

All NC voters should 'be prepared'

October 20, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The (NC)

Section: News 828 Words

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The County Compass is a tabloid-sized weekly publication distributed free to Pamlico, Beaufort, Craven, Jones and Carteret Counties. It claims to offer "360 degrees of thorough and honest news coverage – furnished FREE to thousands of loyal readers every week." The truth is that it is about 90 percent ads, and any editorial content is so far to the right as to make Atilla the Hun look liberal.

The issue for September 12-16 caught our attention. On page 15 and bleeding over to page 16 is a big article for the "2nd Amendment Patriots of North Carolina." We assume it was a paid ad; however, it is not identified as such.

There is a slug in a box within the message showing the County Compass logo. The group further identifies itself with the Pamlico County GOP, and the ad was published within the Pamlico GOP website.

In a big bold box heading the ad is the slogan "If you want peace, prepare for war."

The message attempts to connect the modern-day group to colonial militiamen, reminding readers that men between 16 and 60 were required to train regularly. It urges gunowners to stock up on ammo, get to the range and practice, claiming that protecting freedom is their job today.

Unwritten, but implied, is the message that if this election doesn't turn out right, with Trump winning, there will be violence and bloodshed.

In 2023, the Southern Poverty Law Center identified 50 hate and anti-government groups in our state. Twelve have a statewide footprint. But there is only one legal militia in North Carolina – The North Carolina National Guard.

"Be prepared" appears to be a common theme of these groups. All North Carolinians would be well advised to heed this warning.

The misinformation campaign since Hurricane Helene struck our state has grown to such proportions that federal officials have joined Governor Roy Cooper and leaders from both political parties in warning people not to listen to the lies. Trump has been the genesis of many of the lies about disaster response. Marjorie Taylor Greene is posting garbage saying the National Weather Service and meteorologists can control the weather. Because of malicious and fallacious social media posts, federal officials who are trying to help have received threats in at least two counties.

Already we see attempts trying to discredit and disrupt our elections. The state GOP filed a lawsuit trying to get 225,000 registered voters thrown off the rolls. Another lawsuit from them claims the state is not canceling the voting registration of persons who refuse to serve on a jury because they aren't a citizen. The State Board of Elections vehemently denies this claim. Republicans are challenging absentee ballots that aren't sealed in the proper envelope...there are two envelopes enclosed with the ballot. They are also challenging ballots of overseas voters born in our state but who aren't living in our state. And the most preposterous of their claims is that Helene was merely an attempt to steal the election.

Some of the polling places in the western part of the state no longer exist and the State Board of Elections is doing all it can to ensure western voters are able to cast their ballots. It could only benefit Republicans if they helped instead of trying to disrupt. A close look at voting trends shows these western counties are almost solid red Republican.

And we need to be prepared for interference in polling places.

We're told outcomes might be learned later than election night this year to assure votes are accurately reported. It might take a week before the final presidential outcome is known. Our State Board of Elections has implemented rigorous procedures to ensure votes are recorded and tallied accurately, however they are also preparing for a barrage of expected challenges.

Donald Trump has intimated that if he doesn't win there might be bedlam. In an April Time magazine article, Trump, when asked about possible violence said, "If we don't win, you know, it depends." In another interview he said, "If everything's honest, I'll gladly accept the results. If it's not, you have to fight for the right of the country."

Trump has never thought any election he was involved in was honest. He's never accepted the results. Not with Hilary Clinton. Not with Joe Biden. And he won't with Kamala Harris. He is still claiming the 2020 contest was rigged.

Are we so gullible, so partisan and mistrustful that truth no longer matters? Can we not understand that these deliberate misinformation campaigns are designed to cause us to lose faith in all institutions? What happens when we no longer trust anyone?

Is it too late to stand up for the values that we once held dear? I cannot believe that lies and misinformation, that authoritarians who divide us, and that fairness and justice no longer matter.

What has happened to us?

Tom Campbell is a Hall of Fame North Carolina broadcaster and columnist who has covered North Carolina public policy issues since 1965. Contact him at tomcamp@carolinabroadcasting.com.

Tar Heel Voices

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Guest columnist

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Hurricane Helene - FROM NC TO TALLAHASSEE - North Carolina family finds refuge in Florida

October 20, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Alaijah Brown; Tallahassee Democrat | USA TODAY NETWORK Section: News | 928 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

"I couldn't have asked for a better place to be to ride out the storm. We weren't even up there, and it still affected us. It affected us more than we originally thought."

Taylor Bonnell

Taylor Bonnell watched as her two toddlers, Aria, 5, and Silas, 1, played on the playground at Jack McLean Park in a carefree manner, despite their displacement and her concern for their Western North Carolina home. The mother grew up in Tallahassee, but now her hometown has become a refuge after Hurricane Helene destroyed her community Sept. 26. "It's familiar so it's really comfortable to be here. I couldn't have asked for a better place to be to ride out the storm. We weren't even up there, and it still affected us," Bonnell told the Tallahassee Democrat on Oct. 11, over a week after Helene wreaked havoc on the southeastern states. "It affected us more than we originally thought."

Bonnell and her husband, Ethan, had no idea Western North Carolina would be hit so badly.

"There was no warning. I just remember there were flash flood warnings as it was happening on my app and that was it, so there were no evacuation warnings," Bonnell said. "They didn't know, it just happened so suddenly and so quickly."

Before Helene hit, Bonnell said the family traveled to Tampa for a wedding, which was postponed, so they hunkered down at an Airbnb in Plant City and then drove to Tallahassee to stay with her mother and ride out the storm. They've been here for over two weeks, but her heart has been with her community.

Bonnell met Ethan when they were students at Leon High School. After the couple married, they started to look for a place to call home, away from the Florida humidity they grew up in.

Beautiful mountain ranges, an intimate community and a cooler climate: These are the reasons Bonnell and Ethan moved to a quiet and small mountain community near Asheville to raise their children.

Now, the terrain is muddy from flooding and landslides, and their quaint town in Western North Carolina, destroyed by the storm.

"I thought there was just a little bit of flooding at first. I had been seeing it from afar on social media," Bonnell said.
"But it was really bad. I managed to get ahold of a couple of friends on Friday and then it was radio silence through Sunday."

Ethan left Tallahassee on Tuesday, Oct. 1, to check on their homestead about 45 minutes outside of Asheville, where they grow tomatoes, raise cows and chickens, and care for cats. Bonnell said she heard from her husband on Oct. 3, since there was no cell service.

"He assessed the damage and said our house is 'fine, wonderful,' our house is on a hill, so we didn't expect any flooding," Bonnell said.

But the road used to reach their home had been transformed into a river and the natural spring in the mountain

above their home, their only water source, was washed out in a landslide.

"I have friends that got out just in time and watched their house float away. I just saw something this morning where someone lost 11 members of their family in the landslide," Bonnell said.

As of Oct. 11, officials said 122 people were confirmed dead, with that number expected to rise as rescue crews continue searching for missing persons.

Bonnell said she wants her friends in Asheville to be cautious of the toxic muck left behind from the flooding, something she was wary of for her kids.

"I've been urging my friends with kids to get out of the areas with a lot of mud because of how sick people are getting, especially children," she said. "No one is talking about how toxic the muck that's left behind from the flooding, and how gross and unhealthy it is out there right now."

With no safe water, or roadways back home, Bonnell and her children have decided to stay with family in Tallahassee. She hopes to be able to return home by Thanksgiving.

"It's not easy bringing kids into people's homes, especially in the midst of uncertainty and not knowing how long we're going to be in a certain area," Bonnell said.

How to help out in Asheville

Bonnell operates "Taylor Bonnell Photography," providing services for all of life's special occasions. Now she is turning her business into a fundraising effort to benefit recovery efforts in Western North Carolina.

She is offering discounted 30-minute mini photoshoot sessions to Tallahassee clientele, for special moments like marriage engagements and pregnancy announcements, to help her community rebuild. Even though she isn't with them physically, she is encouraged by their mission to rebuild.

"Most of the help has been totally self-initiated, and from the kindness of their hearts. It's a very self-driven community out there. Everyone's family up there, they want to help each other," she said.

And there are other ways the people of Tallahassee can help too, she said.

Here are links to websites for Asheville charities to support recovery efforts, personally shared with the Tallahassee Democrat by Taylor:

www.828strong.com

www.samaritanspurse.org

www.belovedasheville.com

www.mannafoodbank.org

Adopt a family through Harbor of Hope: https://forms.gle/CEm4Qe9EqEcU5SYX6

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"I couldn't have asked for a better place to be to ride out the storm. We weren't even up there, and it still affected us. It affected us more than we originally thought."

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Helene spoils Tenn. agritourism season - Area's farms are known for beef cattle, produce

October 20, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Hayden Dunbar; Knoxville News Sentinel | Section: News | 999 Words Page: A5 OpenURL Link

JONESBOROUGH, Tenn. – The season is "done for" before ever really starting at Fender's Farm. The brief and spooky agritourism opportunities farm owners rely on each fall have been spoiled by the real-life horror of Sept. 27, when Hurricane Helene caused the Nolichucky River to overflow, ravaging farm fields, equipment and infrastructure.

Owners Bonnie and Carroll Fender, who began building on the Washington County property in 1984, are in their 70s now. Considering all the canceled field trips — which alone would have brought 5,000 people to the farm this season — the couple must decide whether rebuilding makes sense for their family.

"We're going to have a good talk with our daughter and grandchildren," Carroll said. "If they want to continue on here, we'll apply for any assistance we can get."

They are far from alone in their post-Helene struggle. Forty-seven percent of Washington County is farmland, and 99% of farms are family farms, according to the USDA's 2022 Census of Agriculture and calculations made using USDA data. Washington County has a "multimillion-dollar industry" known for its beef cattle, according to Anthony Shelton of the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, and the Nolichucky River Valley is known for its produce — "some of the best anywhere," Carroll said.

Agriculture and forestry contribute approximately \$89billion to Tennessee's economy each year, according to Tennessee Farm Bureau, while tourism in Tennessee generated a record \$30.6billion in direct visitor spending in 2023, according to Visit Nashville TN. Agritourism combines the two and extends to opportunities beyond just the farming itself – think corn mazes, hayrides and petting zoos.

