seen the devastation firsthand," the legislative leaders said.

"Our hearts are broken for the communities that have been ravaged by Hurricane Helene. Despite the destruction, it has been incredible to see how North Carolinians have stepped up to help. We cannot let up on those efforts or forget about the small communities that have been effectively closed off because of this storm."

Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper and state and federal officials also are awaiting initial damage assessment in order to request Federal Emergency Management Administration assistance.

President Joe Biden has approved a federal emergency declaration for North Carolina, which provides federal financial reimbursement for response actions by government entities and some non-profits. Biden visited this week parts of western N.C. with Cooper and state and federal relief officials.

House Minority leader Rep. Robert Rieves, D-Chatham, said "House Democrats are thinking of and praying for the residents affected by Hurricane Helene, especially in Western North Carolina, but also in Eastern North Carolina where a tornado tore through Rocky Mount."

"We are committed to doing whatever it takes to help rebuild the region over the long term. We have to begin planning for the long-term recovery, which will take time. House Democrats have begun working on a package of relief measures and look forward to working with our Republican colleagues and the governor's team to help get it done.

"We stand ready to do this work in one of our regularly scheduled sessions or during a special session - whatever is necessary."

Mitch Kokai, senior policy analyst with conservative think tank John Locke Foundation, said "it's important to note that the statement referenced an initial disaster relief package."

"No one knows at this point how state government ultimately will need to respond to the storm's damage. We might not have those answers before a new General Assembly convenes in 2025."

Kokai said lawmakers "can take steps now to free up money for items that can be addressed in the coming weeks."

"Since lawmakers are already scheduled to return to Raleigh again in November and December, it's likely that more hurricane-related legislation could be considered at those sessions as well."

Neither Berger nor Moore's office could be immediately reached for comment on whether veto override votes still were planned. Neither chamber have posted their planned agendas for Wednesday.

The Republican supermajority passed HB10 on Sept. 12. The Opportunity Scholarship language in HB10 allows North Carolina parents - no matter how much they make - to get vouchers to help cover tuition for K-12 private or religious schools for their children.

It's likely both chambers will override the veto, as they have seven of Cooper's eight vetoes this session.

It's not clear whether the legislature will look to divert the Opportunity Scholarship funding for 2024-25 school year to disaster relief efforts, or just draw from the rainy day fund.

Cooper has declared a state public education emergency in response to the proposed Opportunity Scholarship expansion, saying "we need to put a moratorium on destructive private-school vouchers until North Carolina's public schools are fully funded."

More than relief?

Berger and Moore did not indicate in their joint statement whether they intended to address any other pending legislation or call for a special session to do so.

In December 2016, the Republican super-majority held its third special session to pass a bill to provide \$200.9 million in disaster relief to 49 eastern counties affected by Hurricane Matthew and two tropical storms, as well as five western counties affected by wildfires.

However, rather than end that session and go home outside of scheduled joint oversight meetings, the General Assembly was called into a fourth special session protested by House Democrats.

Two bills were passed during that fourth session and quickly signed into law by Republican Gov. Pat McCrory. The bills surrendered gubernatorial appointee authority - held for decades - that Republican legislative leaders claimed allowed them to not have to go to court to enforce their reclaiming of authority.

For critics, McCrory's signing of the two bills demonstrated another example of a lack of political will and unwillingness to butt heads with strong Republican legislative leadership over potentially unconstitutional legislation.

The decision by McCrory not to hold a press conference or bill signing ceremony encapsulated his reputation as a go-along-to-get-along executive more in tune with being mayor of North Carolina than its governor.

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Site an option for storm victims

October 5, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Author: KEVIN GRIFFIN Staff Reporter | Section: Main | 531 Words

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The former American Hebrew Academy in Greensboro, planned at one time to house unaccompanied migrant teens, has emerged as an option for sheltering people displaced by Hurricane Helene.

U.S. Rep. Kathy Manning said in a statement Friday that her office "is actively engaging with the Department of Health and Human Services regarding the potential use of the Greensboro Influx Care facility as temporary accommodation for those impacted by the storm."

