

Rockwell ends under budget on new public works building, commits savings to other projects

October 16, 2024 | Salisbury Post (NC) Author: Robert Sullivan | Section: News | 692 Words OpenURL Link

Rockwell ends under budget on new public works building, commits savings to other projects

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By Robert Sullivan

ROCKWELL — The Rockwell Public Works Department came in significantly under its budget for the construction of a new building, and on Monday the aldermen approved allowing the department to use some of the savings to update a 50-year-old public works building.

Public Works Director Chris Renfrow said that the windfall partly came because the building permits received an exempt status from the county, which meant that certain engineering requirements did not apply.

"We did come in significantly under our line item on the building repairs. The new building line item was \$125,000. We ended up spending, with the gravel and the building so far, about \$86,000, so we came in a good bit under. What I'm asking for tonight is to be able to appropriate some of the funds that are left in that line item to get our public works building up to snuff," said Renfrow.

Renfrow said that the main issue with the building currently is that the roof is leaking, due to issues resulting from the age of the building. He said that the fiberglass skylight has stress fractures that causes it to leak, the roof has rusted in many places and the gutters are attached to that roof and so would have to be removed and replaced. The building is currently used to house supplies that the department needs to keep dry, said Renfrow.

Renfrow asked for and received approval from the aldermen to appropriate approximately \$15,000 from the line item for roofing repairs, approximately \$4,200 for painting and approximately \$3,100 for new gutter installation. That leaves the line item with approximately \$15,000, which Renfrow said would go towards improvements in the town's American Legion building, specifically renovating the kitchen.

In other news from the Rockwell Board of Aldermen meeting:

- * The aldermen approved moving a large percentage of their fund balance and Powell Bill funding from a savings account to the North Carolina Capital Management Trust, which is a portfolio only accessible by local government entities. Town Clerk Marlene Dunn, who is also the town finance office, said that utilizing the trust would allow the town to earn more in interest while still keeping the funds accessible on a short-term basis.
- * Renfrow said that the town had received compliments from residents on the recently-completed bathroom stalls at the town park.
- * Police Chief Cody Trexler detailed the police department's efforts in western North Carolina in the wake of Hurricane Helene. He said that the department had four personnel stationed at the water depot in Fairview before being stationed in Hickory to provide security to a medical facility there.
- * Trexler said that North Carolina Wildlife had reached out to the town about allowing an urban archery season in the Rockwell limits, which caused him to look into the town's discharge of weapons ordinance and note that it was outdated. Currently, the ordinance forbids the firing of "bean shooters," pop guns or slingshots among dangerous weapons such as firearms or bows. Trexler said that he would be looking into both the urban archery and weapons

ordinance.

- * Aldermen Dillon Brewer gave an update on the town's most recent mural, which has been begun on the side of the Dimensions Dance Studio building and should be completed within the next two weeks.
- * Brewer reported that the town's new website is live at townofrockwell.com. He said that once the website is fully updated and the town is satisfied with it, the old website at rockwellnc.gov will be taken down and the new page will use that url.
- * The aldermen received information that the NC Department of Transportation Division 9, which contains Rowan County, has committed \$119 million over the division's budget to projects and the negative is expected to grow as western North Carolina's restoration needs are revealed. Brewer said that due to the division's funding deficit, he believed that the US 52 bypass project would likely not be realistic for at least a decade.
- * Mayor Chuck Bowman read a proclamation recognizing October 2024 as nation substance abuse prevention month.

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Fundraising could affect FEMA payouts - Crowdfunding benefits may not be duplicated

October 16, 2024 \mid Star, The (Shelby, NC) Author: Lianna Norman; USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA Section: News 891 Words Page: A5

OpenURL Link

For those who lost their homes or belongings as a result of Hurricane Milton or Hurricane Helene, rebuilding and replacing can be daunting.

And there are plenty of rumors flying around about FEMA disaster assistance, which can add a whole other layer of confusion on top of the stress of rebuilding.

Some people affected by hurricanes have made or are considering making a GoFundMe or online fundraiser to help pay for the cost of any damages they have to their home or property. They might be wondering if that interferes with their FEMA eligibility.

The answer: It might. If a person uses crowdfunding or GoFundMe, it isn't likely that they'll be able to receive disaster assistance from FEMA. However, there's still a chance.

According to FEMA's site for mitigating rumors in the wake of Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton, FEMA cannot duplicate benefits or funds disaster victims receive from another source. But it depends on the situation.