The Fenders pivoted from their produce model to agritourism in 2000, adding a corn maze, gaga ball pit, giant sandbox, haunted maze, pedal cart track, tube slide and zip line over the years. All were ruined in the recent flooding. Carroll estimates \$250,000 worth of equipment went underwater. He's not sure how much will be salvageable.

"Not only have we lost this year's revenue, the revenue we made last year was put back in to get started this year. It's gone because it's washed away," Carroll said. "And then if we do get back up and going, it'll take next year's revenue to pay for that."

The Farm Market and Paw Paw's Pumpkin Patch at Fender's Farm are still open, but the other closures come at an exceptionally challenging time. This was the Fenders' first year selling season passes, many of which won't be used at all. They plan to refund them, or honor them next season — if the farm is reopened.

"There's more gone than what you're seeing," Carroll told Knox News while driving his ATV on a tour through the wreckage. "I just can't explain how fast all this happened."

Still, "we probably need to concentrate more on what we have left than what's gone," he said.

That includes the farm's livestock. Carroll's granddaughter, 17-year-old Sadie Buchanan, lives on the property and helped save the animals when the Nolichucky rose.

Buchanan recalled walking through ankle-deep water to the pens, where she and other helpers grabbed animals

and started heading to higher ground. By that point, she said, the water was so high they had to swim. But they rescued all the animals — more than 20 chickens, goats, rabbits, pigs, sheep and turkeys.

What's left also includes the people, including those who traveled from near and far to help clean up the property and to distribute hot meals and supplies.

"That's the way that people love on each other here," Carroll said.

Not far from Fender's Farm is Saldana Farms, encompassing more than 27 acres along the Nolichucky River in Washington County. Bruce Saldana bought the property in 2015 with his parents, who planned to retire from their full-time jobs in 2025 to spend more time growing produce, including sweet corn and potatoes.

They plan to continue, Saldana told Knox News in a text message, but "it will be a challenge for the next few years."

The family was able to save some larger equipment. But the shed that housed it — which they also used as an outpost to sell produce — was severely damaged, causing what Saldana estimates as \$10,000-\$20,000 worth of damage to tools and supplies.

About 9 acres of timber were destroyed, and about an acre of land that was used for growing produce has become a massive ditch. It will have to be filled in and regraded before the family can continue growing, Saldana said.

Still, "we are extremely lucky compared to others who lost homes, and some fields are beyond repair," Saldana said. "Fields that once had acres of tomatoes, corn, watermelon, pumpkins, beans, etc., will never be able to be farmed again."

The main house at Still Hollow Farm in neighboring Greene County, where 52% of the land is farmed, was built in 1860. The Birdwell family has been living there for six generations, George Birdwell told Knox News. He grew up in the house and his parents, Jay and Ann Birdwell, were living there until Sept. 27.

Still Hollow is a Century Farm, meaning it's recognized by the state as having been owned by the same family for at least 100 years.

On Sept. 27, George Birdwell and his parents made a decision they thought would preserve their precious belongings: They took everything upstairs.

But the latest round of flooding brought water to a higher level than ever before: past the main level and to the second story, where water rose an additional 7 feet.

Though the family knows the river could flood again, they are rebuilding – with a few modifications. The most badly damaged side of the house will become a screened-in porch, and Birdwell said he'll be installing drains in the remaining rooms.

The house has too much history to be forgotten.

"This old house has thousands of stories," Birdwell said. "And this is just one of those stories. That's why we're building back. It's just another story."

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Homeowners beware - Avoid contractor fraud, charity scams after weather disasters

October 20, 2024 | Gaston Gazette, The (Gastonia, NC) Author: Jade Jackson; USA TODAY NETWORK | Section: Home | 993 Words Page: D1 OpenURL Link

"Never pay a big deposit up front. Always have a written contract. I wouldn't pay anything until they have a certificate of compliance. Make sure all changes are in writing."

Ryan Cody

North Carolina Licensing Board for General Contractors

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – Every year, hurricanes, tornadoes and other major weather events leave millions of Americans struggling to recover and rebuild their lives. Unfortunately, these events also provide an opening for dishonest contractors and scammers looking to take advantage of homeowners.

Ryan Cody with the North Carolina Licensing Board for General Contractors said that during times of disaster, unlicensed contractors from all over the country will go seeking "recovery money."

"And oftentimes they don't deliver on the services promised," Cody said. "They just take the money and leave. People have already been victimized by the storm and then these fraudulent contractors take advantage of hurricane victims. So, be wary of people coming door to door."

He reminds North Carolinians any project totaling over \$40,000 from Tropical Storm Helene's damage requires a licensed North Carolina general contractor, who comes with approval from their board for being certified in working on projects with the promise of continued education and renewing their license annually.

"Never pay a big deposit up front," Cody said. "Always have a written contract. I wouldn't pay anything until they have a certificate of compliance. Make sure all changes are in writing."

Chaddrick Francis owns Francis Crawlspace & Foundation Repairs LLC and said one common scam he's seeing is people pretending to offer charity work for disaster victims.

"They're offering to help or say they're going to help," Francis said. "But then they turn around and ask for money. Another red flag is contractors who keep changing the work or the change order and wanting to charge you more for it. Make sure those change forms are effective and a customer signs those papers before a change is made. I talk to my customers before I change anything."

His crawl space and foundation repair business specializes in waterproofing and structural repairs. Since Tropical Storm Helene hit, he said requests and inquiries have been more hectic with a lot of people worried about scams.

How to avoid getting scammed

According to the Legal Aid of North Carolina, you should ask for an official ID from anyone claiming to be from the government, power company or insurance company.

You can verify any contractor by name and license on the N.C. Licensing Board for General Contractors website. Cody said a license number can also be found on a contract written up by a contractor.

Contact your insurance company first if your property has been damaged by a disaster. Some insurance companies

require the adjuster's approval before work can be done.

Shop around and compare estimates for any major repairs and know that legitimate contractors will provide written estimates for home repairs.

Avoid sharing personal information, such as Social Security or bank account numbers, with anyone who contacts you first.

If someone contacts you claiming to be from a government agency or organization, look up the number for that organization online and call to verify that the person is really an employee.

Remember that you should not be asked to pay to file any disaster assistance applications.

Other things to keep in mind:

Beware of contractors who knock on your door offering services because they noticed your home is damaged or are already working in your area. This is a common tactic of scam artists.

FEMA does not approve, endorse, certify, or recommend any contractors, individuals, or firms.

Do not hire a contractor who does not have a physical address or refuses to show ID.

Use a contractor who is backed by reliable references. The most reputable contractors have liability insurance, workers' compensation and are bonded.

Perform a quick Google search before hiring any contractor. Do they have a website? Have they scammed previous clients? Read any reviews.

Get a copy of your contract in writing from the contractor that includes the work to be done and, ideally, a completion date.

Always check credentials.

You may wish to request a copy of your contractor's Certificate of Insurance before they begin work, to ensure that the contractor is legitimate and that you will be covered if the contractor causes any damage to your home.

"We also have a complaint and investigations division for anybody that feels a contractor has scammed them," Cody said. "You can also check with your local permit and inspection office to find out if a building permit has been obtained by a contractor."

Be cautious about paying contractors before they begin work. If possible, wait until the work is finished and you are satisfied. Reputable contractors generally do not expect customers to pay the entire price upfront.

Pay contractors by credit card if you can, so you can request a chargeback from your credit card company if they fail to do the work or if the work is unsatisfactory.

If you can't pay with a credit card, pay by check or get a written receipt from the contractor to keep a paper trail proving your payments.

"There may be times when a contractor has to make a change," Cody said. "It might be a situation where you want something, but the building code says you have to do it certain way. I would just make sure that a contractor is giving clear communication about any changes."

Cody understands that people want to make repairs as quickly as possible, but he cautions against rushing a

project. He wants people to do their due diligence to ensure they're not being scammed or duped.

"People's homes are ruined," Francis said. "There's a lot of vultures out there that come during these times. Even licensed people, but make sure at the very least they do have some credibility."

Jade Jackson is a public safety reporter for IndyStar assisting The Citizen-Times, Asheville with Hurricane Helene coverage.

getty images

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Mulching, shredding, all things recycling in Gaston County

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Hello Gaston, hoping that all have gotten trees cleared, power back on and your shelves restocked for the next natural disaster.

Having seen the latest in storm debris footage from Hurricane Milton, which spurred over 12 tornadoes in Florida, the first thing that comes to mind is just how important debris cleanup is to restoring life back to a state of "normal."

It reminds me of that refrain from the Big Yellow Taxi song by Joni Mitchell: "Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you got 'til it's gone?" It makes me think of so many things: the peace of mind we have when we aren't dealing with a crisis, the luxuries we take for granted, and when the trash services are gone, we certainly realize very quickly how important those services and the people who keep them running are for keeping our local communities safe and sanitary.

So although my job for the county is to mainly promote and encourage recycling, part of the job is also reducing organic wastes from landfill trash, which includes educating people that yard waste is a separate waste and needs to be kept out of your regular household trash pickup.

As I completed our annual reporting to the state this year about the amounts and types of material that we diverted from regular landfill, the largest amount was from yard waste (15,003.7 TONS to be exact). When we experienced the two tornadoes in May rip through areas of Gaston County, it created enough extra debris that we had to call in our mulch grinder to help start moving the pile of limbs, trunks and stumps into chipped mulch.

Being able to take something that may take years to decompose on its own and create a useful product (mainly for erosion control) is a type of diversion and reuse that helps everyone. The yard waste that is coming to the landfill now is for the most part from Hurricane Helene. We are lucky to live in the South where the field can turn to forest in a matter of years, and those trees can be replenished if left alone in as little as 15-20 years for softwoods and 30-50 years for hardwoods. Those of us that have chosen older neighborhoods will know the costs associated for cleanup of 50-80 year old oaks, maples, hickories and poplars are not cheap. Especially if one of those mighty trees comes down on the car, house, shed or carport. You can apply online for FEMA assistance for your Hurricane Helene related cleanup costs now at gastongov.com.