"My heart aches at the devastation Hurricane Helene has brought to our state," Manning said via the statement, adding: "In this moment of urgent need for our neighbors in western North Carolina, I am committed to ensuring that resources are swiftly mobilized and reach all those affected by this unprecedented storm."

Greensboro Mayor Nancy Vaughan said she reached out to Manning's office and Gov. Roy Cooper's office about the possibility of using the site earlier this week.

"I think that would be a great opportunity to utilize that site for people who really have suffered such an extreme tragedy in Western North Carolina," she said.

Manning said her office "will maintain close contact with HHS as they make critical determinations about the facility's usage."

When asked about the potential use of the site, the department provided a statement saying that Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra "made clear that HHS will do all that we can to help support families impacted by Hurricane Helene."

The statement continued: "We are working closely with state and local health authorities, as well as with our partners across the federal government, to provide public health and medical support. HHS will continue to use every lever we can to help families impacted."

The Health and Human Services Department has a five-year, \$50 million lease on the former American Hebrew Academy property at 4334 Hobbs Road.

The facility was originally set aside as a site for sheltering up to 800 teens who came into the country unaccompanied by parents or legal guardians.

From March to June, the center was technically operational though no teens were actually brought there during that time. Since June, the center has wound down operation and been on standby should the need to house migrant teens increase.

Manning previously attributed the facility's unused status to a decline in unaccompanied minors coming into the United States.

It is not clear at this point if the campus, which is large enough to accommodate at least 1,500 workers in addition to 800 residents, will ultimately be used to assist storm victims.

As of early Friday afternoon, there were around 1,300 people being housed in 22 shelters in and near western

North Carolina, according to information published by the state. Two-thirds of the shelters were either housing no one at that time or were below 50% capacity.

Vaughan said she believes Greensboro residents will show their support for those displaced by Helene if the site is ever used as a shelter.

"I think that if this occurs that the city of Greensboro will embrace the refugees from the storm," Vaughan said. "We look forward to welcoming them if that becomes a possibility."

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CLOSED INDEFINITELY

October 5, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Author: CONNOR MCNEELY Staff writer | Section: Main | 821 Words

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In the wake of the devastation of Hurricane Helene, only a handful of families could still reach the observation decks of the Blue Ridge Parkway and witness a brilliant mountain sunset.

Officials with the National Park Service (NPS) announced Wednesday that the parkway will remain closed through the entire state of North Carolina indefinitely as crews continue to conduct their initial assessment of the damage from the hurricane.

Those who lived far up into the mountains, past closed roadways and dangerous washouts, walked to the observation deck at Gillespie Gap Wednesday evening across from the Skyline Village Inn, about 100 feet from an access point to the parkway. It was virtually the only way for the families, who had come to the McDowell-Mitchell county line for better cell signal to call their loved ones.

Ernan and Marcia Santos, longtime Spruce Pine residents who spent many days following the storm attempting to leave the mountains, sat on a bench and gazed over at a view they had seen hundreds of times in their lives. Earlier the couple had called their daughter, who had just finished law school at Duke University.

"Even now, it's pretty," Ernan Santos said, looking out at the sunset. "It's so peaceful here."

According to the National Park Service announcement, NPS assessment teams have seen significant, and in some cases, catastrophic damage along the parkway, particularly from milepost 280 to milepost 469.

As of Thursday afternoon, 250 NPS employees from 32 states are working with the Blue Ridge Parkway staff in the recovery efforts, the news release said.

In the coming weeks, the assessment teams from the NPS will use data from their inspections to determine the timeline and cost estimates for repairs.

A projected reopening of any section of the Blue Ridge Parkway hasn't yet been established, the NPS announcement said.

The conversations of other families mainly centered on the status of the roads on the way up the mountains. Washouts had closed many of the possible exits for them and their family.

On one of the tables on the observation deck, the Skyline Inn had set down a log that mountain residents filled with more than two dozen names of those who were safe.

