

# Cleveland County - Livermush festival draws a crowd

October 22, 2024 | Star, The (Shelby, NC) Author: Rebecca Sitzes; Shelby Star | Section: News | 519 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

For 39 years, the livermush festival has been celebrating and serving up a regional delicacy that has enticed - and sometimes repulsed - southern diners.

Love it or hate it, the humble pork dish is the star of one of the biggest festivals in the county, drawing in thousands of attendees each year both locally and across the region.

Held in uptown Shelby last weekend, the annual Mush, Music and Mutts Festival featured live music, over 100 vendors, activities for children and pets and of course lots of mush.

Greenbrook Design held a livermush cookoff between two county top chefs, Johnny Ray and Jason Walker, with Walker taking home the win. The cook off was livestreamed and is available to watch on YouTube.

There was also a livermush recipe contest, pet parade, pet costume contest, livermush eating contest, kid zone and more.

Emily Epley, director of Cleveland County Tourism, said based on data from an analytics company, there was an estimated 15,000 attendees last year and even more this year.

"We don't have that information yet but after speaking with vendors and seeing crowds, we're expecting to see a much higher number this year," she said.

She said they mainly track numbers to measure growth, and over the past three festivals, attendance rose from around 6,000 in 2019 to more than twice that last year.

This year there were 20 drink and food concessions with plenty of livermush and non mush options. Local restaurants in the uptown area were also highlighted and several offered livermush themed dishes, including Pfeiffer's, Shelby Cafe, Newgrass and Pleasant City.

The festival was also able to support a local favorite vendor impacted by Hurricane Helene.

Mack's Liver Mush was hard hit by Helene, and Epley said they received word a few days before the festival that they would be unable to attend as a result.

"Mack's is the livermush vendor every year," she said. "We worked with Mack's to provide livermush to several additional vendors and added signs on those vendors' stations. In addition, Hiddenspring Farm agreed to our request to locate where Mack's is usually serving. Mack's provided them with a large inventory of livermush, and they served that as well as their regular menu items."

Epley said she spoke to vendors and the feedback was positive, with many saying it was the best event they attended in a long time, if ever, with several selling out before the end of the day.

"There was whole different level of energy, and I felt like everybody I spoke with, whether they were attendees or vendors, that everybody just seemed very positive and really seemed to be enjoying the festival," she said.

The music this year was strong with Darin and Brooke Aldridge performing as well as Tray Wellington Band and

more local groups.

"It was incredible to see so many people on such a beautiful day enjoying great music and experiences. I think we all needed it in the midst of the difficulties so many here and across Western NC have experienced and many continue to experience because of Helene," Epley said.

The festival will be held next year on Saturday, Oct. 18, and will celebrate its 40th anniversary.

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#### • Citation (aglc Style)

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# Girl Scouts prepare items for relief effort

October 22, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: ERICA CRANE Girl Scout Troop Communications Support Leader | Section: Mapping | 282 Words OpenURL Link

Girl Scout Troop No. 13179 in Mooresville recently went above and beyond in their mission to give back to the community, raising \$1,700 worth of hygiene products in just one weekend to support Hurricane Helene relief efforts.

The girls then worked together at their troop meeting at Broad Street Church in Mooresville to pack more than 300 donation kits in an hour. These kits will be delivered to the Girl Scouts Council shop in Asheville, where they will be distributed to families in need across the region.

The troop didn't just stop at collecting donations. They applied the skills they've learned through Girl Scouts to ensure everything was completed efficiently. By organizing the entire effort using programming and problem-solving skills, they earned their Take Action "Think Like a Programmer" badge, an important milestone recognizing their ability to break down challenges and work as a team. As a special honor for their service, the girls will also receive the Sisterhood Peaks to Piedmont patch.

"It's been amazing to watch these girls step up and show what they're capable of," said one parent volunteer.
"They didn't hesitate when asked to help, and seeing them work so hard and with such heart is truly inspiring."

The troop's efforts have not gone unnoticed by the community, and they credit their success to the generous support they received from donors near and far. "We are so grateful to everyone who contributed," said the volunteer. "Without their donations, none of this would have been possible."

As the hygiene kits head to Asheville, the troop is already looking forward to future service projects, eager to continue making a difference in the lives of those who need it most.

North Carolina Strong. Girl Scout Strong.

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# Craven County employees assist in Helene recovery

October 22, 2024 | Sun Journal (New Bern, NC) Author: Sun Journal staff| Section: News| 569 Words OpenURL Link

Craven County employees from seven departments traveled west to provide mutual aid in western North Carolina for Hurricane Helene.

Trained staff helped with emergency preparedness, search and rescue efforts, emergency operations center operations, shelter operations, public information duties, security, information technology support and long-term care facility assessments.

"Counties and municipalities from all over North Carolina, as well as teams from other states and volunteer organizations, came to aid Craven County citizens when Hurricane Florence hit us hard in 2018, and now it is our turn to assist them in their time of need," said Amber Parker, Craven County human resources director.

Ira Whitford, assistant director of emergency services, worked with the Emergency Operations Center in Jackson County Sept. 26 through Oct. 4.

The Craven County Sheriff's Office sent 14 deputies in two teams to assist with search and rescue, security, and safe distribution of essential goods in McDowell County Sept. 30 through Oct. 11.

The teams also used their underwater drone to assist with underwater search and recovery. An additional team is on standby should mutual aid be requested.

Parker served as a public information officer for incident management teams deployed to coordinate Buncombe County's emergency evacuation shelters in Asheville and Fletcher from Oct. 1 through Oct. 9.

Steve Bennett, director of Information Technology, provided IT support to the Regional Coordination Center Western Branch in Catawba County from Oct. 3 through Oct. 7.

The Department of Social Services sent a shelter team made up of April Rollins, Alissa Andrewsbrown, Loretta Hollis, Haily Barao, and Jean Barlow to help with shelter operations in Hudson from Oct. 5 through Oct. 9.

Shane Digan, assistant to the county manager, served as a public information officer in the Buncombe County Emergency Operations Center on Oct. 6 and Oct. 7.

Margareta Slagle, environmental health specialist, deployed on Oct. 21 to Buncombe County, where she will assist the North Carolina Division of Public Health, Environmental Health Section with long-term care facility assessments.

In addition to deploying staff to work in western North Carolina, Craven County continues to provide support remotely.

The Income Maintenance Division of the Craven County Department of Social Services is helping western counties with the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, D-SNAP, for those impacted by Hurricane Helene.

Keith Riggins, Josietta Dillahunt, and Tonya Camp are assisting the D-SNAP call center set up by the state.