Now our mountain neighbors are not only dealing with trees but also with mud. The ruined furniture and carpets have got to be pulled out, if there is even a structure left to salvage. All that wet and mucky bits have to go somewhere. The spoiled food has to go somewhere. The misplaced sand from Florida that was dragged with the surge of the ocean into coastal communities will need to be shoveled out and go somewhere.

We cannot get back to normal until we get cleaned up. I don't know about you, but sometimes I can't think clearly until my space I am working in is tidied up. It is much easier to function in spaces that are clear of clutter. So although you may not be shoveling out sand or mud, you may need to take some time over the next days or weeks to clear out the clutter so that in the next disaster you are not trying to do two jobs in one. The daily, weekly and monthly chores are easy to get away from us in the busy seasons of life.

We can all learn from these disasters about being prepared for the storm itself, but also we can make the clean up easier if we rid our spaces of things we do not need to keep. Even better, we can try not to bring in to our houses, things that we don't plan on keeping so that maybe, there's less to throw out overall.

In two weeks (Nov. 2), Keep Gastonia Beautiful will have their free Shred Event for Gastonia citizens at the Farmers Market. Now is the time to prepare to get rid of the paper clutter. Disregarding documents like titles or taxes, most other sensitive items can be shredded after seven years. The event is for household use only. It is three boxes per car of sensitive documents to be shredded. It is not to shred your junk mail, or magazines or old paperwork from school. You may go next door to the Farmers Market Recycling Center to recycle your mixed paper and cardboard when you are done.

If you are worried about someone knowing your name or address on the mail, cut it out or mark it with a black permanent marker. We will only dump out boxes and then return them to you. Bags break. Office paper is heavy. So consider the size of your box and if it's too heavy for you to lift, it's too heavy for our volunteers. If you have anything besides paper in your bags - like flash drives, cell phones or batteries, shoes, or other random items in your box - you will be turned away to sort your items before getting back in line. Please help Keep Gastonia Beautiful and their team of volunteers to have a seamless event by following the rules and preparing beforehand.

By taking time to clean our spaces before disaster strikes, we make getting back to normal a little easier. Separating organic debris from your household trash leaves more room in the landfill, as sticks, leaves, grass, and tree parts can be easily ground and reused as mulch. Keeping recyclable materials sorted and separated from landfill trash also leaves more space in the landfill for the items that have no other safe place for disposal.

To find out more about what can be recycled or where, about the ongoing mulch sales happening this Saturday and more to come, and events like Shred or Household Hazardous Waste check out gastongov.com/solidwaste.

Thanks and we can do this together, let's help keep Gaston clean and put our wastes where they belong.

Becca Hurd is Gaston County's recycling coordinator.

Your Turn

Becca Hurd

Guest columnist

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'God willing and the creek don't rise'

October 20, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

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Gwen Frisbie-Fulton is a writer, organizer, and mother in Greensboro focused on race, gender and class in the South.

A few years back, I tagged along with volunteers delivering Meals on Wheels outside Creston, N.C. We drove up winding roads through hollers of beech and basswood dropping off food to elderly residents. At one house, the homeowner was waiting for us on his porch, dressed to the nines in all black, from his shiny boots to his cowboy hat. He told me he was known as "Ashe County's Man in Black."

He rode with us back down to the community center, where he played guitar for me in an empty storage room. He talked to me about his favorite Johnny Cash songs, about how to graft hickory trees, and about the many generations of his family who lived in these hills.

He told me story after story and I felt grateful to be in his presence. When we dropped him off back home again, I said I'd love to visit again. He grinned as he shut the car door, leaned in the window, and said: "God willing and the creek don't rise."

Unheard of

I've lived in, hiked and camped in Appalachia enough to know that surprise storms can come over a ridge and drench you. I also know that steep slopes and low creeks can cause quick floods. Ashe County's Man in Black lived up such a creek and no doubt had more than once become cut off from his neighbors due to high water- that's not rare here.

But what Hurricane Helene has done in Western North Carolina is rare - in fact, it's unheard of. My friends in Asheville tell me the water came fast and furious, cutting off one side of the town from the other before they could even make it home. In Swannanoa, helicopters flew overhead announcing evacuations when they thought Bee Tree Dam would fail. In Marshall, all of downtown was underwater. The whole town.

Helene has made me think about that saying: "God willing and the creek don't rise." I've heard it all my life.

In my mind, God and flooding were always connected, both a part of a natural order of things. You know not to pitch your tent by a creek in a rainstorm, just as you know not to climb a tree during lightning, just as you know to lower your voice as you walk through a cemetery - you don't tempt fate.

More to come?

I've seen Hurricane Helene's flooding in western North Carolina described as "a biblical disaster," but my fear is that it is not. I don't see what has happened here as anything close to God's natural order, but as something deeply blasphemous. The ever-increasing strength of these storms, and the warm air they move through, is entirely because of human-made climate change, not God's will.

In two weeks' time, North Carolina saw two historic weather events. The tropical cyclone that battered the Cape Fear region brought 20 inches of rain in two days - meteorologists say this happens only once every thousand years. But only days later, emergency management was scrambling to prepare for Helene, which brought even more rain and broke even more records. No wonder I was seeing friends share warnings of yet another storm ready

to bear down on our state - these warnings, while sincere, were misinformation - they go to show that people are scared.

A week later, Milton came - sparing North Carolina but hitting Florida with, again, historic force.

It's getting hard to stand in mud this deep and deny that the climate is warming. This last decade has been the warmest on record in North Carolina, averaging about .6 degrees warmer than the 1930s (N.C. Climate Office). That may not sound too wild, but researchers predict that these intense storms increase 10-30% for each degree of global temperature increase (Princeton, 2024). This means that hurricanes like Helene undergo rapid intensification and wind speeds increase at least 35 miles per hour within a day producing "significantly higher rainfall hazard levels" (Princeton).

Bearing witness to it all

From Florence to Helene to a freakish tornado that ripped through his school, my son, now 17, has seen more climate disasters in his childhood than he has seen snow.

While global warming may not be natural or God's plan, it doesn't mean there is nothing we can do. In fact, the thing about the climate crisis being human-made means that, to a large degree, it can be also mitigated by humans. In the wake of Helene, our local governments can use available Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funds and disaster relief funds to rebuild in ways that protect our communities from future climate disasters: redesigning dams, roads, and houses using green building practices to make them more resilient. We can also leverage the massive federal Inflation Reduction Act funds coming down to North Carolina to invest in residential solar, weatherization and the like to make climate security something we can all access, no matter where we live or what our income is.

When God is willing, the creek will rise. When we create a disaster, it's up to us to reverse course.

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"God willing and the creek don't rise", *Greensboro News & Record* (online), 20 Oct 2024 1C https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C532F997851288



Helene shows us value of fiscal restraint

October 20, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Section: Sports | 709 Words

Page: 4C OpenURL Link

RALEIGH - The devastation wreaked on North Carolina by Hurricane Helene will take weeks to assess, months to clear out and years to repair or rebuild. Second only to the value of the lives lost will be the exorbitant fiscal and economic costs of our recovery.

Our state government is reasonably well-prepared to shoulder its share. Our federal government is not.

Last week, the General Assembly authorized an initial \$273 million withdrawal from North Carolina's rainy-day fund to cover initial recovery expenses and changes in elections administration. Gov. Roy Cooper signed the bill.

That's only the first tranche of state expenditure. Lawmakers will return to the capital more than once before year's end, then commence regular session in early 2025. They'll appropriate much more money for various reconstruction efforts, from academic campuses and government offices to highways, bridges, water systems, and other infrastructure.

North Carolina has lots of money set aside. The rainy-day fund itself still contains about \$4.5 billion. Other accounts and our unreserved credit balance contain billions more. I don't mean to minimize the storm's staggering costs. I'm just pointing out that the General Assembly won't have to cut other programs, raise taxes or borrow money to fulfill its responsibilities.

Congress is another story. Over the past couple of decades, presidents and lawmakers of both parties have run massive federal deficits and made exorbitant spending promises that far exceed any reasonable expectation of revenues at economically sustainable tax rates.

In a recent Reason magazine piece, Veronique de Rugy of the Mercatus Center pointed out that the federal debt now exceeds \$28 trillion - \$2 trillion more than last year and \$6 trillion more than when the Biden-Harris team entered the White House.

"This debt stands at 100% of America's gross domestic product, which, other than a one-year exception at the end of World War II, is the highest ratio we've ever had," she wrote. "Unlike in 1946, today's debt is only going to grow. Indeed, debt-to-GDP took a nearly 30-year dive to reach 23% in 1974. Today, federal debt is projected - under the rosiest scenarios - to rise to 166% in 30 years."

In other words, every dollar Congress authorizes and the executive branch distributes for hurricane relief in North Carolina is, in effect, a borrowed dollar. It represents a debt to be paid in the future, not a gift.

Of course, North Carolinians aren't the only ones who must pay each dollar back (with interest). Decades ago, our politicians essentially nationalized the provision of relief and reconstruction after natural disasters. I don't think that was wise. States and localities ought to make their own preparations and save their own money to handle future emergencies.

But at this point, I'm not sure how to extricate ourselves from this process. If Congress passed a law next year to slash federal disaster relief and then Kansas gets clobbered by tornados, their taxpayers could reasonably complain that they helped clean up after North Carolina's disaster and then didn't get their "turn" at withdrawing funds for their own.

The next best thing, then, is for future Congresses and presidents to take their budgeting responsibilities more seriously. As I've pointed out many times, the opportunity to bring federal revenues and expenditures closer to alignment without painful adjustment has long since passed. The gap is too large.

It can't be substantially closed by eliminating "waste, fraud, and abuse." Nor can it be substantially closed by "tax hikes on the wealthy." Contrary to popular misconception, the United States already has one of the most steeply progressive tax codes in the developed world. According to the left-leaning Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, the bottom quintile of American taxpayers pays an average of 17% of their income in federal, state and local taxes. The middle quintile pays 26%. The wealthiest 1% pay 35%.

Washington's fiscal recklessness should be one of the top voting issues this year. Alas, it isn't. But ignoring the problem won't make it go away.

John Hood is a John Locke Foundation board member.