Bubba Presnell stood with his wife, Tamara, a principal in the Yancey County School system, and their daughters Hannah and Sarah. They had weathered the storm together and were able to reach nearby Irwin, Tennessee, a couple of days ago to retrieve a portable DVD player that charged in their car.

Usually, they would charge it during the day and watch one movie in the evening. At the observation deck, Sarah and Bubba would call loved ones and ask about a shared fantasy football league, and for recaps of two Monday Night Football games.

It was terrible for Bubba Presnell to think about what would happen next for their undefeated local high school

football team, the Mountain Heritage Cougars.

"I'm heartbroken for our guys, because I don't know what's going to happen or if they're even going to get to finish playing," Presnell said. "I hate that for them."

Tamara Presnell said she made her way to her school, Newland Elementary to make contact with different families and to check on the water damage.

"We had several families that have lost their homes, but we were able to lay eyes on all our kids, and talk to all of our kids." Presnell said.

Up at the Skyline Village Inn, now closed, co-owner Tamara Seid-Graham recounted enduring the storm with different guest couples who became a tight-knit group during the experience.

As the roads closed, there was no way out for several days. The group bonded as the first floor of the inn flooded and they ran around the building to get flashlights.

"One of the guests was like, 'Can we extend our stay?' And I was like, 'What are you talking about? There's nowhere to go. You're good.'" Seid-Graham said.

Her phone was now flooded with over 600 missed emails, Seid-Graham said. But everything, including peak business season for most of the businesses near the Blue Ridge Parkway, had to be pushed aside to deal with the aftermath of the hurricane.

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Main

October 5, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Section: Main | 102 Words

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Boone, heavily reliant on tourist dollars, grapples with what's next. News, A9

N.C. A&T's David Laney returns home to Richmond. Sports, B1

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UNC moves basketball scrimmage planned for Cherokee

October 5, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Author: STAFF REPORT | Section: Life | 194 Words

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CHAPEL HILL - North Carolina's men's basketball's Blue-White scrimmage scheduled for next weekend at Harrah's Resort in Cherokee has been canceled due to the aftermath of Hurricane Helene and its impact on the western part of the state.

Instead, the Tar Heels are moving the Blue-White scrimmage to next Saturday, Oct. 12, at the Smith Center following the football game against Georgia Tech. The football game begins at noon and the basketball scrimmage will begin 45 minutes after the football game ends.

"We had some discussions about keeping the date to help restore some normalcy but there is nothing normal about the tragic circumstances people in the area are facing every day," UNC head coach Hubert Davis said in a news release. "We plan to bring our team to Harrah's and Cherokee another time when the conditions are right."

Tickets for the Blue-White scrimmage are \$10 for general admission seating, and all proceeds will be directed to hurricane relief efforts. Tickets will go on sale on Tuesday at 10 a.m. at GoHeels.com/tickets.

Anyone who purchased a ticket to the Cherokee scrimmage and brings a copy of the receipt to the Smith Center will be admitted for free.

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HURRICANE HELENE ONE OF THE DEADLIEST IN US HISTORY

October 5, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 105 Words OpenURL Link

Falling trees and raging floods from Hurricane Helene killed at least 200 people after it made landfall late last week as a Category 4 storm in the Big Bend area of Florida's Gulf Coast. Helene then plowed through the Southeast as one of the deadliest storms in U.S. history. People died in six states: Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. The powerful storm left a wide path of destruction, including downed trees and power lines, massive flooding and water outages. Above, Anne Schneider, right, hugs her friend Eddy Sampson as they survey the damage left in Helene's wake Tuesday in Marshall, N.C.

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Teams are back up and running

October 5, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: JASON KOON jason.koon@lee.net| Section: News| 889 Words OpenURL Link

Newton-Conover High School athletic director Todd Davis said, other than a few periods when his cell service went out, his phone has been lit up all week since the remnants of Hurricane Helene hit.

"All the ADs in the Catawba Valley Athletic Conference have been on a group text," he said. "When you get cell service, your phone starts blowing up because you have a backlog of texts."