Terri Pennington, Paige Peed, Dana Coward, Latia Warren, Rebecca Milligan, and April Rollins will enter D-SNAP applications received from Caldwell and Jackson counties.

Craven County employees also organized a fundraiser, donating \$5,259 for nonprofit recovery efforts in western North Carolina.

One of the county's partner agencies, Checkmate Government Relations, matched every donation, bringing the total raised to \$10,518.

"We are immensely proud of the dedication our staff has shown helping with the recovery from this devastating hurricane. We will remain steadfast in our commitment to our fellow North Carolinians through this difficult time," said Jack Veit III, Craven County manager.

"The destruction from this storm is terrible, and we are praying for those affected."

Several local fire departments also deployed west, including Township 7 Fire and Rescue, Township 9 Fire and Rescue, West New Bern Fire Department, Cove City Fire Department, and New Bern Fire and Rescue.

Communities in western North Carolina will need support for months and years.

Craven County staff said residents can help the effort by donating through the United Way or a voluntary organization listed with the North Carolina Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster and by donating blood to the American Red Cross.

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# Website gives up-to date donation locations and needs in Western NC

October 22, 2024 | Thomasville Times, The (NC) Author: Sharon Myers PAXTON MEDIA GROUP| Section: Thomasville Times | 365 Words OpenURL Link

DAVIDSON COUNTY — Four weeks after Hurricane Helene devastated western North Carolina, people are still wanting to help by sending clothes, food and other supplies, but there is confusion on what can be donated and where it is needed the most.

There is a website, supportingwnc.com, created by two North Carolina residents that lets people click on individual donation sites and see whether they are taking donations. It also has a breakdown by county on how many donations centers there are, what organization operates each site, as well as locations, collection days and times, and contact information.

"This page is designed to be a central location of information around donation site information and volunteer needs," a statement on the website says. "We are a hub for community-driven change in western North Carolina. Centralize your giving and find volunteer opportunities to make a difference."

The dashboard also tells whether a site is accepting all kinds of donations, limited donations or has stopped or paused taking donations. If you expand the screen, there is further information on what items are the most-needed, including clothing, cleaning supplies, hygiene items or pet food.

Organizations that have registered with the website can update needs in real time. They also list whether they are a collection site needing items, or if they are an organization delivering food and supplies that needs volunteers.

For those in Davidson County who wish to donate locally, there are still plenty of churches, businesses and other organizations who are taking items.

Richard Childress Racing Museum at 236 Industrial Way in Welcome is continuing to take donations of coats, hats, blankets, sleeping bags and warm clothing.

Other organizations, such as the United Way of Davidson County, are accepting items through various donation drives, including donations collected at the recent football game between North Davidson and Oak Grove high schools.

The North Carolina Department of Public Safety is urging residents to be informed on disaster relief efforts through official channels, and it offers a variety of resources on how to donate money, what volunteer organizations working in the area and other information at ncdps.gov/helene.

The North Carolina Department of Justice also has information on how to spot and avoid any charity or relief scams at ncdoj.gov/charity.

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Sharon Myers PAXTON MEDIA GROUP, 'Website gives up-to date donation locations and needs in Western NC', *Thomasville Times, The* (online), 22 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a>? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C63E50F7D7F988>



# Biltmore Estate to reopen in November - Date has been set after Helene forced its closure and furloughs

October 22, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Jacob Biba; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 425 Words Page: A2 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE - A reopening date has been set for Biltmore Estate after Tropical Storm Helene ripped through Western North Carolina, forcing the closure of one of the area's most popular tourist attractions.

The Biltmore Estate will reopen Saturday, Nov. 2, the company announced in an Oct. 19 news release.

The Citizen Times previously reported that portions of Biltmore's grounds and some of its buildings suffered significant flood damage from Helene. Biltmore House, the Conservatory, winery, gardens and the estate's hotels received minimal or no damage from the storm.

The Nov. 2 reopening will mark the beginning of the holiday season for the 8,000-acre estate employing approximately 2,400 people. While the Biltmore House, restaurants and other estate attractions will be open to visitors, the company is still cleaning up roads and wooded areas. The company said its Trails and the Outdoor Adventure Center will remain closed until further notice.

"We are incredibly grateful for the outpouring of support for our community and the determination of our first responders, utility workers and community volunteers," Bill Cecil Jr., president and CEO of Biltmore, said in a statement. "As recovery unfolds, welcoming guests back to Biltmore not only means we can open, but also brings critical support to our region's economy to aid area employees, local businesses and friends.

No storm-related fatalities were reported among staff, Marissa Jamison, a Biltmore spokesperson, said in an Oct. 19 email to the Citizen Times. All staff have been accounted for, though several employees lost their homes in the storm, Jamison said.

Some are also out of work.

Citing "a significant decline in tourism that is expected to persist in the near term," Biltmore, one of the largest employers in Buncombe County, furloughed an unspecified number of employees, according to Jamison.

But the furlough is temporary, she said, and staff members will return to work "in phases after reopening."

Jacob Biba is the county watchdog reporter at the Asheville Citizen Times. Reach him at jbiba@citizentimes.com.

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# Trump visits after Helene - Repeats false FEMA spending claim in Swannanoa

October 22, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Will Hofmann; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 765 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

SWANNANOA - Three and a half weeks after Tropical Storm Helene hit Western North Carolina, former President Donald Trump visited the region in a brief trip to Swannanoa on Monday, repeating a false claim that the Federal Emergency Management Agency is spending money on unauthorized migrants and not those who suffered during the storm.

Trump has continued to sow doubt about the federal response to Helene. He has suggested that FEMA funds have been spent on unauthorized immigrants rather than to aid survivors. The claim, which has also been spread by Elon Musk and Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan, has been debunked as false by USA TODAY and fact checking agencies like PolitiFact.

Standing in front of the wreckage of a Swannanoa neighborhood, Trump repeated the claim three times while speaking to press after he visited with supporters in WNC. Just 15 minutes outside of Asheville, Swannanoa was one of the most impacted towns caused by Hurricane Helene flooding.

Responding to a question about the recent arrest of a man who had issued threats against FEMA employees and whether continuing to sow doubt about FEMA's performance was helping the recovery, Trump deflected. He instead said that he's seen nothing but "very bad statements" about FEMA's performance and suggested that all of FEMA's money had been spent on "murderers," "drug dealers," and "terrorists."

FEMA has approved \$1.2 billion more in federal aid to individuals and communities affected by Helene, according to a Oct. 21 update from the agency. For those affected by Helene, \$746 million has gone to assist individuals and families affected by Helene on top of over \$524 million in debris removal and \$130 million for housing and other types of assistance. In total, the agency has provided \$4.3 billion toward the recovery.