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Rockingham transports essential supplies storm victims

October 20, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Author: STAFF REPORT | Section: Rockingham | 234 Words Page: 2R OpenURL Link

Hurricane Helene relief

WENTWORTH - Although roads and bridges leading to the areas hardest hit by Hurricane Helene remain impassable, Rockingham County staff and volunteers were able to transport earlier this week directly to remote communities that have otherwise been completely isolated.

Monday afternoon, water and other essential items were transported to Statesville Regional Airport in Iredell County and flown directly to remote locations in western North Carolina. The airlift was the first, but not the last. More supplies are expected to be flown out in the days and weeks ahead.

People are encouraged to help by bringing much-needed supplies directly to the Rockingham County Maintenance Warehouse located at 338 Cherokee Camp Road, Wentworth, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, through next week. Staff will be available to assist and direct.

Rockingham County Libraries will also be taking donated supplies at the following times:

Eden, Madison/Mayodan, and Reidsville libraries - Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.Stoneville - Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Other drop-off points are the town and city halls of Eden, Madison, Mayodan, Reidsville, Stoneville and Wentworth during normal business hours. All of Rockingham's in-county fire departments are also accepting donated goods.

For more information, visit rockinghamcountync.gov.

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STAFF REPORT, 'Rockingham transports essential supplies storm victims', *Greensboro News & Record* (online), 20 Oct 2024 2R https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C532F8C180A8A8>



What's scary is some people believe this stuff

October 20, 2024 \mid News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Section: Sports \mid 735 Words

Page: 1C OpenURL Link

Richard Groves lives and writes in Winston-Salem.

In a democracy it is the duty of every citizen to think."

- James Russell Lowell's endorsement of Abraham Lincoln in 1860

A week and a half after Hurricane Helene wreaked devastation and caused immeasurable suffering in the mountains of North Carolina, U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards, whose 11th District includes much of the western part of the state, issued a "Dear Friend" press release unlike any I have ever read.

The first-term Republican representative congratulated the mountain communities for the way they had "come together to help one another. We have seen a level of support that is unmatched by most any other disaster nationwide."

But he said, "amidst all of the support, we've also seen an uptick in untrustworthy sources trying to spark chaos by sharing hoaxes, conspiracy theories and hearsay about hurricane response efforts across our mountains."

"I'm here," Edwards said, "to dispel the outrageous rumors that have been circulated online."

He began with, "Hurricane Helene was NOT geoengineered by the government to seize and access lithium deposits in Chimney Rock. Nobody can control the weather."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency was the target of many of the "outrageous rumors." Rep. Edwards came to FEMA's defense.

"FEMA is NOT stopping trucks or vehicles with donations, confiscating or seizing supplies, or otherwise turning away donations."

"FEMA has NOT diverted disaster response funding to the border or foreign aid."

"FEMA is NOT going to run out of money."

"FEMA cannot seize your property or land."

"FEMA is NOT providing only \$750 to disaster survivors to support their recovery."

Kudos to Rep. Edwards for exposing some of the falsehoods that threatened the safety of many of the victims of Helene's wrath and undermined confidence in governmental agencies that brought relief and for reminding his constituents that "everything you see on Facebook, X, or any other social media platform is not always fact."

Unfortunately, in pointing out that there has been "an uptick in untrustworthy sources trying to spark chaos by sharing hoaxes, conspiracy theories, and hearsay," Rep. Edwards neglected to mention that one of those "untrustworthy sources" is his party's candidate for president, Donald J. Trump.

Trump told rallygoers in Michigan that the Biden administration "stole the FEMA money, just like they stole it from a

bank, so they could give it to their illegal immigrants that they want to have vote for them this season."

He claimed that "the Federal Government, and the Democrat Governor of the State, (went) out of their way to not help people in Republican areas," and that while "Kamala wined and dined in San Francisco, and all of the people in North Carolina - no helicopters, no rescue - it's just - what's happened there is very bad."

Writing for Bloomberg, Barbara McQuade, professor at the University of Michigan Law school, said that "the current brand of disinformation is different from the usual con jobs" that accompany natural disasters. "This new breed of disaster disinformation appears to be motivated by politics."

It is reprehensible for politicians to deliberately, shamelessly mislead their constituents for personal and partisan purposes - to garner votes or to cast their opponents in the worst possible light - especially in times of great suffering and loss.

But there is something else to be said: There is a heavy responsibility that is inherent in citizenship, and we have not held ourselves and our fellow citizens sufficiently accountable. If suffrage is sacred as we sometimes say it is, our votes should be cast thoughtfully and with care.

If someone told you, after a terrible disaster, that government officials were not burying the bodies of victims but instead were stacking them at hospitals - conspiracy theories that circulated in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene - wouldn't you be just a bit skeptical? Maybe ask a question or two?

You know what's really scary? Realizing that on Nov. 5 the near future of our country may be determined by people who uncritically accept, embrace and base their votes on "hoaxes, conspiracy theories and hearsay."

"In a democracy it is the duty of every citizen to think."

Richard Groves lives and writes in Winston-Salem.

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Local

October 20, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Section: Local | 227 Words Page: 3B OpenURL Link

In the News

Meat recall expands after listeria found

A nationwide recall of meat and poultry products potentially contaminated with listeria expanded this past week to nearly 12 million pounds and now includes ready-to-eat meals sent to U.S. schools, restaurants and major retailers, federal officials said.

The updated recall includes prepared salads, burritos and other foods sold at stores including Costco, Trader Joe's, Target, Walmart and Kroger. The meat used in those products was processed at a Durant, Oklahoma, manufacturing plant operated by BrucePac, which sells precooked meat and poultry to industrial, foodservice and retail companies.

Routine testing found listeria bacteria in samples of BrucePac chicken, officials with the U.S. Agriculture Department said.

US ECONOMY: Retail sales rose 0.4% from August to September, the Commerce Department said Thursday, up from 0.1% the previous month and the third straight increase. Also on Thursday, the Labor Department reported that applications for jobless claims fell 19,000 to 241,000 for the week of Oct. 12, below the 262,000 analysts were expecting.

HURRICANE AID: The federal government approved nearly \$2 billion in assistance across six states to help people hit hard by hurricanes Helene and Milton, the White House said Wednesday.

DRUGSTORE CLOSURES: Walgreens announced Tuesday that it will close about 1,200 locations over the next three years as the drugstore chain seeks to turn around a struggling U.S. business that contributed to a \$3 billion quarterly loss.

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Our future begins with choosing wisely right now

October 20, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Section: Sports | 600 Words

Page: 3C OpenURL Link

Imagine a 7-year-old bouncing out of school to greet her grandpa. As they walk to his apartment in senior housing to play until her parents get home from work, she tells him all the things she learned that day.

Contrast this with the reality of other 7-year-olds. Their neighborhood school was closed, damaged beyond repair by devastating storms, so they have to take long bus rides and are too tired to learn and play. Their grandparents' rent nearly doubled for deteriorating houses near their old school. Their parents have long bus rides, too, to get home from two jobs.

What kind of community do we choose to live in, now and in the future? What kind of schools do we want for our community's children? What housing and transportation options do we want? How clean do we want our air and water? How safe do we want our city from floods and guns? What kinds of opportunities will provide safe, meaningful employment at fair wages?

These are all impacted by our choice of decision-makers.

We are at a crossroads. We can choose our community, state and national leaders whose policies affect all the areas of our lives.

We can vote today through Nov. 5 by mail-in ballot, early voting at numerous sites, and in-person at our precincts on Election Day. To prepare for voting, we can each get our ID and check our registration at North Carolina State Board of Elections (www.ncsbe.gov) and then pull up a sample ballot to see the candidates for our district based on our address. We can compare what each candidate says about what we choose for our community's future.

Our votes count.

And our voices do count, as we talk with candidates now and we contact elected officials in the months to come, urging them to make wise decisions that ensure a strong future.

But, while elections are crucial in the direction our nation is moving, we can't leave all the work to those with the most votes. We must work for the kind of community we want to live in, finding the intersection of our passions, our skills and our community's needs.

Is our passion investing in education for our children's future contributions to the world by learning reading and history and science? We can urge local and state government to vote for adequate financial support for teachers, bus drivers and school buildings.

Do we want grandparents and children to have comfortable places to live within walking distance of each other? We can welcome development that brings new residents into walkable neighborhoods with a wide range of housing designs to fit all ages, budgets and lifestyles.

Overwhelmed by the devastating floods, are we willing to limit greenhouse gas emissions and water pollution and construction in environmentally fragile areas? Helene and Milton and the rest of the storm alphabet show the deadly power of water and wind when temperatures rise.

What firearm policies do we accept to keep the most destructive weapons out of the irresponsible hands of enraged

or suicidal people?

As we applaud our state and local officials for bringing new employment with the exciting ripple effect of additional job creation, can we focus on work safety and meaningful jobs that enhance our community?

When we talk with our families, friends, neighbors and co-workers about the future we want, we can find creative ideas and energy to make it happen. The first step right now is to prepare to vote by comparing candidates. Then we can team up with each other and elected officials to put those decisions into action.

News & Record columnist Beth McKee-Huger is an affordable housing advocate who lives in Greensboro.

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Huge draw: First day of early voting in Guilford swells to 19,000

October 20, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Author: CAMDYN BRUCE Staff Reporter | Section: Main | 233 Words Page: 4A

GREENSBORO - More than 19,000 people cast their ballots in Guilford County on Thursday, the first day of early voting in North Carolina for the 2024 general election.

Thursday's total of 19,004 was an increase of 2,065 first-day voters from the 2020 general election in the county.

"I expected we'd match or slightly exceed 2020's first day," Guilford County Director of Elections Charlie Collicutt said in an email to the News & Record.

Likewise, North Carolina set a first-day record of 353,166 ballots, according to preliminary data from the State Board of Elections.

This topped the previous record set in 2020 when 348,559 North Carolinians voted on the first day of early voting.

Making the new record more impressive is the fact that voting was largely unimpeded in the western part of the state recently ravaged by Hurricane Helene.

The Associated Press reported that more than 400 early voting sites opened as scheduled for the 17-day period, including all but four of the 80 sites previously anticipated for the 25 western counties hardest hit by the storm.

