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TRAVIS LONG tlong@newsobserver.com Residents and volunteers clean up on Oct. 1 after the French Broad River flooded downtown Marshall. The Madison County town is about 25 miles northwest of

Marshall residents dig out of the mud

They know Helene has forever changed their NC town

BY RYAN OEHRLI

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Asheville.

Fran Randall peered into a comic book and board game store in down-

town Marshall. "This is the kind of business we never thought we'd have," he said, studying the dam-



Fran Randall

age inside. Randall, 61, is a sixthgeneration native of Marshall, a Madison County town with fewer than

1,000 people. He grew up

on a hill just over down-

town, which had bloomed

since 2008 or so into an "artsy" sort of place, he said. There was a bike shop, a bar with live music, art galleries and even a

tattoo parlor. But the old Western North Carolina character was still there, like a place

to buy bib overalls. "It's kind of weird being in that generation that saw old and new," he said Tuesday. "Now, I'm about to see what's next."

Downtown Marshall lies between cliffs and the French Broad River. Like other areas on that river, it was devastated by Helene last week. Police and barricades blocked every way into downtown Tuesday morning. But shop owners, their friends and family met up.

The job was big but straightforward: dig out mud that caked the streets and

buildings. Help for Western North Carolina has come from local law enforcement, the federal government and volunteers. Recovery for some towns will

take a long time, though. Randall donned a fishing hat and a shovel. As he walked along the muddy road, he checked in on friends and

neighbors. Others downtown shared their stories with him and a reporter.

Jaime Perkins talked about putting up barricades around a church before

the storm. Jackson Massey was shoveling mud out of his grandparents' shop on his 15th birthday; he'd get his learner's permit to drive soon, his grandfather

Connie Molland shared some good news: Most of the art in Flow Gallery

survived. Randall's town will change more after Helene, he knows. There's some melancholy in knowing that. But then again, that's just the way it is. New people will come in. The collective memory won't hold onto the damage Marshall saw in September 2024.

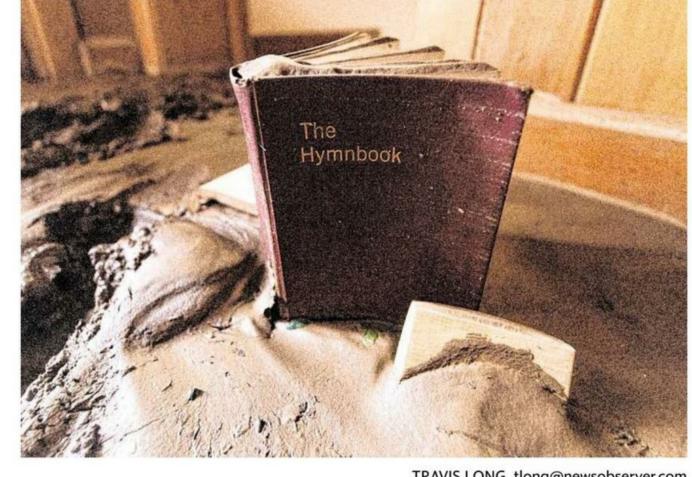
"The buildings will be gone, a lot of them," he said. "But new things will come in. It'll be a further turn of the page, of the old generation of people that's been here to a new generation."



Downtown Marshall, photographed Oct. 1, lies between cliffs and the French Broad River. After Helene, residents came together to dig out mud that caked the streets and buildings.



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TRAVIS LONG tlong@newsobserver.com Mud covers the interior of Marshall Presbyterian Church in



Ken Garrison, left, and Jacob Golden of Marshall help clean up

downtown.

Joe Freeman of Marshall helps clean up downtown.



lan Downes strums his guitar while taking a brief break from cleaning up in downtown Marshall. The Madison County town has fewer than 1,000 people.

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