Trump, however, did say that he would "be in favor" of congress returning early to provide relief funding for the hurricane, a similar message that Republican Sen. Thom Tillis shared on Oct. 17 during a walk around in Canton with media and local officials. The call comes after President Joe Biden encouraged congress to "move as rapidly as they can" to provide emergency relief funds to the devastated regions impacted by Helene and Hurricane Milton.

"This is a very unusual situation and I would be in favor of it," Trump said of congress returning.

Trump was joined by some supporters during his visit, including some who had been impacted by Helene's floods and others, like Adam Smith, who leads the Savage Freedom Relief Operation out of the Harley Davidson location just down the street from the event. One of the supporters impacted by Helene, Mike Stewart, prayed for him during the event. Other attendees included NC House Speaker Tim Moore, Sen. Ted Budd, NC Sen. Tim Moffitt and Rep. Chuck Edwards — all Republican WNC elected officials.

As the Republican candidate for president, Trump has made a series of campaign photo stops and events leading up to the Swannanoa visit, including one at a McDonalds in Pennsylvania, where he gave out fries and McNuggets. During the Swannanoa visit, Edwards — who owns numerous McDonalds locations in WNC — gave him a "French Fry Certification Pin" in reference to said visit. He's set to rally in Greenville, in the eastern part of the state, the afternoon of Oct. 21.

Currently, the presidential election is in a dead heat. A USA TODAY/Suffolk University Poll sets Harris just ahead of Trump in a 45%-44% split.

In the run-up to the event, the Harris-Walz campaign held a press conference about Trump's visit to the region, disputing his claims regarding the federal response.

"When Helene hit North Carolina, Vice President Harris and President Biden jumped into action, sending thousands of FEMA workers and working to provide relief for families who lost loved ones, who lost their homes, who lost their businesses," said Bishop Leah Daughtry, former chief of staff of the Democratic Party and CEO of the 2008 and 2016 Democratic National Conventions.

"Instead of joining the effort to help those impacted the most by this tragic storm, Trump instead spread disinformation that has put the lives of recovery workers at risk. And some folks who need help aren't using the resources available to them because of Trump's lies," Daughtry continued.

Citizen Times City Government Reporter Sarah Honosky contributed to this story.

Will Hofmann is the Growth and Development Reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA Today Network. Got a tip? Email him at WHofmann@citizentimes.com. Consider supporting this type of journalism with a subscription to the Citizen Times.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C5DDFD1D1B4B40>



# Family mourns 'helpful' Asheville pharmacist and father after Helene

October 22, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Ryley Ober; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 783 Words Page: A3 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE - For several days after floodwaters from Tropical Storm Helene receded, Zubila Shafiq walked Moffit Bridge Road and scoured online, talking to anyone who could help her piece together what happened on Sept. 27 – and where her husband might be.

"Hi Zubi. It's Omar. My unit is completely submerged under the river," Omar Khan, a longtime community pharmacist in Asheville, texted Shafig from an unknown number at 9:47 a.m. that day.

It was four hours before the Swannanoa River would reach its historic peak at 26 feet.

Khan, 44, told his wife he was in a second floor unit of Riverview Apartments with his upstairs neighbor, Samira Zoobi. He wrote that he was OK, but he was stuck there, that his stuff was gone, and he didn't have his cellphone.

"I love you and the boys. Please tell them that," Khan wrote — the last Shafiq heard from him.

But with power, cell and internet service knocked out throughout the city, the message was not delivered until days later.

A wife's tireless search for answers

Meanwhile, a couple of neighbors from up Moffitt Branch Road — whom Shafiq called "heroes" — gathered at Azalea Church of God as the Swannanoa rose Sept. 27, Shafiq later figured out. They tried to reach Khan and Zoobi. They saw the waters continuing to rise. They called 911.

By the time first responders arrived, the building "completely shifted off its foundation," Shafiq said. Using a rescue boat, the first responders went inside the building, which had fallen on its side near the riverbed, Shafiq was told. But no one was there.

Over the next four days, Shafiq spoke with numerous neighbors, called 20 different hospitals and contacted 15 different agencies that could possibly help with search efforts, she told the Citizen Times Oct. 17.

With each day that passed, it was her "project" to figure out what else they could do to find her husband and the father of her two young boys.

"Everyday, I told the kids, 'We're looking for daddy and we are praying," Shafiq said.

On the twelfth day, she got a call from a detective with the Asheville Police Department, who asked if there was a quiet place they could talk.

'The village I didn't know I had'

On Oct. 8 — Day No. 11 – a search and rescue crew with a cadaver dog searched the area of Moffit Branch Road late at night, and they got a hit, the detective told Shafiq the next day. It was too late to safely retrieve the person under the piles of debris and trees, so the crew marked the spot.

A visiting officer from an agency outside of Asheville sat there through the night, keeping watch over the person

later identified as Khan.

"When they told me that, I just cried," Shafiq said. "It means a lot that he wasn't alone."

Her husband was identified from the wallet and passport in his pocket, and through his fingerprints being on file with the FBI after a two-year immigration process that brought him to be with his wife in the United States from Canada in 2013.

As a pharmacist in Asheville since he moved here over 10 years ago, Khan went "above and beyond" to help others, sometimes driving out at 3 a.m. to get medication to those who desperately needed it, his wife said.

"He had a sort of open, curious spirit, almost like a curious child. He was totally unafraid to ask questions," Shafiq said.

Through the trauma and tremendous loss, Shafiq said she's found solace in Khan's compassion and helpful nature being reflected in strangers: from the first responder who stayed by her husband's side, to the workers at Ray's Funeral Home doing the best they could to give Khan a traditional Muslim burial, and to the people who donated clothes and toys for her children. It's the village she never knew she had, Shafiq said.

"Everyone in Western North Carolina is grieving at some level and is traumatized at some level. But despite that, humanity has risen."

Ryley Ober is the Public Safety Reporter for Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA Today Network. She is a graduate of Indiana University and was the Citizen Times Summer News Reporting Intern in 2022. Email her at rober@gannett.com and follow her on Twitter @ryleyober

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# Buttigieg: River Arts District's future will be different

October 22, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Will Hofmann; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 716 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE - Amid muddy dust and tangled debris, Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttiglieg and Gov. Roy Cooper met with business owners and developers of the River Arts District.

The once-booming area faces an uncertain future after the disastrous floods from Tropical Storm Helene.

Speaking in front of the rubble of Foundy Street, a large development once full of active studios, breweries and restaurants, Buttigieg and Cooper reiterated their support for the city. The secretary said "the whole country is rooting for Asheville."