Among voters at polling locations in Guilford County Thursday, the urgency was almost palpable with many highlighting the importance this year's elections results could have on the direction of the country going forward.

"We have to think about our country, our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren, women," said Joyce McGilvery who voted yesterday at the Brown Recreation Center.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C53590374C8A38>



Sunday's letters: How can a former Guilford sheriff support a convicted lawbreaker like Trump?

October 20, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC) Section: Sports | 795 Words Page: 2C OpenURL Link

BJ's for DJT?

The weirdness of how people can support Donald Trump is astounding to many of us.

For example, a former Guilford County sheriff, BJ Barnes, sent in a letter last week expressing his support for Trump. As sheriff, this man did a good job for our county.

So, it's easy to believe that, if he were sheriff today and a person in our county had been found guilty on more than 30 felony counts - and if that person also had provoked an attack on sheriff's deputies while they were attempting to do their jobs - this officer of the law would do all he could to get that person arrested and put into prison for many years.

He certainly wouldn't support his election as president of our country.

This contradiction is true for many other supporters of Trump. If they were confronted by a person who had sexually assaulted a female in their family or a friend of theirs, they would do everything they could to have the person arrested and imprisoned.

That's why it's difficult to understand how supporters of Trump can totally ignore the illegal things he has done. Some even see him as being like Jesus.

Many of us realize how badly Trump has acted. But it is much harder to understand how so many people who say they support law and order in our country can support him.

Lee A. Gable

Greensboro

Un-refresh me

How much longer do we have to endure the "refreshed" comic pages?

"Zippy the Pinhead" is unintelligible!

Jim Kinney

High Point

At last, good news

Recently, our state has been in the national news for all the wrong reasons. Finally, there is a good press in The New York Times.

In "Maybe Voters Want a Break from Endless Combat," the reporter writes about meeting Jeff Jackson, who is

running for N.C. attorney general. She highlights Jackson's success in working across the aisle while serving as a state senator and in the U.S. House Representatives

In addition to being a collaborator, Jackson is extremely qualified. He is an experienced assistant district attorney and a U.S. veteran. Rep. Jackson is a champion for our environment. The League of Conservation Voters gave him a score of 100, its highest rating for legislators who consistently vote for laws that protect our environment.

Our state has faced many environmental challenges, including the Duke Energy coal ash clean-up, polluted waterways and the horrific Hurricane Helene. As attorney general, Jackson will ensure that corporations are held accountable for their pollution.

In the Times article, Jackson states, "Voters need to prepare themselves to take seriously an opportunity to unite people and to check their impulses for outrage." What a nice change from all the name-calling.

Many voters are tired of the divisiveness. We cannot unite as a country if we demonize those who vote differently from us.

We need leaders who will bring us together. We need an attorney general who will protect all North Carolinians, regardless of political party. The clear choice is Jeff Jackson for N.C. attorney general.

Julie Ann Cooper

Greensboro

Who's left?

Donald Trump has insulted women, Black people, members of the military, veterans, heroes, the physically and mentally impaired, gays, transgender people, immigrants and most religions.

So, who does that leave? A few white males, maybe?

Trump has said nothing and done nothing to help this country. He is not worthy to be president of the United States.

Nancy L. Poulos

Greensboro

Marcus for insurance post

Insurance is a significant cost to most North Carolinians - on homes, vehicles, health care, businesses. So, the N.C. commissioner of insurance is extremely important, as that person negotiates with insurance companies for the best insurance and best prices for us.

Sen. Natasha Marcus is a three-term state senator running for this position. Her Senate record proves that she serves our interests, not those of big business. She has been a practicing attorney and knows insurance and the needs of the state, serving on the Senate Commerce and Insurance Committee (among others).

Sen. Marcus commits to conducting public hearings (not private negotiations with insurance companies) on proposed rate changes, so voters see the process and can judge its effectiveness.

Sen. Marcus is running against Mike Causey, the current commissioner. Several things about Causey's record raised red flags to me.

Causey has not held a public hearing in seven years, instead negotiating privately. He says hearings are costly. I'm personally glad to pay that cost if it means transparency on decisions affecting me.

Causey's predecessor raised dwelling insurance rates once in eight years. Causey has raised rates four times in his tenure. Also, a large portion of donations to Causey are from the insurance industry.

I'm tired of closed-door dealings in state government. Natasha Marcus will give us transparency. She has proven she serves us and, best of all, her goal is to not raise rates every time insurance companies request one.

Kathy Wheeler

Summerfield

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Movie sites in Western NC affected by Helene

October 20, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon; Staff Writer | Section: Living | 636 Words

Page: 1C OpenURL Link

Weeks after Hurricane Helene swept through the state as a tropical storm, several landmarks and attractions in Western North Carolina have been temporarily shut down, including some that were in the spotlight of big blockbuster movies.

For decades, the Tar Heel state has been the backdrop for many action, comedy and drama television shows and movies. Of the many popular movies captured around North Carolina, here's which film sites around the mountain areas were impacted by the storm:

Biltmore Estate

Featured in: "The Swan" (1956), "Being There" (1979), "Last of the Mohicans" (1992), "Forrest Gump" (1994), "Richie Rich" (1994), "Hannibal" (2001), "A Biltmore Christmas" (2023)

Biltmore Estate, which stood as the home of the billionaire mogul in the 1979 Oscar-winning movie "Being There" and the world's richest comic book family in "Richie Rich," as well as as the primary set for one of Hallmark's newest holiday movies, is temporarily closed after Helene. The entrance to the home and other low-lying areas of the property did have some flooding, but Biltmore House, conservatory, winery, gardens, and hotels had little to no damage.

Chimney Rock State Park

Featured in: "Last of the Mohicans" (1992)

Chimney Rock State Park is one of the 13 state parks in western North Carolina temporarily closed while officials work on post-storm recovery. Located in Rutherford county outside of south Asheville, the park was featured in the ending of "Last of the Mohicans" during the waterfall, fight and bathing scenes, according to the Rutherford County tourism site.

Dupont State Recreational Forest

Featured in: "The Hunger Games" (2012)

Dupont State Recreational Forest, location of Katniss' pond and the place where Peeta camouflaged himself in the movie based on the bestselling "Hunger Games" book series, has been closed since Sept. 30. According to the DSRF website, the park will be closed "for an extended period while public safety and emergency response are prioritized."

Grandfather Mountain

Featured in: "Forrest Gump" (1994)

Grandfather Mountain is one of many spots featured in Forrest Gump's 3+ year run across America in the iconic 1994 film - with a marker for what's now known as "Forrest Gump Curve" between the Wilson Center for Nature Discovery and the Mile High Swinging Bridge. Both the private park and state park at Grandfather Mountain are closed at this time.

Lake James

Featured in: "The Hunt for Red October" (1990)

Lake James, which was portrayed as Penobscot River in Maine in the film based on the thriller novel, is closed at this time. Along with Lake James State Park, all state parks west of I-77 are closed through at least the end of Oct.

Lake Lure

Featured in: "Dirty Dancing" (1987)

Lake Lure, located in Rutherford County, was the backdrop for the famous lift scene in the classic '80s film, "Dirty Dancing." According to the town of Lake Lure website, a curfew is in place at the lake from 7:30 p.m.- 7:30 a.m. and officials and crews have been working to remove debris from the lake.

Moses H. Cone Memorial Park

Featured in: "The Green Mile" (1999)

If you've seen the 1999 drama starring Tom Hanks you might recognize Moses H. Cone Memorial Park as Paul Edgecomb's nursing home. As of Oct. 11, The Blue Ridge Parkway is closed between mileposts 198.4 and 469, including Flat Top Manor at Milepost 294.

South Mountain State Park

Featured in: "Please Don't Destroy: The Treasure of Foggy Mountain" (2023)

"Saturday Night Live" comedy trio Please Don't Destroy filmed the comedy film in various spots across North Carolina to depict the fictitious "Foggy Mountain," including South Mountains State Park, Crowders Mountain State Park and Mount Mitchell State Park. All three state parks are among the parks with closures in effect until at least Oct. 31 due to Helene.

Chyna Blackmon: @chynablackmon

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Buttigieg visits Pigeon River Gorge to see I-40 damage

October 20, 2024 \mid Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)

Author: Richard Stradling; Staff Writer | Section: News | 857 Words

Page: 15A OpenURL Link

PIGEON RIVER GORGE Like many Americans, U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttiglieg saw pictures of what the remnants of Hurricane Helene did to Interstate 40 in Western North Carolina's Pigeon River Gorge.

On Thursday, he came to the gorge to see first hand. With Gov. Roy Cooper, U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis and state officials, he looked over the concrete highway median into the abyss where the river had washed the eastbound lanes away.

"It's one thing to see a photo," Buttigieg said. "It's another to stand here and look at just the shocking, destructive power of this storm. It's almost impossible to believe that water and wind alone could have torn apart rock and asphalt and the literal ground near where we're standing."

Of all the rebuilding challenges ahead, the reconstruction of the eastbound lanes of I-40 through the gorge will be among the most complex and expensive. The N.C. Department of Transportation's preliminary estimate puts the cost at \$1 billion.

On his first tour of Western North Carolina since the storm, Buttigieg pledged federal support to "make sure that funding is not a barrier."

State officials don't yet know how long it will take to rebuild I-40 through the gorge and restore the main highway connection between North Carolina and Tennessee. But standing next to Buttigieg on Thursday, N.C. Transportation Secretary Joey Hopkins pledged that it would happen.

"Not rebuilding is not an option," Hopkins said. "We will rebuild. The question is how."

The eastbound lanes of I-40 began to disappear just before noon on Sept. 27, as the remnants of Helene moved out of Western North Carolina. The swollen Pigeon River carved into the earth along the highway, swallowing trees, then the guardrail and the paved shoulder. In several places, one or both of the travel lanes are also gone.

The westbound lanes are intact, though cracks have developed in the pavement in spots. The NCDOT and its contractors are keeping an eye on those, looking for any signs of movement, says Wanda Payne, NCDOT's top engineer in the region.

"We're actively monitoring the cracks to make sure we don't lose anything else," Payne told Buttigieg.

