NewsBank
Herald, The (Morganton, NC) - October 15, 2024 - page 4
October 15, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) | Morganton, North Carolina | Page 4

Rebecca Pitts Mitchell

August 2, 1949 - October 10, 2024

Rebecca Pitts Mitchell, affectionately known as "Gee", 75, of Jamestown, NC went home to be with her Lord and Savior on Thursday, October 10, 2024. Born and raised in Morganton, NC on August 2, 1949, she was the daughter of the late Philip H. Pitts, Sr. and the late Vivian H. Pitts.

Rebecca was a graduate of Lenoir Rhyne University and enjoyed a 30 year career teaching first grade, loving her students and being a mentor for those new to the profession. In addition to her love for children, she was also a devout Christian and was active in her church organizations all her life. Rebecca also had a love for animals, including dogs and cats, and love to spend time birdwatching. Rebecca was a loving wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and friend and will be missed by all who knew her.

Rebecca is survived by her husband, James C. Mitchell, Jr.; daughter, Jennifer M. Vestal (Lee); son, James C. "Trey" Mitchell, III (Ashley); grandchildren, Spencer, Grayson, Alayna (Reign), Gracie and Aubrey; great-grandson, Adonis and sister-in-law, Jackie Pitts (Philip). She is also survived by nieces; nephews; extended family and friends that loved her dearly.

In addition to her parents, Rebecca was preceded in death by her brothers, Noah Andrews Pitts and Philip H. Pitts, Jr.

The funeral will be held at 2 p.m., Saturday, October 19, 2024 at First Baptist Church of Morganton, NC with the Dr. Thomas A. Bland, Jr. officiating. The family will be receiving guests in the Fellowship Hall following the service.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Trellis Supportive Care, 101 Hospice Lane, Winston-Salem, NC 27103 or to First Baptist Church of Morganton, 502 West Union Street, Morganton, NC 28655

SOSSOMAN FUNERAL HOME
www.sossomanfh.com

WOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

A charter bus pulls into the former American Hebrew Academy campus from a Hobbs Road entrance in Greensboro on June 27. FEMA is in the process of finalizing an agreement to take over the site, which has so far been unused, to potentially assist with the response to Hurricane Helene.

Former Greensboro school a possible shelter

KEVIN GRIFFIN
Staff Reporter

The Federal Emergency Management Agency will soon be taking control of the former American Hebrew Academy in Greensboro for potential use in Hurricane Helene recovery efforts.

The agency confirmed the plans in a statement.

"As part of our effort to ensure that every available resource is mobilized, FEMA will soon sign an agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services to transfer the Greensboro Facility in North Carolina, previously operated by HHS, to FEMA," according to the release. "The Greensboro facility will be another resource to ensure that FEMA has access to a wide array of assets and resources should they be needed for the recovery."

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services had earmarked the property at 4334 Hobbs Road for use as a facility housing migrant teens without parents or guardians.

However, the site has not been used for that purpose so far. Last week, officials such as Greensboro Mayor Nancy Vaughan raised the possibility of using the site as a potential shelter for people displaced by Helene.

U.S. Rep. Kathy Manning, who has also been advocating for the site as a possible resource in the recovery, said in a statement Wednesday that she was pleased the agencies were coming to an agreement.

"In this moment of urgent need for food, health services and housing for our neighbors in western North Carolina, I am fully committed to mobilizing resources swiftly and ensuring they reach all those impacted by this unprecedented storm," Manning said via the statement.

It is not clear how many people the site might hold as a shelter, though it was set up to accommodate 800 residents and 1,500 workers when it was slated to serve as the migrant teen center.

When asked about the possibility of the site being used as shelter, some neighbors said they had not heard about that possibility.

One neighbor who lives near the property who declined to give his name said he felt it would be an inappropriate use. The neighbor said the site was suitable for use as a school but not much other than that.

"Anything beyond that, especially anything that requires special services or special care especially with either younger populations or older populations, it's not suited for that in the middle of a residential district," the neighbor said.

However, at least some of the neighbors were more supportive of the idea of the site being used for hurricane response.

Melba Brown said she had not heard about the site being possibly used as part of the storm response but that she would be in favor of the idea.

"I think it would be a great idea for people that don't have anywhere to go from the hurricane," Brown said.

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Crews working on temporary bridge to Marion IV fluid plant

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Crews across western North Carolina are working to make communities accessible about two weeks after Hurricane Helene whipped through the state. One major project is reopening a bridge to Baxter International in McDowell County. The plant produces much of the country's IV solutions.

Nathan Moneyham, division construction engineer for the NC Department of Transportation's Division 13, said damage to roads in western North Carolina was significant, but crews are making improvements. Division 13 includes McDowell, Burke, Mitchell, Rutherford, Buncombe, Madison and Yancey counties.

"We're working every day to get as much open as we can," Moneyham said.

Tim Anderson, division engineer, said NCDOT has identified about 450 bridges or large pipes in the division that were damaged in the storm.

Anderson said the department's 2,100 employees along with contractors have been working to clear major state roads and make repairs to damaged roads and bridges, including in the North Cove area of Marion.

"We were able to open up several of our large primaries, including I-40 across Old Fort Mountain, early on," Anderson said. "We've got a whole lot left to do. It's going to take some time to pull together our contractors, get some of those larger repairs designed and get those executed and get folks to work."