Business owners and key players in the district's development noted that the area will likely look far different from its recent past. Funds for rebuilding infrastructure already have begun to flow into the area.

The U.S. Department of Transportation has made \$100 million in emergency relief funds available to the North Carolina Department of Transportation and \$32 million available to the Tennessee Department of Transportation after Helene's floods. Working toward restoring Interstate 40, the DOT has issued funds for stabilization projects along the stretch of highway between North Carolina and Tennessee that was damaged.

As for the future of the RAD, it's important to note that it has been historically prone to floods — both the 1916 floods and the 2004 floods changed how the area was developing. Some who have properties and businesses in the district, like Pattiy Torno, the owner of Curve Studios near Lyman Street, spoke with Buttigieg. Other business owners included Eddie Dewey, a developer in the district, and Russ Tower, the founder of the outdoor sports store Second Gear, which had a location off of Riverside Drive.

Torno, Dewey and Webster's properties were severely damaged during the flood. Nearly 80% of the district was destroyed by Helene's rapidly rising floodwaters, according to Katie Cornell, executive director of ArtsAVL.

After the flood, Torno said that most of her tenants were "done" after living through both the flood caused by the remnants of Hurricane's Frances and Ivan in 2004 and Helene this year. She felt her buildings sit "too low" near the floodplain, making her question what the future of the district looks.

"It's just too stressful," Torno said of artists coming back to the district. "I feel like our artists deserve better than this."

Torno has played an important role in the development of the district in the past 10 years, chairing the Asheville Area Riverfront Redevelopment Commission in the mid-2010s. She also has consistently showed up during public discussion at City Council about future growth and development in the district.

"I think that the River Arts District still is an amazing place, but I question whether the way we have been able to use it is the right way forward," she continued.

Dewey, as one of the primary property managers and owners of Foundy Street, recently told the Citizen Times that he hopes to keep Foundy Street a base for artists and rebuild where they can. The disastrous flooding at his site has leveled businesses like Pleb Urban Winery and washed away others like Marquee, a massive complex that sold the art of over 200 artists.

"We think we can come back and rebuild. We need help," Dewey said, adding federal and philanthropic help was needed.

Standing in front of the Foundation Skatepark building, now fallen in and largely gone, Buttigieg said that he plans to listen to the community's "local conversation" regarding the future of the district. Cooper said the RAD will "come back," but "probably in a different way." Continuing discussions with Buttigieg's office about building back in the district continues to be a priority, Cooper said.

"Rebuilding transportation in a more resilient way in Western North Carolina is going to be the key to making sure communities like this can come back strong," Cooper said in the RAD, noting that he had issued an emergency order on Oct. 16 that was able to move up unemployment to \$600 a week and extended how long it applies to those in the region.

Will Hofmann is the Growth and Development Reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA Today Network. Got a tip? Email him at WHofmann@citizentimes.com. Consider supporting this type of journalism with a subscription to the Citizen Times.

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# Helping wildlife after Tropical Storm Helene

October 22, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Loti Woods | Section: On The Wild Side - Loti Woods | 697 Words OpenURL Link

Western North Carolina's lush forests and crystal-clear streams are home to some amazing animals. Then Tropical Storm Helene tore through our mountains. As it flooded houses, roads, businesses, and toppled trees, it not only upended the lives of people but also our wildlife. Several species were particularly hard hit, including our river-dwelling hellbenders, fish, beavers, pollinators, and migrating birds.

As we all move forward, wildlife will need our help to come back. The critical immediate focus is helping our communities recover, but there are small things you can do to help wildlife now.

Let's start with hellbenders. These giant, flat salamanders, often growing over two feet long, live in cold, fast-moving streams like the French Broad, the Davidson and Mills Rivers. They hide under large, flat rocks and breathe through their wrinkly skin. But Helene's heavy rains changed all that.

As the storm sent tons of mud, sand and other debris rushing down our mountains, hellbenders' homes were buried under layers of muck. Not only were their homes ruined, but the flood waters washed many of the hellbenders and the food they eat, like crayfish and small fish, away.

The timing couldn't be worse. Hellbenders breed in the fall. With their food sources gone and homes damaged, many will not be able to breed and may not survive the coming winter months.

Now think about beavers. I know some folks don't like beavers, especially on their property, when they down trees to make their homes. However, their dams can actually help with flooding by creating wetlands. Many beavers were displaced or worse in the storm.

So, how can we help these two species? By helping improve stream health. Our rivers will need massive clean-up once it's safe. Not just debris, but chemicals in the water from cars and houses and pesticides washed in from adjacent fields. Once local community organizations are ready, join a local river cleanup group and volunteer to remove debris from waterways and replant trees along riverbanks. Trees help hold soil in place, reducing sedimentation.

Our pollinators were also impacted. Our region has beautiful wildflower meadows, which feed bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. But Helene's winds flattened whole flower fields, including milkweed, which monarchs need to lay their eggs. Native bee habitats and even butterfly chrysalises were destroyed.

Replanting food sources is key for pollinators. Don't cut late blooming until after the first freeze, so insects will have a few weeks to get nourished. Plus, monarchs are migrating through the region now, looking for food. Plant nectar flowers and milkweed for the spring. Buying plants from local nurseries helps them with much-needed revenue since they also got hammered by the storm.

And who noticed the wonderful Rose-breasted Grosbeaks that arrived in the area right after Helene? At our house, we usually see a couple for just a few days in the fall as they migrate to Central and South America. But this year, we had 16 males and females stay three weeks. And a couple are still hanging around. We can only speculate they were knocked off their migration by the storm.

You can put out food for birds, especially for our migratory friends, who may have trouble finding it as they pass through with so much lost habitat. We have put out an extra flat feeder filled with nutritious seeds. Just be sure to take your feeders in at night so you don't get a late-season bear crashing through your garden.

And last, for all animals, leave as many trees and branches piled up on your property as possible. Make berms or branch hedges. They make great new habitats for all kinds of creatures.

Helene dealt a brutal blow to area wildlife. But with help from all of us, our hellbenders, beavers and other aquatic creatures can return to their streams, and our pollinators and birds can thrive. Together, we can help nature heal and ensure our wildlife remains a part of our mountain home for generations.

Loti Woods is co-founder of Champions for Wildlife, a local nonprofit organization whose mission is to inspire kids to be champions for wildlife through the power of art and education. To learn more, visit www.championsforwildlife.org.

The post Helping wildlife after Tropical Storm Helene appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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# UNSUNG HEROES: Local radio club connects people during Helene

October 22, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Clay Johnson | Section: Community | 306 Words OpenURL Link

POLK COUNTY—When Hurricane Helene knocked out power, Internet and cell service to much of the region, including Polk County, the Thermal Belt Amateur Radio Club stepped in. They provided a valuable means of communication for people needing to connect in the crisis.