Stabilizing the westbound lanes is the first step in restoring the highway. Contractors are using a technique called "soil nailing," essentially driving reinforced steel bars up to 20 feet long into the side of the gorge under the road to keep it from eroding further.

The \$8 million contract with Wright Brothers Construction of Charleston, Tennessee, and Colorado-based GeoStabilization International requires that work to be done by Jan. 4, with incentives if they can finish sooner, said Daniel Ross, NCDOT's engineer overseeing the project. Once they're done, work on the eastbound side can begin in earnest.

It's not clear yet how the road will be rebuilt. Hopkins said NCDOT has identified teams of designers and construction contractors and asked them to come up with proposals, along with estimated costs and timelines.

"I'm sure we'll see some different ideas," he said.

The basic challenge, Payne said, is to reconnect the highway from the Tennessee line to the tunnels near mile marker 4. There may be different solutions at different points along the way, including walls, viaducts and shifting lanes back from the river's edge.

"I think we have a lot of options," she said.

Hopkins said he hopes NCDOT will choose a design and construction team in the next few weeks.

Could the westbound lanes reopen to traffic?

The Pigeon River also tore away parts of eastbound I-40 in Tennessee, though the damage was not as extensive. The state transportation department has converted the two westbound lanes to two-way traffic between the North Carolina line and Exit 447, a distance of about 4 miles.

But it's too soon to tell whether NCDOT can put traffic on the westbound lanes on the North Carolina side once they're stabilized.

In several places, all that separates those lanes from the river is the median barrier, like the spot Buttigieg visited Thursday. Ross, the project engineer, said it's likely contractors will need at least one of the westbound lanes for trucks and construction equipment to rebuild the highway.

Meanwhile, an alternate route between the two states, Interstate 26, remains closed after floodwaters knocked down twin spans that carried the highway over the Nolichucky River in Erwin, Tennessee, about 40 miles from the state line.

There's no timeline set for rebuilding the bridges and fully reopening the highway, said Mark Nagi, spokesman for the Tennessee Department of Transportation.

But TDOT hopes to get one lane open in each direction to through traffic by the end of November, Nagi said. The bridge spans that fell are close to the river bank, and TDOT plans to create a temporary roadway by filling the area on the westbound side with stone and paving over it.

When the eastbound span is rebuilt, traffic will shift and the temporary road will be replaced with a new westbound bridge.

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When you are both a journalist and a firefighter, which comes first when a hurricane hits?

October 20, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)

Author: Scott Fowler; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1003 Words

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Many journalists have covered the damage that Hurricane Helene wrought in Western North Carolina when it devastated much of the area in late September.

Very few of them, though, have had to make the same sorts of choices that 25-year-old Moss Brennan has.

Brennan is the editor of the Watauga Democrat in Boone, where he supervises three other staff writers and several freelance photographers and also helps oversee the publication of four other neighboring community newspapers.

Meanwhile, Brennan also serves as a volunteer firefighter for two local rescue units in the Boone area - the Deep Gap Fire Department and the Watauga County Rescue Squad.

"I have my rescue hat and my journalism hat," Brennan, a 2021 graduate of Appalachian State, said in a phone interview. "And I try to keep them as separate as possible."

That has proved challenging over the past couple of weeks. Hurricane Helene caused mayhem all over Western North Carolina. Brennan found himself wanting to help in two disparate ways - getting important information to the public through the newspaper and its various social media platforms and literally helping to save lives as a first responder.

In the first few hours and days of the storm, as Helene downed trees, flooded rivers, provoked landslides, knocked out power and caused dozens of deaths in Western North Carolina, Brennan stuck mostly with his volunteer work on the rescue units. He participated in several swift-water rescues, helping get people and animals out of cars that were stuck in floodwaters or out of houses where the water had risen too high for a safe exit.

"On those swift-water calls," Brennan said, "I was part of rescuing 11 people and three dogs."

Then it came time to put out the newspaper - or actually multiple newspapers, since Brennan is also the executive editor of Mountain Times Publications. The company owns community newspapers in neighboring counties like Ashe and Avery, too. All of the publications combined - there are five of them altogether - have a staff of nine full-time journalists. Most of those reporters are in their 20s, Brennan said.

Brennan is most closely associated with the Watauga Democrat, which he reports for and edits each week and which prints once a week on Wednesdays. For the Oct. 2 edition, the first after Helene, Brennan wrote the top story on the front page and also took the 1A centerpiece photo.

The headline was stark: "DEVASTATION."

The newspaper decided to print close to a thousand extra copies of that edition, since so many places were without power and Wi-Fi. Brennan and the staff dropped off free copies of the newspapers at central distribution areas like community centers and fire departments.

"I went to one fire department and they said, 'This is the first news we've had since Friday (five days before),'"
Brennan said. "It just goes to show you that local journalism - and the printed paper - can still be very important."

Brennan grew up in Durham and attended high school at the Durham School of the Arts. He traveled 200 miles west

across North Carolina to go to college at Appalachian State, where he majored in journalism and at one point was editor-in-chief of The Appalachian, the student newspaper.

Before he had even finished college, the Watauga Democrat had offered him a full-time job as a reporter. Brennan jumped at it - this was during the COVID era and almost all of his classes were online. When the editor job at the newspaper came open, Brennan was first appointed as interim editor and then got the job permanently - at age 22 and only three months after his college graduation.

Shortly after that, Brennan had to report on a spate of fires in Deep Gap, which is an unincorporated area in Watauga County. He grew somewhat interested in the process of fighting fires during this reporting, as well as the people who do it.

"I had always been interested in helping people anyway," Brennan said. "That's kind of why I got into journalism, too - to tell people's stories and hopefully help them. And then the Deep Gap fire chief was like, 'Hey, if you want to come to one of our trainings, we have one on Tuesday night.'"

Curious, Brennan stopped by and was enthralled by the work. He lived only 10 minutes from the station. So he joined Deep Gap as a volunteer firefighter in January 2022. A few months later, he got trained as an emergency medical technician (EMT). By February 2023, he had also joined the Watauga County Rescue Squad, also as a volunteer. Since he was volunteering, Brennan could mostly pick and choose what calls he assisted on and make sure he had time for his reporting and editing.

"My journalism job is flexible enough that if I'm not in the middle of an interview or a deadline, I can typically leave work if it's a serious enough call," Brennan said. "I probably go on a couple of calls a week. The majority of calls are medical, but there is the occasional car crash or fire."

With input from his bosses, Brennan said he decided early on that he shouldn't and couldn't report on calls that he was working on as a first responder. Compartmentalization would be key.

As for Brennan himself, he was fortunate. He lost power for only three hours during Hurricane Helene. Wi-Fi has been a thornier issue. Brennan has filed some stories from McDonald's (this is an age-old reporting trick, since McDonald's are often open late and generally have reliable Wi-Fi).

As the rescue calls have slowed and Western North Carolina concentrates on recovery, Brennan has been more focused on the reporting side of his life lately. As for his long-term plans, he said: "I really don't know what the future holds. I just know that I love what I do right now - both the rescue side and the journalism side."

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Editorial/Opinion

October 20, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Section: Editorial/Opinion | 629 Words Page: 20A

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OpenURL Link

The western part of this state has endured a devastating weather event that has affected every segment of people's lives. There has been an outpouring of support from public and governmental sources and it will take months if not years to fully recover.

Almost as devastating is the mass amount of misinformation and disinformation that these folks have been bombarded with, especially from Donald Trump and his minions, for their own political purposes. As in the lies that were told about Springfield, Ohio (think cats and dogs), they seem to have no shame or compassion.

Republican governors and other local officials have disputed these outright lies. The folks who are hurt the most are the ones who need help the most. As usual with Trump, it is all about him and not the affected citizens.

Danny Squires, Raleigh

Robinson choice

I agree wholeheartedly with the take of the Sept. 29 letter that said Mark Robinson should stay in the race. It's not ideal to have someone in a position of power who could do damage, but it can teach a lesson to those who put them in that level of power.

The tension parties have and the arrogance to stick by their parties' side, despite the moral compass of the person running, is going to catch up to them. Bad choices unfortunately have bad outcomes.

Alana Vance, Clayton

It's personal

Hurricane Helene's devastation hit close to home for me. As a kid, I spent summers vacationing in the Carolinas, especially in Chimney Rock, a beautiful village in Rutherford County. I still have family in that region, and it's heartbreaking to see their community shattered by the storm.

Recovery will be long and difficult. While FEMA's response has been quick, the scope of destruction demands greater attention.

Helene is a reminder that we need stronger infrastructure and better preparedness for future storms. Strengthening infrastructure, creating emergency plans and staying informed are critical steps that could save lives. Climate change is progressing, and so are the frequency and intensity of these disasters. We can't afford to wait to act until the next catastrophe hits vulnerable communities.

For me, this is personal. The places and people I love are suffering. We must take extra precautions and prepare these communities for the inevitable effects of climate change before it's too late.

Fallon Lawson, Old Town, Maine

Vote against amendment

The ballot in North Carolina will contain a proposed amendment to the state constitution. It reads "Constitutional amendment to provide that only a citizen of the United States who is 18 years of age and otherwise possessing the qualifications for voting shall be entitled to vote at any election in this state." The existing wording from the constitution is not on the ballot for comparison.

If passed, the clear phrasing in the current constitution "every person born in the United States and every person who has been naturalized" would be replaced by the unclear phrase "citizen of the United States." Preserve our constitutional rights. Vote against the constitutional amendment referendum.

Marvin Fineman, Wilmington

Voucher moms

In response to "A male Wake teacher wore a tutu for Spirit Week last year. Why critics are now upset" (Oct. 15):

These right-wing Moms for Liberty harassing a teacher over a costume? I can't believe this is part of our daily news conversation. These are exactly the moms who need to put their kids in voucher schools and leave the rest of us alone.

Ellen Canavan, Cary

Education threats

The group Moms for Liberty is going after a male Wake County teacher for wearing a skirt during spirit week, yet is silent about reports of candidate for Governor Mark Robinson calling himself a "Black NAZI" and "perv."

Robinson continues to sit on the NC Board of Education and make decisions that affect our schools. Perhaps Moms for Liberty and others should get serious about the real threats to education.