High school athletics in the Hickory area had a nearly weeklong break because of Hurricane Helene. However, Davis and other area athletic directors have been as busy as ever. Davis said the area ADs have been in almost constant contact over the last week, working to get as much of the fall season caught up as possible.

Last Friday's football games were originally rescheduled to Saturday. Then it was Monday. Then Tuesday. Hickory, Maiden and Newton-Conover finally got the games in on Wednesday evening while other schools promised the games would be made up, just not this week. Davis said it's right that during times like this, athletics take a back burner.

"Right now, sports is not necessarily at the forefront as much as, 'Is everybody OK,'" he said. "I have to remind myself, it's bigger than just Newton-Conover sports, it's a community, a county and a state thing. ... At the end of the day, it's just a game."

Davis and his coaches have also taken some of that load on themselves. He said the group has been busy reaching out to student athletes and families to check on their well-being.

"Our coaches have done a great job touching base with our kids, making sure they're OK," he said.

A protracted break

At Newton-Conover, the last game to be played was the JV football game on Wednesday, Sept. 25. It was almost a full week until athletes hit the field again. Football players put pads on for the first time on Tuesday, and soccer and tennis played Tuesday night matches. Davis said he has been telling his coaches to treat these first games and practices more like it is the beginning of a season due to the inactive period.

"These kids have been out for awhile and you haven't seen them," Davis said. "Proper stretching, proper conditioning. Do not come back thinking they're 100%, a lot of these kids haven't been doing anything."

The same story has been repeated all around Catawba County. Practice fields, gyms and weight rooms were empty for nearly a week until most athletics resumed on Tuesday and Wednesday.

At Fred T. Foard High School, sports were back up Wednesday evening after power was finally restored. Volleyball and soccer hosted North Iredell on Wednesday, and tennis, volleyball, soccer and JV football are expected to be in action Thursday evening.

Hickory soccer got back to its winning ways on Tuesday with a 3-1 win over Statesville. Volleyball and tennis got back to action on Wednesday and cross country participated in the county championship meet at Murray's Mill. All seven public high schools in the county, along with University Christian High School and Hickory Christian Academy, were at that meet.

To the north, at South Caldwell and Alexander Central, fields will remain dark at least until Sunday, Oct. 6. The Northwestern 3A/4A Conference, which includes schools like Freedom and Watauga in harder hit areas, canceled all athletic activities for this week. A determination has not been made yet about next week's schedules.

The ripple effect

CVAC schools are also dealing with longer-term scheduling challenges. Davis said that while the Newton-Conover area got off comparatively easy, its going to take some extra planning to work around longer shutdowns at places like East Burke High School and West Caldwell.

"We're just trying to be proactive when we can, knowing that some schools, like West Caldwell and East Burke, can't," Davis said. "We're trying to get these other games played so we can free up some space to work with them."

As of Wednesday afternoon, all athletic games and practices at West Caldwell and East Burke are canceled for at least the rest of this week.

The ripple effect is also impacting this Friday's football matchups. Hickory, St. Stephens, Bandys and Bunker Hill have all moved this week's games to Saturday to give the players an extra day between games. Fred T. Foard is still scheduled to play on Friday while the Newton-Conover-East Burke and MaidenWest Caldwell games have been postponed.

To help mitigate some of the longer-term impacts, Bunker Hill athletic director John Sullivan said on Monday that he and other ADs are hoping the North Carolina High School Athletic Association will consider adding an extra week to the fall season. The Charlotte Observer reported Monday that the NCHSAA board will not make a determination until at least the end of this week.

Asheville High School football coach Cort Radford took to X (formerly known as Twitter) with a simple request for the NCHSAA.

"Please don't forget about us in Western NC," he wrote. "As we are handing out food and water for survival, kids are asking me when we are playing again. It matters to them. We just need a little time."

Jason Koon is the Sports Editor for the Hickory Record and can be reached at jason.koon@lee.net.

This week's high school football schedule

Wednesday:

Hickory 60, North Lincoln 25

West Lincoln 19, Maiden 14

Lincolnton 36, Newton-Conover 21

Friday:

Statesville @Fred T. Foard 7:30 p.m.