Amateur radio operators, known as hams, use what are called radio repeaters to receive and send VHF and UHF signals for communication.

"The radio repeaters provided a critical pathway for other hams to contact appropriate resources and personnel for aid, whether it be for health and welfare checks of loved ones that were unable to be contacted, tree removal, emergency supplies and essentials, road clearance, and a myriad of other needs when the cell service disappeared," says Gary Wells, the club's treasurer.

The club itself lost power to its radio repeaters. Still, it used battery power as a backup and later used a generator to recharge the batteries to keep lines of communication open. One club member embedded himself at a church in the Pisgah Forest to help coordinate the distribution of needed supplies, and another is still driving supplies to areas that have been unreachable using his radio to coordinate deliveries.

While demand for its services is dropping as power, Internet, and cell service are being restored, the club is still ready and available to assist if needed.

"We have received countless feedback stories of how amateur radio came to the rescue of so many people in need that had no other way to communicate to loved ones," says Wells.

Amateur radio operators formed the club in 1974 as the Polk County Amateur Radio Club. Now, as the Thermal Belt Amateur Radio Club, it has more than 30 members located across the Upstate and western North Carolina.

For more information, visit tbarc.org

The post UNSUNG HEROES: Local radio club connects people during Helene appeared first on The Tryon Daily

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# County commissioners hear updates on storm recovery

October 22, 2024  $\mid$  Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Evan Fitch  $\mid$  Section: Community  $\mid$  511 Words

OpenURL Link

COLUMBUS—At the Polk County Board of Commissioners meeting held Monday, October 21, the board heard updates on the ongoing disaster relief efforts underway after Tropical Storme Helene

North Carolina Speaker of the House Tim Moore was in town as part of the ongoing disaster relief effort and was nominated to speak in place of Dave Odom of Odom Engineering, who was scheduled to give an update on Lake Adger Dam but couldn't attend. The NC House will return to session Thursday to work on a new relief package.

The past relief packages were passed unanimously, and Moore is confident the new legislation will also pass.

"I'm very pleased with what we're doing; it's been both Senate and House, bipartisan," Moore said. "I'm going to make a wager: the cost of Helene will be more than the cost of Katrina."

Moore said he was in Swannanoa earlier that day and praised DOT officials working on road reconstruction. He also praised the citizens' response to the disaster.

"Coming out of a tragedy like this, the one bright spot is seeing friends and neighbors getting together to help everyone out. And Polk County should be very proud of the response it's seen in this community."

Speaker Moore took one question from the commissioners on the possibility of federal funds for damaged private roads and driveways.

"The jury is still out on that," he said. "Our plan is to move forward with that, but we're just making sure we're crossing our t's and dotting i's."

The board also heard a storm recovery update from Polk County Emergency Management Director Bobby Arledge.

"Polk County is right in the middle of updating our hazard mitigation plan, as we've done every five years," Arledge said. "As of right now, there have been 3,062 citizens of Polk County that have applied for FEMA assistance so far."

The county is organizing requests to repair private roads and driveways as part of its ongoing effort to clean up the county. Currently, the situation is awaiting the resolution of contracts between the Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA. The county's role is strictly advisory, with Arledge commenting, "We're still working through some stuff with Army Corp, the state, and FEMA to make sure the wording in the contracts fits our specific needs for the county."

The current projection on the contract trajectory will see the Army Corp of Engineers and FEMA assume all costs for these repairs, passing no cost onto the county.

"This is the best option moving forward," Arledge said.

Arledge said they are still working on the disaster recovery center and hope to announce its opening soon. Until then, the disaster survivor assistance center at the Polk County Library will remain open. The county emergency operations center is still open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, on the ground floor of the Womack Building.

The meeting approved a budget amendment for a "Disaster Relief Department Budget Transfer" of \$272,000 to cover salaries, overtime, and other costs incurred due to the county's emergency operations.

The post County commissioners hear updates on storm recovery appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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# UNSUNG HEROES: Mill Spring woman coordinates donations, free concert in wake of storm

October 22, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Storme Smith | Section: Business | 497 Words OpenURL Link

MIL SPRING—In an inspiring display of community spirit, Adair's Rod and Gun Supply and Tim Edwards Landscaping Feed & Farm Store served as a donation drop-off point and hosted a concert and free BBQ lunch on Saturday, October 5.

Tim and Alicia Edwards have served the community for over twenty years, and now it's clear that their daughter Adair, who runs Adair's Rod and Gun Supply, is continuing that legacy. Adair organized the concert to offer much-needed hope and joy to residents affected by Helene. Crowds from the surrounding areas attended, bringing together families and friends to celebrate resilience.

"We wanted to give folks a hot meal and some hope," said Adair. "A lot of my customer base is Lake Lure, so for me, every person comes in, I make a connection and I've heard all these stories from all these people I've gotten to know over last two years that have lost their homes. And it's pretty heartbreaking."

The inside of Tim Edwards Feed & Farm Store had become a pivotal hub for storm relief donations, buoyed by a social media campaign spearheaded by Adair that generated support from nearby and out of state.

"We were a drop-off point for about three weeks. We closed down our drive-through at the Feed & Farm Store and filled it with donations," noted Adair. "We also worked with a couple of local people delivering aid on foot. We wanted to get donations here so we could get it to where we wanted it to go."

The event featured a delicious spread, with free BBQ, ribs, hamburgers, hot dogs, and drinks served to all attendees starting at noon. A highlight for many was the live performance from The Dirty South Band, which kicked off at 2 p.m. Community members were encouraged to bring chairs and enjoy the local music.

Organizers ensured that supplies not distributed at the event would reach other affected communities, including Lake Lure, Banner Elk, Spruce Pine, and Burnsville. Thanks to Hero to Handyman's coordination efforts, the donations will be delivered directly to families in need.

Adair expressed gratitude to those involved in the relief efforts.

"Thank you to everyone who showed up and made our Hurricane Helene relief event successful. Especially Caitlyn Farms, which supplied a lot of the food," she said. "We were able to help so many and bring a little light to this hard time."

Alicia Edwards commended her daughter's efforts.

"She contacted and coordinated with Caitlyn Farms, Dawn Foster with Urban Carry Holsters, the band and volunteers, all while helping people in need by packing up essentials," said Alicia. "We are very proud of her willingness to step up and observe the needs of others in our affected communities, considering she just turned 20."

Adair's Rod and Gun Supply and Tim Edwards Landscaping Feed & Farm Store have resumed their regular store hours and continue to support storm victims whenever possible.