Mark Slattery, Raleigh

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In NC, Tim Walz and Bill Clinton praise Kamala Harris, contrast her with Trump

October 20, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)

Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan; Staff Writer | Section: News | 730 Words

Page: 17A OpenURL Link

RALEIGH Vice presidential candidate Tim Walz and former President Bill Clinton traveled to Durham Thursday on the first day of early voting in North Carolina. And Clinton will be back in the Triangle on Sunday for what the campaign calls a block party in Raleigh.

Clinton said at a rally at the Community Family Life & Recreation Center at Lyon Park that former Republican President Donald Trump has "become kind of a crazy conspiracy theorist."

He contrasted vice president and Democratic nominee Kamala Harris with Trump, saying that another Trump administration is "four more years of chaos."

"Which candidate will take us forward, and which will take us back?" Clinton asked the crowd.

Walz touted his middle-class background, talked about himself and Harris both being gun owners, and said Trump "can't pass a background check."

Walz said Republicans in Congress won't stand up to Trump, urging supporters to go vote. "Who would have ever thought we'd see Bernie Sanders, Dick Cheney and Taylor Swift" all endorsing Harris, he asked, to laughter from the crowd.

He told the crowd that "the economy works best when it's fair and focuses on the middle class."

Walz, Clinton and N.C. Central University student Devin Freeman took the stage together shortly after 4 p.m. Freeman rallied the crowd, saying that Harris and Walz have a "vision for the future, one where we're all able to achieve our version of the American dream."

Clinton praised Harris for choosing Walz as her running mate as her first major action as a candidate. Clinton also made light of his own advanced age, noting that he's only two months younger than Trump.

Clinton and Trump are both 78.

Walz visits Durham

Earlier in the day, Walz recorded interviews with radio stations in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Walz' plane landed shortly after 2:30 p.m. Thursday at Raleigh-Durham International Airport, where he was greeted by a group that included state Sen. Mike Woodard of Durham and two county Democratic Party chairs, Steve Rawson of Durham County and Cassie Rice of Orange County.

Walz then stopped at a campaign field office downtown on East Chapel Hill Street, where he thanked volunteers packing supplies for Hurricane Helene relief. The Minnesota governor told the group that a disaster like Helene brings out the best in people.

The Lyon Park center is in Durham's West End. The rally was being held in the gym, with a crowd of hundreds of supporters, including local officials like Durham County Commissioner Wendy Jacobs, state Rep. Julie von Haefen and Durham City Council member Javiera Caballero. On the street outside the center, a protester held a handmade

sign that said "Ceasefire Now."

At a Winston-Salem stop later Thursday, Walz was to be joined by musical artist and activist Common, according to the campaign. Walz' airplane departed RDU around 6:30 p.m.

This marks Walz' third campaign visit to North Carolina as Harris' running mate, with the first two in Asheville and Raleigh.

The latest Quinnipiac University Poll, released Wednesday, shows Harris with just a 2-point lead over Republican nominee and Trump among likely North Carolina voters. The slim margin makes the race "too close to call," according to pollsters.

Upcoming Clinton events

Also set to be in Durham on Thursday, but not part of the campaign event, was Hillary Clinton for a long-scheduled event at the Durham Performing Arts Center. Author John Grisham was scheduled to talk with Clinton on stage about a wide range of topics. Clinton was the Democratic nominee for president in 2016 and former secretary of state and U.S. senator from New York.

In Bill Clinton's rally speech, he defended his wife over Trump's focus on her emails during the 2016 presidential campaign. At one point during his speech, someone in the crowd yelled out, "We love Hillary!"

Bill Clinton will move on to a Harris-Walz campaign bus tour of Eastern North Carolina, with stops on Friday and Saturday in Wilmington, Fayetteville, Wilson and Greenville. On Sunday, he'll be at a get-out-the-vote event in Rocky Mount with Nash County Democrats, then come to Raleigh.

The Raleigh event on Sunday, with no location or time announced yet, will be a block party with local Democratic leaders.

On Monday, Trump will hold a campaign event in Greenville.

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App State band went from playing dorms to NC arenas

October 20, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Théoden Janes; Staff Writer | Section: Living | 2613 Words

Page: 1C OpenURL Link

It's been 10 years since Rachael McKinney looked the members of Rainbow Kitten Surprise in the eyes and - as the Boone-based indie folk-rock band's brand-new booking agent at the time - gave them the bad news:

"We have to change this name," McKinney, then an Appalachian State University senior, told the group consisting of five musical artists who'd joined forces after meeting as freshmen living on campus in Bowie Hall. "It's not happening. We cannot do this. No one's gonna take us seriously.

"We have to change it."

Then they gave her some bad news right back: "It's too late," one of them replied, matter-of-factly. "People already know us too well for us to change the name."

A decade later, it is happening. They can do this. Save for the people who just haven't been paying attention, the vast majority of the music industry - and the thoughtful music fans who appreciate their emotionally raw lyrics - are taking RKS plenty seriously.

And on Oct. 25 and 26, the Mountaineers-turned-Nashvillians-turned darlings of major festivals like Bonnaroo and Lollapalooza will perform energetic back-to-back concerts at Spectrum Center in Charlotte and Lenovo Center in Raleigh, the largest indoor venues they've ever headlined in their former home state.

McKinney, who has been with the band ever since and is now its tour manager, can't help but laugh at memories of that debate, given how everything panned out for lead singer Ela Melo, guitarists Darrick "Bozzy" Keller and Ethan Goodpaster, and drummer Jess Haney.

"I appreciated that confidence in it, but I also just thought it was silly," she says of their original discussion about the name. "And looking back, I was wrong.

"But then you have bands like, what, Diarrhea Planet, and it's like, At least we didn't have that name. I love them, don't get me wrong. But at least we didn't pick that name."

Over the summer, we spoke to McKinney, Melo, Keller, Goodpaster; people who booked them in Boone; and multiple members of their inner circle back at App State, including - in his first mainstream-media interview ever - the man who came up with the name while high on morphine.

Those conversations (lightly edited for clarity and brevity) make up our exclusive oral history of Rainbow Kitten Surprise.

Note: All interviews for this story were completed prior to Hurricane Helene's arrival in Western North Carolina in late September. After the storm, Rainbow Kitten Surprise posted the following message on its Facebook page: "We're heartbroken to see the devastation left behind by Hurricane Helene. Our beloved home of North Carolina needs our help right now." The band listed a variety of ways its fans could help victims. And this month, RKS pledged to donate \$50,000 raised through its fall concert-ticket sales to recovery efforts related to Helene.

'Hanging out, smoking cigarettes, playing songs'

As App State freshmen, Melo, Keller, Goodpaster, Haney, and Charlie Holt (the band's original bassist, who parted ways with RKS last winter) all were assigned to the old Bowie Hall dorm. The only ones who knew each other prior to college were Goodpaster and Haney, fellow Robbinsville, N.C. natives who throughout high school were in multiple bands together that mostly just played in Haney's basement.

Ela Melo: I had a lot of things on the list of what I wanted to do with my life, but I wasn't quite sure about any of it. One thing that I did know is I did want to make music that people could get down to, people enjoyed. I had been doing that for years already, in my hometown of Albemarle, just chilling, had a band with some friends there. That didn't pan out. So I came onto the campus with a mantra, almost.

Darrick "Bozzy" Keller: I was definitely a shy kid growing up. But I remember going in for the first week of college and being like, Man, this feels like summer camp. This is never gonna end. I really stepped out of my comfort zone and would try to take my guitar and go jam with people and make friends. ...

Ethan Goodpaster: When I wasn't going to class, I was playing guitar, finding someone to play something with. There was a lot of jamming happening in our dorm.

Melo: College was a magical time, at least for me. It was like Bonnaroo or something - it's just, like, serendipity everywhere. You end up running into people and stuff, and forming relationships really quickly.

Keller: I knew Ela was a musician, but she was so humble about everything. ... She had seen me at an open-mic night play a couple original songs. Later that night, I bumped into her, and she was like, "Can I show you a song I wrote?" She showed me "All That and More (Sailboat)." And I was just like, "Dude, you have to get this out into the world. This is the best song I've ever heard in my life."

Melo: I played it one time, and he went and got his guitar. He was like, "Show me what you're playing. I want to play it with you." But Bozz was writing, too. So after, he was like, "Well, check my stuff out."

Matthew Clonch, who lived in the dorm and became part of their inner circle: Then they started playing together just for fun.

Ethan Goodpaster: Ela and Bozz were always sitting out there in front of Bowie or in the lobby playing, singing Modest Mouse songs, or Bon Iver songs, things like that.

Clonch: And the first show they ever did was an open-mic night at the college. They were just like, "Hey, this could be fun. We should do it."

Keller: That was the birth of RKS.

'What do you think it should be called?'

It was October of the fall semester of their freshman year when Melo and Keller decided to sign up as an acoustic-guitar duo for the open-mic night hosted at Crossroads Coffee House at the Student Union on campus. But they needed to register with the name of their act - and they didn't have one.

Keller: Maybe a week or so before, our friend Noah Toomey got meningitis right after coming back from fall break. And he was really, really sick.

Noah Toomey: It progressed to a point that Matt - my roommate freshman year - literally had to carry me down the stairs of our dorm to get into a friend's car to get me to the hospital. I'm completely out of it. Then 72 hours later I remember people coming in and out, but nothing too specific until the meds started actually working for me. That's when they came to me with the question about their open-mic night. It was Bozzy, Matt and Ela.

Keller: To see him like that, it was tough. And Ela was just like, "You can name the band. What do you think it should

be called?"

Toomey: I remember doing hand gestures, maybe? And, well, I mean, I love the internet. And there's that cat that has, like, the Pop-Tart body. It's called Nyan Cat. That's kinda what was going through my head. I'm sure I did repeat it quite a bit.

Clonch: I said, "'Rainbow Kitten Surprise?' That's ridiculous." And it was - then they did it anyway.

Keller: My initial reaction was: pretty cool. But we kept telling ourselves, "Ohhh, maybe we should change it."

Toomey, who says the only other time that he's talked about naming the band was when a friend interviewed him for a journalism class: If I could go back, it's always like, Would I have wished the name on them? Because it's a blessing and a curse. I was so morphined up at the time that it sounded like a great idea.