Saturday:

Lincolnton @Bandys, noon

St. Stephens @Hickory, 6 p.m.

Bunker Hill @West Lincoln, 6:30 p.m.

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Pilot makes emergency landing in Hickory

October 5, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: SARAH C. JOHNSON sjohnson@hickoryrecord.com| Section: News | 321 Words OpenURL Link

An airplane that was returning from Avery County made an emergency landing at the Hickory Regional Airport on Wednesday.

At 12:45 p.m., the N.C. State Highway Patrol responded to an airplane crash in Catawba County at the Hickory Regional Airport, Trooper Christopher Casey said in a news release.

The pilot, Jordan Seth Faught, 41, of Lenoir, was not injured, Casey said.

The single-engine Cessna experienced a mechanical failure, resulting in an emergency landing on the runway. The plane was returning from Avery County after delivering supplies to areas impacted by Hurricane Helene, Casey said.

Kevin Buxton is a volunteer with the eff orts to ship emergency supplies to western North Carolina following Hurricane Helene. Buxton witnessed the emergency landing. He said the plane's landing gear did not come down. The pilot circled a few times before landing without the gear. The plane slid about 60 feet on its belly. After stopping, Faught exited the plane, Buxton said.

The plane landed on a runway directly behind the main building of the Hickory Regional Airport. Emergency responders were still on scene at 3 p.m. Wednesday.

The N.C. Highway Patrol secured the scene. The Federal Aviation Administration will investigate, Casey said.

Emergency supplies to aid the mountain communities of North Carolina have been shipped out of regional airports, including the Hickory Regional Airport and the Statesville Regional Airport, since the weekend. Buxton said the supplies are mostly being shipped by volunteer pilots.

Residents who have been rescued are being evacuated by these pilots as well, Buxton said. Doctors and nurses are at the Hickory Regional Airport to provide treatment.

Buxton said most of the planes and helicopters are privately owned and pilots are paying for gas out of pocket. Buxton said roughly 60,000 gallons of fuel is being used each day.

Monetary donations to help with fuel costs are being accepted by Operation Airdrop at operation-airdrop.com/hurricane-helene.

Donations are asked to be taken to the Appalachian State University campus in Hickory on U.S. Highway 321.

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No classes at App State Hickory campus for weeks

October 5, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: BILLY CHAPMAN wchapman@hickoryrecord.com| Section: News | 287 Words OpenURL Link

Students attending Appalachian State's Hickory campus will not meet for classes until at least Oct. 16, according to a release from the university.

The university's campus in Boone was heavily impacted by Hurricane Helene, which was a tropical storm when it hit North Carolina on Sept. 27. Flooding, mudslides and downed trees damaged infrastructure and buildings throughout Boone and Watauga County.

A fall break for the university is also scheduled for Oct. 14 and 15.

Classes in Boone are also canceled until at least Oct. 16, the release said.

Appalachian State Interim Chancellor Heather Norris said during a press conference Tuesday the university's Boone campus briefly lost power and internet service.

She said many campus buildings sustained water damage, but residence halls remained structurally sound.

Norris said widespread flooding and transportation issues were aff ecting faculty and staff .

"We've been focused on mitigating the eff ects of Hurricane Helene and keeping our community safe," Norris said during the press conference.

During the press conference, Watauga County Director of Emergency Management Will Holt said the county's 911 system received 2,000 calls for assistance the first day of the storm. He said the county normally receives 3,000 calls in a month.

Holt said dozens were sheltered at Appalachian State's Holmes Convocation Center.

"Everyone, please stay out of Watauga County unless you are called upon," Holt said at the press conference.

Community colleges

Catawba Valley Community College also canceled classes and closed the campus this week. The college said it would provide information about classes during the week of Oct. 7 by late afternoon Oct. 4.

Western Piedmont Community College in Morganton was also closed this week. The college said hundreds of utility trucks are using the campus as a base.