The post UNSUNG HEROES: Mill Spring woman coordinates donations, free concert in wake of storm appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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# UNSUNG HEROES: Saluda Pantry serves through the storm

October 22, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Clay Johnson | Section: Business | 306 Words OpenURL Link

SALUDA—Like so many residences and businesses in the region, Tropical Storm Helene impacted the Saluda Pantry. Its location in the Saluda Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall at 54 Carolina Drive was flooded, covered in mud, and without power.

"We had a lot of frozen meats, so we had a cookout and fed whoever in town came because we knew we were going to lose that food," says the pantry's board chair, Teresa Wilkinson.

Wilkinson also knew the pantry had to find a temporary location quickly to continue feeding the families it serves, so Tim and Sara Bell, the owners of Green River Adventures, offered a solution.

"They were closing for the winter because it was October," says Wilkinson. "They offered to let us stay there temporarily so we wouldn't have any interruptions in services. We moved everything over to that temporary location and that's where we are today."

The space at GRA is slightly smaller, so after the church cleaned up from the storm it allowed the pantry to use its old space for storage. The pantry used to be open only on Tuesdays, but Wilkinson says it opened every day in the wake of the storm.

It has scaled back to Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The pantry typically serves 120 families a week, but Wilkinson says it surged to 1,200 in the three weeks after the storm.

"They're just thrilled that we're available and offering services," says Wilkinson. "A lot of these people are still without power. Some are without water that live in the outer parts of Saluda."

Wilkinson says the pantry, which opened in 2019, has also seen a surge in volunteers. If interested in volunteering or donating money, visit saludapantry.com.

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# Pioneer Playmakers performing play based on experiences during Hurricane Helene

October 22, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 689 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — Watauga High School's Pioneer Playmakers will perform a play they devised based on their experiences during Hurricane Helene.

The Playmakers created the play "Surge" for the North Carolina Theatre Conference High School Play Festival and will host a showing of it on Oct. 29 at 7 p.m.

According to Playmakers Lilly Hampton and Kelley Donnelly, the play is about different families perspectives and experiences during Helene.

"We all had very different experiences during Helene; we all discussed times. What time did the power go out? When did we realize that this was a really serious situation?" Hampton and Donnelly said. "We asked these questions to help develop details within our story. Many of us just had no water or power for many days — some weeks — as did most of Watauga County, so we definitely wanted to incorporate that into 'Surge.'"

Playmaker Liliana Lemus hopes to recognize how tragic the damage from Helene really was and comfort those affected by it, "which is really all of us in one way or another."

"One character in our show describes how singing is a 'light' for her and how she managed to hold on to that joy despite a life-threatening situation," Lemus said. "This show has kind of been like that for us. Art tends to show itself in the face of destruction, and this show is proof of our resilience. I'm very proud of our troupe for this entire process, and I'm excited to share our creation with our community."

The group started the writing process in June. Playmaker Brian Newmark said they decided to shift the topic once Hurricane Helene hit.

"This wasn't the first shift we made," Newmark said. "Our ability to shift and adapt to the change in topic shows the trust that we have in each other."

WHS Drama Department teacher Sarah Miller is directing the play this year—Miller and Zach Walker switch directing each year—and noted that on Sept. 24, they had zeroed in on a story. Stoked, they left class shouting, "See you next week."

When Miller asked if they still wanted to go to NCTC, the resounding answer was "yes."

"As artists do, we began to process our Helene experiences artistically. We discovered a whole new story, a whole new concept, grounded in work we did before Helene, but now very much devoted to exploring a snapshot of what's happened here. To them. To us. To our community," Miller and Walker said. "We're ridiculously proud of this ensemble. Proud of their commitment — to each other, to the process, to this work. We're moved by their ability to work with and for each other, to trust the process in the midst of these incredible times."

Playmaker Jax Marsh is most excited to show the community their view on the hurricane and its devastation.

"The play will showcase destruction (and) devastation, but also happiness and relief, a complete journey of emotions throughout the play, and we really hope to capture these emotions with our audience," Marsh said. "We will also use songs that represent hope, and hopefully, this will reach our audience in a really impactful way as they watch the rest of our play unfold. I'm really excited to show people what our ensemble was able to do in such a

short amount of time."

A preview of the performance will take place on Tuesday, Oct. 29, at 7 p.m. at Ross Auditorium at WHS. Tickets are \$5 plus a convenience fee and \$7 at the door. Tickets can be purchased at tinyurl.com/4aebsaxr.

"We want people watching this to know that we have put a lot of time, effort, and thought into this piece and we are very proud of what we have done. In extreme circumstances and crunch time, we found a way to come together and work really hard to write something we think is beautiful and shows the best aspects of what we can do as actors," Playmaker Clara Lappan said. "Whatever individuals take from the story is theirs to take, but they should know that this is an homage to the experiences of our town and all places similar. It is the stories of the people who wrote it."

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# EPA deploys mobile water laboratory to Watauga County

October 22, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com | Section: Local | 514 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has deployed a second mobile laboratory to Watauga County to support the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ), North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS), and local health departments in drinking water testing efforts.

Placing a second mobile laboratory in Watauga County will expand water testing capacity in rural communities in more remote parts of North Carolina that were impacted by Hurricane Helene, according to the EPA.

To date, the mobile laboratory in Asheville has tested more than 500 drinking water samples to support NCDEQ, NCDHHS, and Buncombe County, and EPA stated in a press release that it is committed to augmenting county health department and state resources to ensure communities impacted by the storm have access to the needed analyses.

EPA's mobile laboratories can only accept water samples directly from water utilities, NCDEQ, and local health departments — not residents. Private well owners whose wells were completely flooded or otherwise damaged by the storm are urged to contact their local health department to request testing. Additional information for well owners is available in a NCDHHS Fact Sheet on well disinfection at www.ncdhhs.gov/well-disinfection/download? attachment.

For more information on the mobile lab and water testing updates, visit www.epa.gov/hurricane-response/hurricane-helene.

If your well has flooded, follow safe water precautions to prevent illness caused by potentially contaminated water:

Do not drink water from your well or spring. Do not use contaminated well or spring water. You cannot see, taste or smell bacterial contamination in your well or spring. Use only bottled, boiled or treated water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene until you are able to properly disinfect and test your water.

Inspect the well seal and casing for damage as floodwaters can cause cracks or other issues that allow contaminants to enter. If there is damage to your well or spring, contact AppHealthCare Environmental Health at (828) 795-1970 or email eh@apphealth.com.

Avoid turning on your pump until you are sure the electrical system and well components are dry and functioning properly.

Properly disinfect your well or spring before testing. Disinfection must be done properly in order for testing to be effective. AppHealthCare is working to get disinfection kits locally. Disinfection kits will be provided at no cost.