On Wednesday, crews were working on a temporary bridge on Pitts Station Road off U.S. Highway 221 over the North Fork of the Catawba River to give residential community access to their homes and allow tractor-trailers to access the Baxter Healthcare facility that uses Pitts Station Road as its access point.

During Helene, flood waters washed out the foundation of the original bridge and toppled its supports, Moneyham said.

XAVIER MARTIN PHOTOS

A worker from R.E. Burns & Sons Co. uses an excavator to dig out the foundation for a temporary bridge outside of the Baxter Healthcare plant in Marion on Oct. 9.

A worker stands watch at the entrance of the bridge at the intersection of Pitts Station Road and U.S. Highway 221 in Marion on Oct. 9. The bridge at the entrance to the Baxter Healthcare factory is crucial for the production of intravenous fluids and IV equipment.

Baxter makes about 74% of the saline bags for hospitals in North America, Anderson said.

"When the bridge was compromised, they couldn't get their inventory out," Anderson said. "They sustained some damage inside they're working on, but they've got to be able to get that equipment and get those tractor-trailers out so they can serve the nation."

Baxter was forced to limit how much IV fluids hospitals can order in the wake of the storm, according to press releases from Baxter International.

Moneyham said Baxter worked with NCDOT and a contractor to build a temporary bridge to get into the business until a more permanent solution was built.

In a release Wednesday, Baxter said it has eased some allocation limits for products but is still limiting how much customers can buy at once. The company is monitoring stock levels and ramping up production at other facilities, the release said.

Baxter said it hopes to restart production at the North Cove facility in phases and get customers back to 100% allocation on some IV products by the end of the year. The company is already working to restore the manufacturing plant.

On Oct. 7, Baxter said it had not found any structural damage to the North Cove facility, power and water was restored and cleanup was in progress. The company expects to have a production plan in the next two weeks, the release said.

"We will spare no resource — human or financial — to restart operations and help ensure patients and providers have the products they need," said Baxter CEO Joe Almeida.

NCDOT is working on a longer-term, temporary bridge until permanent repairs can be made, Moneyham said. He said the temporary structure would be in place for about a year to a year and a half while a permanent bridge is built. NCDOT hopes the temporary bridge on Pitts Station Road will be ready in about a month, he said.

Anderson said NCDOT employees have been adapting to the challenges throughout the storm. When the power went out, NCDOT offices had generators. When cell services went down, staff in Raleigh made it possible for western North Carolina employees to use satellite phones instead.

"It's just been a Herculean effort by our folks and the entire community," Anderson said. "Our staff in Raleigh all the way to the governor, they've been here since day one. Supporting us there, supporting us here in the field, and without that, we wouldn't be where we are at this moment. I just can't say enough about what they do for us."

He said NCDOT is making emergency repairs first, then moving to long-term, temporary repairs, and finally making permanent repairs. There isn't a timeline yet for how long repairs could take.

"It's a process, and it does take time," Anderson said.

While repairs are underway, Anderson said people should only travel when it's essential in the hard-hit areas of Burke, McDowell and other mountain counties.

"There's a lot of folks wanting to help and a lot of folks bringing help, and that's great to see the community outpouring from across the state and across the Southeast. It's nothing short of inspiring to see how much folks care," Anderson said. "But keeping that travel to essential travel only so that our dump trucks can go up and down the road and folks can get back to life. Especially on the one-lane roads, … extra traffic is not very helpful."

Check www.drivenc.gov for updated road closures and traffic conditions.

Foundation offering relief grants for nonprofits

FROM STAFF REPORTS

On Wednesday, the Gateway Wellness Foundation announced emergency relief for nonprofits who have been impacted by Hurricane Helene.

"At Gateway Wellness Foundation, we recognize that our nonprofit partners are critical to our region's relief and recovery efforts, and we are proud to partner with the Dogwood Health Trust to provide an initial disaster relief grant opportunity to support your Hurricane Helene emergency response efforts," reads an announcement from Gateway.

Gateway Wellness Foundation is providing emergency relief to those affected by Hurricane Helene in the form of grants to nonprofit organizations in Burke, McDowell, Polk, and Rutherford counties.

Funds may be used to provide direct assistance to individuals affected by Hurricane Helene and/or support the applicant organization in recovering from or responding to Hurricane Helene. Grant funds are intended to cover the costs of providing emergency relief services to individuals or eligible organizations affected by the storm.

Grants will be accepted and awarded on a rolling basis.

Please submit only one request for funding at this time.

The recommended maximum grant request is $25,000. Requests in the range of $5,000-$10,000 are more likely to be fully funded.

Organizations applying for a grant must be:

- A community-based nonprofit designated by the IRS as a tax-exempt 501©(3) organization, a faith-based organization, or a public agency serving individuals and families that were affected by Hurricane Helene.
- Serving the following counties: Burke, McDowell, Polk, Rutherford.

If you have any questions or connectivity is an issue, please contact Sarah Morse: s.morse@gatewaywf.org.

Gateway's Disaster Relief Grant Opportunity webpage: gatewaywellnessfoundation.org/hurricane-relief-efforts-grants/.

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