Billy Chapman is a reporter with the Hickory Daily Record. wchapman@hickoryrecord.com

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Catawba County deputies help with rescues

October 5, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: SARAH C. JOHNSON sjohnson@hickoryrecord.com| Section: News | 533 Words OpenURL Link

The Catawba County Sheriff's Office sent deputies to help with rescue and recovery efforts in western North Carolina following the flooding caused by Hurricane Helene on Sept. 27.

A small group of Catawba County deputies were sent to Yancey County with a Bearcat armored vehicle on Sept. 27 during the storm, Maj. Aaron Turk said on Thursday.

As of Thursday, 15 deputies were still in Yancey County to assist with rescues, recoveries and cleanup. Turk said the largest number of deputies in Yancey County was 25 on Monday.

Catawba County Sheriff Don Brown also went to Yancey County to help, Turk said.

The deputies are scheduled to be in Yancey County until at least Oct. 9, Turk said.

Five Catawba County deputies are helping in McDowell County.

The Catawba County Detention Facility sent 11 staff members to Buncombe County to assist with the county jail there, Turk said.

Currently around 90 inmates from Burke County are being housed at the Catawba County Detention Facility due to the major flooding that hit Morganton, Turk said.

A helicopter pilot volunteering with Operation Airdrop at the Hickory Regional Airport helped fly some of the Catawba County Sheriff's Office staff to areas in Yancey County, Turk said.

Other responses from Catawba County

The town of Maiden has sent out police officers, electrical crews and public works crews to western North Carolina to assist in relief efforts, Maiden police Chief Tracy Ledford said on Thursday.

Ledford said Maiden crews have been working since Saturday to assist. The police officers were deployed to Marion and Asheville. Public works crews were sent to Morganton, he said.

Maiden is also accepting donations at the fire department, police department and town hall. Donations will be taken to Asheville by the fire department, Ledford said.

The Long View Police Department is focusing their efforts on helping local people in Catawba County and Burke County since the town is on the county line, Long View Public Information Officer Heather Minor said.

Long View police have been delivering meals to the Hickory Regional Airport for volunteers and first responders helping with Operation Airdrop, Minor said.

Long View police have also helped Christ United to deliver supplies to Hildebran. On Tuesday, officers will deliver supplies to Burke County, Minor said. Donations can be delivered to the Long View Town Hall.

Long View police officers are also delivering supplies to Long View residents without power. Minor said some areas of Long View were still without power on Thursday.

School resources officers with the Hickory Police Department went to Boone to help with traffic since Hickory City Schools did not have classes on Monday and Tuesday, Hickory Police Department Media & Community Services Coordinator Kristen Hart said. Other Hickory officers are part of the Army National Guard and the U.S. Army Reserve. Those officers have been deployed to serve, Hart said. The city of Conover is coordinating with municipalities in Catawba County. Conover will send out public works crews to help with clean up as well as water and sewer restorations, Conover Public Information Officer Madeleine Epley said. Donations can be brought to the Conover Fire Station #3 on Village Square Northwest.

The Brookford Police Department is accepting donations at 1700 South Center St. in Hickory, according to a post on the department's Facebook page.

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STARTING OVER

October 5, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: CHRISSY MURPHY cmurphy@morganton.com| Section: Starting Over | 1195 Words OpenURL Link

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

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

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

'Starting life over at 82'

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

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

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

"It really was just perfect," Jim said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Houses, memories washed away

Up the street, Libby's sister, Hilda White, sat in a lawn chair on Monday, three days after the storm. Her daughter, Lori Stock, and grandson, Spencer Stock, sorted through picture albums and set photos out to dry. Another wedding photo, the only one of Hilda with her late husband, Ralph, was among the pictures. A teapot a relative brought from Russia survived without a single chip on it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Family history on Catawba River

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Community gathering center lost

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

Through the years, it has been used for birthday parties, church gatherings and civic organization activities.

Emergency rescue teams have even used the building as a place to stay during swift water rescue training events.

The building washed away Sept. 27. Parts of the cabin were strewn around the White family property on Powerhouse Road and down the river.