Test your well or spring for contaminants. You must use official water testing kits in order for the sample to be tested properly. AppHealthCare is working to get testing kits locally. Testing kits will be provided at no cost.

Request a Disinfection and Test Kit

To request a disinfection or test kit, please complete this form and an AppHealthCare staff member will reach out to you once kits arrive. You can also call AppHealthCare at (828) 795-1970 Monday through Friday 8 a.m. — 4:45 p.m. and select option 3 on the phone menu to be connected to the Environmental Health Team. Please note there will be a limited number of kits available.

If your well or spring did not flood but you are concerned about bacterial contamination, contact the Town of Jefferson Water Plant for Ashe and Alleghany Counties or Town of Boone Water Plant for Watauga County for assistance. Municipal, town

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# Annual Boone Boo! event to take place on Oct. 31

October 22, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Community | 431 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — The annual Boone Boo! event to celebrate Halloween will take place on Oct. 31 from 5 to 7:30 p.m. in downtown

The central part of King Street will be closed to accommodate trick-or-treaters and their families, according to the town of Boone.

"With all that has been going on, we hope Boone BOO! will be an opportunity to bring the community together, to draw folks back to downtown, and to provide a safe Halloween activity for families," said Downtown Boone Coordinator Lane Moody.

Spooky music, larger-than-life inflatables, and plenty of Halloween costumes and treats will be part of the evening's festivities. A judged costume contest will take place on the street at 6 p.m., and the winners will receive prizes courtesy of downtown businesses.

Participating downtown merchants will provide candy from 5 to 7:30 p.m. According to the town of Boone, many businesses will move their treat stations to the storefronts, while some may have candy inside the store.

Community groups and businesses will give out additional goodies on the Jones House lawn. The Turchin Center and Jones House will also have some non-candy items available for trick-or-treaters.

"We recognize that many are still reeling from the aftermath of Helene," the Jones House posted on Facebook.

"After consulting with our local police and safety officials, we feel that we can safely host this event without putting undue strain any of our staff or resources. We hope this will be a wonderful opportunity for the community to come together and perhaps to take the pressure off of some of our neighborhoods that are not quite yet ready to handle an influx of trick-or-treaters."

Before the main event, the Watauga County Public Library will have Halloween crafts and goodies from 4 to 5 p.m. The Jones House will also have "additional silly and spooky fun" with a haunted house.

Parking will be available in downtown metered spaces on King Street until 4 p.m. At the start of the event, any vehicles remaining on the closed portion of King/Depot Street will not be allowed to move until the street reopens. In the case of an emergency, Boone Public Works staff can help safely guide you to an appropriate exit, according to the town of Boone.

The following roads will close beginning at Approximately 4:55 p.m. and ending at 8 p.m., or until the road is cleared of pedestrians and objects:

King Street (from Appalachian to Burrell)Depot Street (from Howard to Queen)Grand Blvd (up to Orchard Street/Jones House lot)

Howard Street and Queen Street will remain open, but according to the town of Boone, vehicles should pay extra attention to watch for pedestrians.

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# More than 8,700 voters have cast their ballot so far in Watauga County

October 22, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 492 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — More than 8,700 people have cast their ballot so far in Watauga County.

According to Watauga County Director of Elections Matt Snyder, 8,797 people voted have voted as of 10 a.m. on Oct. 22. In Watauga County, 45,608 people are registered to vote, according to the North Carolina Board of Elections.

On the first day of early voting Oct. 17, more than 2,500 people voted.

"We were very pleased that our Day 1 early voting numbers. (They) were very comparable to Day 1 in 2020, even with a few hours less of operation," Snyder said.

As of 10 a.m. on Oct. 22, the App State location has had the most votes, 2,953, while the Meat Camp location has had the fewest, 557.

The other sites saw the following number of voters in the first hour:

Watauga County Administration Building: 2,200Blowing Rock: 1,114Deep Gap: 1,092Western Watauga Community Center: 881

In the 2020 presidential election, 32,346 Watauga County voters cast their ballot — a 71.62% turnout.

On Oct. 20, the fourth day of early voting, more than 1 million voters had cast their ballot across the state, which is 13% of the total registered voters in the state.

Early voting times are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. on Sundays between Oct. 17 and Nov. 2. The last day of early voting, Nov. 2, will be from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The Watauga County Board of Elections approved the new early voting hours on Oct. 10.

Early voting polling sites are located at:

Watauga County Administration Building (Commissioners' Board Room 814 W. King Street, Boone)Blowing Rock American Legion Building (333 Wallingford Street, Blowing Rock)Deep Gap Fire Department (6583 Old 421 S, Deep Gap)Meat Camp Fire Department (4797 NC Hwy 194 N, Boone)Plemmons Student Union Blue Ridge Ballroom (263 Locust Street, Boone with parking available at 644 Howard Street)Western Watauga Community Center (1081 Old US Hwy 421, Sugar Grove)

If you are registered to vote in Watauga County, you may vote at any early voting site you choose. Same Day Registration is available at every early voting site, but voters must provide proof of residence in Watauga County.

A photo ID is required to vote. Voters who may have lost their ID due to Hurricane Helene have the following options:

Fill out a Photo ID Exception Form at your voting site or send the form back with your absentee ballot. (A blank Exception Form will arrive with your absentee packet.) Check the box for "Exception 3: Victim of a Natural Disaster." Make sure to sign the form.Go to your county board of elections office. If you are a registered voter, they can take your photo and print an acceptable ID on the spot. For details, go to Get a Free Voter Photo ID.Get a free ID from an

NCDMV office in your area. For details, see State IDs | NCDMV.

For details about North Carolina's photo ID requirement, including a list of all acceptable IDs, go to BringltNC.gov.

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# Biltmore Estate set to reopen Nov. 2 - What to know about Biltmore Estate reopening after Hurricane Helene

October 22, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)

Author: KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press | Section: A | 618 Words

Page: 2 OpenURL Link

North Carolina's Biltmore Estate will soon reopen after being forced to close when floodwaters pushed by Hurricane Helene devastated the area.

The popular tourist destination announced over the weekend that they plan to open and "celebrate the joy of the holiday season" on Nov. 2.

"For more than 125 years, Biltmore has been a witness to the resilience of this community," the Asheville-based estate posted in a statement. "The compassion and resolve of our region have been rising every day from beneath the weight of this storm."

Here are a few things to know:

Why did Biltmore close?

On Sept. 27, the remnants of Hurricane Helene destroyed large swaths of the Southeast as flooding overwhelmed communities, swiped out roads and knocked out power for thousands. North Carolina's largest mountain city was left largely isolated as many of the main routes into Asheville were washed away or blocked by mudslides.