The open-mic night at Crossroads was a success, but after that performance, Melo and Keller focused exclusively on writing and recording music. They wanted, they say, to figure out what they were doing before getting back onto a real stage in front of real crowds. So they returned to using the dorm as their workshop.

Melo: I remember working on stuff over Thanksgiving and working on stuff for Christmas break. And then we were playing some of these songs for people in the lobby. I would write one and come down to play it for everybody, then figure out what the other parts were between me and Bozz. I was working on the mixes of stuff for months - until it was ready to release. The second I was done mixing, we just uploaded it onto Bandcamp. We put out (the three-song EP) "Mary" on May 5th of 2013. And we got a thousand streams the first night.

We knew then; it was like, "Dude, we released this at 10 o'clock at night, and we have a thousand streams overnight." We thought that was success at that point.

Toomey: But there's no way that even someone not in that state could have known the heights that they were gonna go to.

'Oh my God, this is actually incredible'

Melo and Keller continued writing and recording at Bowie Hall through the spring and into the summer of 2013.

Melo: Ethan would hang out sometimes, and we would play sometimes. He would bring his amp down. I played acoustic, and Bozz played acoustic, but Ethan would play electric - more, like, metal stuff. Something a little different. But Ethan can rock whatever the style is.

So we came back over summer break, going into sophomore year, and we're like, "OK, we gotta play some shows or something. But we need more people, 'cause we don't have enough hands for all these parts." We tracked Ethan down, and had him do kind of an audition. He learned all the songs the night before, but he knew 'em. It was just like, "All right, you're in the band, dude."

Keller: And we were working on the album "Seven" - which, musically, was just a bigger sound.

Goodpaster: So eventually they asked to borrow my roommate's cajón to record some drums on it. My roommate was actually Jess (who would become the band's drummer). Then, when we were looking for a drummer, we actually auditioned one guy before Jess. But he wasn't the fit. So I was like, "Hey, my roommate plays drums a little bit, played drums in band in high school. We should see if he wants to."

Keller: We added them during the process of Ela recording and writing that album. So by the time that album released, we were a full-band kind of thing.

Goodpaster: But Jess had only agreed to play one show with us.

That one show was at the old Galileo's bar and cafe in Boone, on Oct. 26, 2013.

Keller: When we first started, I booked all the shows. I was our agent, and Ethan did a lot of the social media and business management. It was very DIY and self-sufficient. We did everything ourselves.

Mark Dixon, former owner of now-closed Galileo's in Boone: I think, at first, everybody was like, "Rainbow Kitten Surprise? What is this? Are they serious?" But they took their music more seriously than their name, I guess. ...

When you're booking local groups like that, you want bands that are willing to put themselves out there and promote, and call everybody they know, and get everybody to come in. And it was clear very early on that they were good at promoting themselves. And then it became apparent real quick - 'cause we were a very small room - that they were gonna have to move on to a bigger room.

Goodpaster: And Jess - even though he said, "I'll just do one show" - kept playing with us.

Rachael McKinney, who would become their booking agent and eventually their tour manager: So they did that, then they played Espresso News, another coffee shop, in December 2013. Then they did a Beech Mountain show, a Montreat College thing, Appalachian Mountain Brewery. In June 2014, they did VH1's (reality-competition show) "Make A Band Famous," then Galileo's again .

The first time I ever even heard of them was when I was on the APPS (Appalachian Popular Programming Society) Council. We were looking for openers for a show with Hunter Hunted back in 2014. And I was such a judgmental little hipster college kid. I was like, Rainbow Kitten Surprise, what a terrible name. This is gonna be some dumb punk band. Then I heard the music - and I was like, Oh my God, this is actually incredible.

'They had the audience in their hip pocket'

From there - with bassist Charlie Holt having been added to the mix by Melo, Keller, Goodpaster and Haney - Rainbow Kitten Surprise continued turning heads on campus. After the fivesome opened for Hunter Hunted in November 2014 at App State's storied Legends nightclub, that winter the band signed with the university's student-run record label, Split Rail Records. In March 2015 it played for 300-plus concertgoers on "the small stage" at Legends; then in August, RKS booked "the big stage" - and drew a sellout crowd of 950.

Goodpaster: We started getting added to these big official playlists on Spotify, and our streaming started getting more popular and more popular. But I'd say - for me, at least - when I was like, Okay, this is cool, this could be a thing was when we sold out Legends.

Keller: That was definitely a milestone for us, 'cause in the beginning, Ela and I would walk to the little gas station beside Legends to get cigarettes. And we would just look up at the sign and be like, "Dude, wouldn't it be sick if we played there?"

Randy Kelly, the now-retired longtime manager of Legends: I was so surprised - and happily so - that at their shows, everybody in the audience knew the lyrics to their songs.

Matthew Clonch, their former dorm-mate, who would become their stage manager and to this day is one of Melo's best friends: I remember that at that time, they played an encore. Then they were called for another encore - and they didn't have any more songs to play. So they just played one they'd already played, 'cause they didn't know what else to do. It was a cover of "Float On" by Modest Mouse.

McKinney: It's that whole "when luck meets skill meets opportunity." And truly - I do believe this in my heart - I think Boone is a very, very special place. It's a different feeling when it comes to music than any other place that I've been. And the fans - literally, you have one person that's listening to RKS. They're telling everyone about it. They're not keeping that to themselves. It was word-of-mouth.

And after selling out Legends and showing those videos on social media, the band kind of just, like, exploded.

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Rainbow Kitten Surprise's 'Love Hate Music Box Tour'

When: 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 25, at Spectrum Center, 333 E. Trade St. in Charlotte; and 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 26, at Lenovo Center, 1400 Edwards Mill Road in Raleigh.

Tickets: \$45 and up in Charlotte and \$40 and up in Raleigh, at ticketmaster.com. (\$1 per ticket goes towards supporting organizations delivering mental health treatment and access to care.)

Also: Rainbow Kitten Surprise and opening act The Brook & The Bluff are broadcasting their shows in Charlotte and Raleigh on Nugs.net as a pay-per-view event, with net proceeds going to the PLUS1 Rapid Relief Fund. Details at bit.ly/3Nmyj2F.

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HUB OF HOPE

October 20, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Hub Of Hope | 824 Words OpenURL Link

In ever lost power during Hurricane Helene. When friends and family called me about the hurricane, I had to tell them I was extremely lucky.

The storm was bad. A lot of North Carolinians lost family and friends, their home, their cherished belongings, their pets. Some saw their real estate literally washed away.

But I can't claim any of those stories.

I've tried to imagine the terror of seeing a wall of water crashing toward me, sweeping away my home and neighbors, pets, virtually everything I own.

Being a near miss — or even a far miss — leaves its mark. Last week a Facebooker from Louisiana said she understood. She lived through Katrina, and could relate to the relief of being spared, but, at the same time, the overwhelming feeling of anxiety, numbness and profound sadness.

That's how it is with trauma. It takes different forms, and in one way or another, we've all been traumatized by being so close to destruction. In the end, I don't know why we were spared and why the folks west of here were not.

Perhaps TV's Mister Rogers responded best when he explained disasters in a way kids could understand. When there are scary things in the news, he said, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping."

In the wake of Helene, ordinary people dropped everything to come to North Carolina's rescue. Men and women, young and old, helped turn Hickory into a hub of hope. Private pilots, many of them ex-military, arrived with their helicopters to make air drops to hard-hit areas. Community members rallied to organize places to bring necessary supplies and cash to support the effort.

On my way to the collection point in the parking lot of Appalachian State University in Hickory, I found myself behind a horse trailer and a fl atbed. On the fl atbed was a generator and power tools. In the trailer were cases of bottled water, packages of diapers, toilet paper and more. Obviously, he was on a relief mission. Had I not been caught by a traffic light I would have given the driver a thumbs up.

Surely Helene will be one of those calamities by which we mark time.

Two days after Helene's wretched visit, I opened my T-shirt drawer to see, neatly folded, my shirt from Lake Lure. I remember the day I bought it. Cousin Renee was visiting from Illinois and wanted to see where "The Last of the Mohicans" was filmed. She's a Daniel Day-Lewis fan and wanted to tour the famous waterfall.

We enjoyed a sandwich lunch, poked around the Lake Lure Inn, and browsed the gift shop.

Later, we took the boat ride of the lake with its narration of how the lake was formed in Hickory Nut Gorge into a place where "summer" is a verb. The Morse family, who founded Carolina Mountain Power Company, paid to build a dam on the Broad River to create the lake back in 1927.

Our boat captain indulged us in movie lore, too, including spots used to shoot "Dirty Dancing," the film that made stars of Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey. We drifted past Firefl y Cove and the stone steps where Jennifer Grey practiced her dance steps in cutoff shorts.

It's not that I have spent that much time at Lake Lure, but I've made enough visits to envy those who have. It had cottagey surroundings, stunning views, and laid-back ambiance. It was a place lost in time, a poignant reminder of a time and place that's been erased.

Lake Lure sprouted up as a tourist attraction with a striped awning vibe. The affuent built lakeside cottages with screened porches and walls of windows. They pondered the looking glass water and lore about the outline of the mountain ridge that looks like a sleeping lady.

My first visit to Lake Lure was about 30 years ago, when I attended a conference at the Inn. I remember imagining how the hotel would have appeared during the Gatsby era. In fact, Gatsby's creator, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and wife Zelda stayed there back in the day.

A recent attraction was the Flowering Bridge. When it became known that the state would decommission the 1925 bridge, a group of citizens with green thumbs urged the structure to be saved and used as a garden space. They called it the Flowering Bridge. They say it attracted as many as 18,000 visitors a year.

Two years ago, the garden was expanded for pet owners and their furry friends to snatch a chewable from the Doggie Stick Library and enjoy a drink of water. Pet owners, wracked in grief, would visit the Rainbow Bridge, and pay tribute to departed pets, placing collars on the bannisters. People came from far and wide to memorialize pets that had passed on.

No one could imagine that a monster storm could churn its way northward and demolish the Flower Bridge, much less Lake Lure itself.

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