Some parts of the cabin are still standing, like the kitchen and bathroom. Most of the walls are gone, making it look like a dollhouse with one side open It's not the first time the cabin has been washed away. It also was lost during Hurricane Frances in 2004, but the community helped the family recover.

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

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

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Bandys, Maiden high school volley teams head to head in conference after Bandys win

October 5, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: From Staff Reports sports@hickoryrecord.com| Section: High School | 360 Words OpenURL Link

The Bandys and Maiden volleyball teams are now deadlocked at the top of the Catawba Valley Athletic Conference as Bandys took a five-set thriller at home against Maiden on Tuesday.

The two teams battled back and forth, alternating sets throughout the match. Bandys struck first with a 25-17 win in set one. Maiden recovered, taking set two 25-20, before the two teams split the third and fourth sets. It forced a winner-take-all fifth set, which the Trojans took 15-10.

The loss is the first of the conference season for the Blue Devils who came into Tuesday's match 9-0. Maiden and Bandys are now tied for first place in the conference at 10-1. Maiden has lost only six of 35 sets in conference play this season — with four of those sets coming from Bandys. Bandys has lost seven of 38 sets — five at the hands of the Blue Devils.

Maiden bounced back with a 3-0 (25-13, 25-20, 25-8) win over Bunker Hill on Thursday. Elly McClough had 29 kills and seven blocks on the week for the Blue Devils. Raegan Remberts had 16 kills and 39 digs and Laney Miller had 70 digs. The Trojans got their ninth straight win on Thursday, 3-2 (20-25, 25-15, 21-25, 25-20, 15-11) over Newton-Conover.

Hickory soccer gets back to winning ways

The Hickory High School soccer team continued its six-game win streak on Tuesday after a long break due to Hurricane Helene with a 3-1 win over Statesville High School.

Braeden McCourt logged two goals in the game, Nathan Perez Escobedo had one goal and Sam Bridges contributed an assist. Harper Hendrix got the win in goal for Hickory, giving up just one goal in 80 minutes.

McCourt's goals bring his season total to 19. He is currently No. 3 in North Carolina's 3A West Region.

Newton-Conover 4, Bandys 2

Senior Jared Deniz scored two goals and freshman Adolfo Villa added two assists to lift Newton-Conover past Bandys on Tuesday. It was the first of two meetings between the two teams who came into the game locked in a three-way tie for second place in the conference behind first-place West Caldwell. The two teams will face off again on Oct. 23.

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Blume, Harvey

October 5, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Obituaries | 996 Words OpenURL Link

The Rev. Harvey Blume

May 16, 1936 - October 1, 2024

The Rev. Harvey Ludwig Blume, 88, entered the Church Triumphant on October 1, 2024. He was born in Concord, North Carolina, on May 16, 1936, and was adopted as an infant by the late Fred William Blume and Mary Belle Chambers Blume.

He graduated from Concord High School in 1954, and he received an AB degree in English from Lenoir-Rhyne College in 1958. At Lenoir-Rhyne, he was a member of Theta Chi fraternity, Alpha Tau Kappa, Pi Kappa Delta, and Kappa Chi. He was in the marching band for four years, and was named to "Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities." He worked in the college dining hall for two years and was head waiter for one year. He was a member of the Debate Team and a participant in the South Atlantic Forensic Tournament.

On stage at L-R, he played the role of Ali Hakim in "Oklahoma!" and the role of Stosh in "Stalag 17." He was in "The Male Animal," presented in the round in Cline Gym, as well as "The Story of the Old Shoemaker," a one-act play presented to students.

As long as he could remember, his mother commented that she would like for him to become a minister. She never overdid it, but she never let him forget that she would like him to follow through on the suggestion.

"I listened, heard what she was saying, and I guess it was always on my mind," Pastor Blume once said. "Between God and my mother, the way was paved to enable me to choose the ministry."

When his brother joined the Navy, the money that their parents had saved for college expenses all went to Pastor Blume. He attended college and seminary on the \$5,000 his parents had saved.