Officials have warned that rebuilding after Helene will be lengthy and difficult. Helene first roared ashore in northern Florida on Sept. 26 as a Category 4 hurricane and quickly moved through Georgia, the Carolinas and Tennessee. The storm upended life throughout the Southeast, where to date nearly 250 deaths have been reported in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia.

Western North Carolina was hit especially hard because that's where the remnants of Helene encountered the higher elevations and cooler air of the Appalachian Mountains, causing even more rain to fall. Asheville and many surrounding mountain towns were built in valleys, leaving them especially vulnerable to devastating rain and flooding.

It was the deadliest hurricane to hit the U.S. mainland since Katrina in 2005.

What damage did Biltmore experience?

According to the Biltmore Estate, the 8,000-acre property was impacted very little by Hurricane Helene. Along with the Biltmore House, the estate includes a conservatory, winery, gardens and overnight properties, which received varying degrees of minimal or no damage.

Instead, some of the property's more low-lying areas were the most impacted by the storm. Notably, the entrance to the Biltmore Estate experienced flooding and is currently undergoing "extensive repairs." The estate's website says the recovery effort will result in the removal of weakened poplar trees that lined the entrance gate.

Why is the Biltmore a tourist destination?

The Biltmore Estate was completed in 1895 during the nation's Gilded Age. It was anchored by a 250-room French chateau built at the direction of George Vanderbilt and is the largest privately owned home in the United States.

Biltmore draws about 1.4 million visitors on average in a year and employs nearly 2,500 employees - all of whom were accounted for after the storm, according to the estate's website. The estate is one of the largest employers in the Asheville area.

The mansion has rarely closed since opening to the public. When Biltmore laid off most its staff in 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic, the estate said it was first time it was forced to close since World War II.

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KIMBERLEE KRUESI; Associated Press, 'Biltmore Estate set to reopen Nov. 2 What to know about Biltmore Estate reopening after Hurricane Helene', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 22 Oct 2024 2 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C5DD93B61FE948>



# Trump and Harris navigate NC hurricane - In North Carolina, Trump and Harris navigate a hurricane and a rollercoaster governor's race

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RUTHERFORDTON, N.C. - Renee Kyro already voted for Republican nominee Donald Trump for the third consecutive presidential election. But she plans to volunteer for the first time, reaching out to her neighbors in hurricane-battered western North Carolina to make sure they have a voting plan amid a flurry of precinct changes.

"I want to say I'm confident he wins, but I'm worried that people are just overwhelmed and may need some help or encouragement," she said, standing outside an early voting site in the conservative stronghold of Rutherford County. "I just can't imagine Kamala Harris as president."

To the east, in heavily Democratic Winston-Salem, Dia Roberts described the fear that has her writing postcards urging voters to back Harris, the vice president and Democratic nominee.

"Donald Trump is a narcissist, a liar, a wannabe dictator," said Roberts, an independent who has voted for Democrats in the Trump era. "This should not even be close."

But it is.

The presidential race in North Carolina is playing out in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene and alongside a governor's race in which the Trump-endorsed GOP nominee, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, has seen his campaign collapse amid controversies, potentially splintering GOP unity.

Both the Harris and Trump campaigns ramped up their activity here again after the storm. Trump had three scheduled North Carolina stops Monday, including a visit to see storm damage in Asheville. Former President Bill Clinton appeared last week with Harris' running mate, Tim Walz, and followed with several visits in eastern North Carolina.

With 15 days until Election Day, North Carolina is critical to the Electoral College math that will decide whether Trump gets a White House encore or Harris hands him a second defeat and, in the process, makes history as the first woman, second Black person and first person of south Asian descent to reach the Oval Office.

"We are going to win or lose the presidency based on what happens in North Carolina," Republican National Chairman Michael Whatley, a North Carolinian, said last week as part of a GOP bus tour.

Pennsylvania and its 20 electoral votes have gotten more attention from Harris and Trump than other battlegrounds. But North Carolina and Georgia are the next largest swing states, with 16 electoral votes each. While Georgia yielded Democrat Joe Biden's closest victory margin four years ago, it was North Carolina that delivered Trump's narrowest win: less than 75,000 votes and 1.3 percentage points.

North Carolina is expected to cast as many as 5.5 million ballots, with more than 1 million votes already cast since the start of early voting last Thursday.

On Monday, Harris targeted suburban Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin - holding a series of conversations with Republican Liz Cheney that will be moderated by Bulwark publisher and Republican strategist Sarah Longwell and conservative radio host Charlie Sykes.

Helene displaced voters

Many North Carolina counties affected by Hurricane Helene moved Election Day precincts or changed early voting sites. Thousands of voters remained displaced or without power or water as early voting commenced.

Buncombe County, home to left-leaning Asheville, was hard-hit. The University of North Carolina Asheville campus remained closed as of Monday. Appalachian State University in Boone, the other cache of Democratic votes in the mountainous region, just resumed some in-person classes.

But surrounding western counties, including Rutherford, add up to more GOP votes than Democrats' advantages in Asheville and Boone. That leaves both parties scrambling to check turnout operations and their math.

"We're working every channel we can, you know?" Whatley said. "We're going to be doing phone calls. We're going to be doing direct mail. We'll be doing emails and digital - basically anything we can do to let people know where to go."

Republicans like Kryo, who lives a short drive from the devastated Chimney Rock community, said she knows "plenty of Trump supporters who lost everything" and others who remain in their homes but don't have reliable internet or phone connections and may not know their polling location.

"I'll go door to door if I have to," she said.

Yet Trump and Republicans never built the same campaign infrastructure as Harris - or President Joe Biden's before he dropped out of the race in July.

"It was a flip of a coin before the storm," said GOP pollster Paul Shumaker. "The critical question is going to be: How is the rural turnout going to compare matched with the urban and suburban turnout?"

Especially, Shumaker added, if Republicans "continue to have ballot erosion in the urban-suburban areas."

State Sen. Natalie Murdock, who doubles as political director for Democrats' coordinated campaign in the state, said the party has the apparatus to reach their target voters in the disaster zone. Field workers in some of Democrats' two-dozen-plus offices around the state have engaged in recovery efforts, distributing water and other supplies to residents.

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat, said he asked Trump to "not share lies or misinformation" when he visits the Asheville area.

Many storm survivors lost everything, and they want help and truth, Cooper said Monday at a briefing in Asheville.

"We should work together to give them both," the governor said. "Storm recovery cannot be partisan. To truly help people, we must check party politics at the door and get this job done."

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# Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC): Page 2

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