In 1961, he graduated from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, with a Master of Divinity degree. He was ordained June 11, 1961, by the North Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

He married Susanne Carol Snyder on August 20, 1960. She worked as a teacher to support them during his final year of seminary. Pastor Blume served North Carolina parishes in Lincolnton (St. Luke's - Salem, 1961-1963), Lumberton (St. Mark's, 1963-1970), China Grove (St. Mark's, 1970-1991), and Hickory (Sardis, 1991-1998) until his retirement in 1998. After retirement, he served a number of congregations as interim or supply pastor.

Pastor Blume served the North Carolina Synod as chair of the Youth Committee, the Campus Ministry Committee, and the Special Committee on the Election of the President of Synod. He also served on the Synodical Stewardship Committee and the America Missions Committee. He served as president of Rowan Cooperative Christian Ministry (RCCM), now Rowan Helping Ministries, which he named. He also served as dean of the East Catawba Conference of the North Carolina Synod. In 1982, he was named Fraternalist of the Year in North Carolina, primarily for his work with Lutheran Brotherhood Branch 8142 (now Thrivent).

During his ministry, Pastor Blume did graduate work at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, and Drew University in New Jersey.

Throughout his life, Pastor Blume and his wife enjoyed taking their daughters and later on, their daughters' families, on annual trips to Myrtle Beach, as well as numerous trips to Disney World. Their frequent travel companions often included their son-in-law's parents, Diane Everhart and the late Howard Everhart. Not only were they related through their children's marriage, they were true friends.

After their daughters were grown and married and he had more time to devote to family, Pastor Blume was a devoted "Pop," and he and Susanne enthusiastically attended all of their grandchildren's activities and sporting events. In retirement, he faithfully photographed and documented his and Susanne's family trips, sports, and grandchildren, as is evidenced by the plethora of photo albums that fill many bookcases in their home.

In addition to his parents, Pastor Blume was predeceased by his brother, Harry William Blume of Concord.

He is survived by his wife of 64 years and their three daughters, Karen Elaine Blume Feezor and husband Kevin Feezor of Charlotte, Carol Diane Blume Everhart and husband T. Kelly Everhart of Spencer, and Lara Susanne Blume Dellinger and husband Ramsey Dellinger of Hickory. He is also survived by four grandchildren and three stepgrandchildren, Nolan Snyder Garrett of Durham and Peyton Samuel Garrett of Hickory; Spencer Cole Everhart of Charlotte and Anna Claire Everhart of Spencer; and Tanner McNeill Dellinger, Garon Thomas Dellinger, and Jayna Alexia Dellinger.

Survivors also include Bette Blume, sister-in-law; nieces Melissa Snyder and Kim Blume Suggs, daughter Dara and husband Jerry; nephew Steve Snyder and wife Constance and their daughters Catherine and Emily.

The family would like to offer our deepest gratitude to the caregivers who loved and cared for Dad in his last several months; Misty Elkins, Candy Atwell, Sheena Shell, Stephanie Hamlin, and Grace Brookshire. Ladies, you are our angels on earth. We also thank those at Kingston Residence who cared for him while he lived there. In addition, we offer heartfelt thanks to everyone at Trinity Ridge Senior Care Community in Hickory, NC, where Dad spent his final week. Every person there was kind and gracious, compassionately caring for him and treating him with respect and dignity. They not only ministered to him, but to us as well. And finally, we are so thankful to have had Hospice with us throughout this journey, especially Angela Herman and Angela Myers. Your assistance, knowledge, empathy and kindness are a blessing to us.

Pastor Blume was a member of New Jerusalem Lutheran Church (NALC), where on Monday, October 14, 2024, Visitation will be held at 11 a.m., followed by the Memorial service at 12 p.m. Burial will be private.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a memorial gift to one of the following: New Jerusalem Lutheran Church, 2120 Startown Road, Hickory, NC 28602, or Lutheran Disaster Response Carolinas, 1988 Lutheran Synod Drive, Salisbury, NC 28144 or www.secure.accessacs.com/access/oglogin.aspx?sn=96379. Select "Lutheran Disaster Response" and note "Hurricane Helene/Western NC" on memo line.

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