"If you receive money from a GoFundMe page for a specific disaster-related expense – such as home repairs, funeral expenses or other emergency needs – you may not be able to receive FEMA aid for the same expense," FEMA's website says.

"For example, if you receive donations to clean up storm damage to your home, FEMA may not be able to also grant you financial assistance for home clean up."

FEMA adds, "We encourage all survivors to apply for assistance regardless so we can review your specific case."

There are a wide variety of post-disaster needs that FEMA can help cover – like temporary housing, purchasing a generator or covering costs related to funerals and reburials caused by a storm. Here's a nonexhaustive list of what FEMA money may be used for, provided by the Asheville Citizen Times.

Home repairs

General repairs: Even if there was a preexisting issue with a home, if it receives major damage from Milton, FEMA can provide funds to repair.

Accessibility: Whether a person has a preexisting disability and the accessibility features of their home were damaged, or they suffer a disability caused by Milton, FEMA can fund the repair or installation of features such as ramps, grab bars, paved paths and more.

Privately owned roads, bridges, docks: FEMA will fund these repairs if they are the only access to the home.

Replacement: "Limited funds may be available under rare conditions to replace a disaster-destroyed home," as per the FEMA website.

Housing expenses

Direct temporary housing: Temporary housing units, multi-family lease and repair or direct lease are available to those who have been displaced by flooding.

Displacement: This money helps those displaced by flooding seek immediate housing needs while looking for a longer-term rental.

Personal property: These funds are allocated for replacing essentials lost in flooding, such as kitchen appliances, computers and furnishings, as well as books, uniforms and tools required for school or work.

Moving and storage expenses: If those affected by a disaster wish to store their possessions in a safe place like a storage unit while looking for a rental property, FEMA may assist.

Group flood insurance: If a home suffered flood damage in a Special Flood Hazard Area, FEMA can purchase a group flood insurance policy on the homeowner's behalf. This policy gives three years of coverage.

Clean and sanitize: This pays for minor damages to a home if the FEMA inspector decides that the home remains livable.

Miscellaneous

Serious needs: Funds cover immediate needs like water, food, first aid, prescriptions, infant formula, breastfeeding equipment, diapers, personal hygiene items and fuel.

Funeral: FEMA can assist with payments for funerals and reburials.

Transport: Repairs for a personal vehicle, if there is no other feasible way to get around.

Child care: FEMA can help with new child care expenses caused by the disaster.

It's important to note that "some disaster aid does not have to be paid back, while other types of help may come in the form of loans. The FEMA representative will explain the details to you when you call," FEMA says.

FEMA money can't be used to go to the movies or buy a lottery ticket. FEMA recommends that disaster survivors keep their Hurricane Helene- or Hurricane Milton-related receipts for about three years "to show how you spent FEMA grants and document how your disaster funds were used."

For people who want to use crowdfunding, GoFundMe has set up a general fundraiser with the money going to people impacted by any hurricane. GoFundMe delivers cash grants from this fundraiser directly to those impacted by domestic hurricanes.

The money goes to "verified individuals who qualify and are fundraising for themselves or on behalf of someone else. We may also provide grants to fundraisers benefiting small businesses and community relief efforts, or to vetted nonprofits coordinating long-term recovery," according to the website. Find information at gofundme.com/f/enxh8-hurricane-relief-fund.

GoFundMe also has a landing page for verified nonprofits that are supporting victims of Hurricane Milton, including Team Rubicon, Feeding Tampa Bay, The Red Cross and Americanes at gofundme.com/c/act/hurricane-milton.

Dozens of families impacted by Milton have set up their own accounts on GoFundMe to raise money. GoFundMe has a page for verified fundraisers for people asking for help with replacing and restoring their houses and belongings. Find them at gofundme.com/c/act/hurricane-relief/florida.

Contributing: Jake Allen, Indianapolis Star

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New organization provides meals in county food deserts - 'Our goal is to be a source of connection and to reach people across the foothills region'

October 16, 2024 | Star, The (Shelby, NC) Author: Rebecca Sitzes; Shelby Star | Section: News | 1022 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

Megan Murphy and Dylan Emory both have a passion for meeting food needs in the community and supporting local farmers.

Out of that passion was born the Broad River Market, a new organization that has already hosted two pop-up markets in Shelby, and is connecting people and farms.

"For me this project sort of started in my head as a student and a researcher in college and also as a farm worker," Murphy said.

Originally from Nashville, Tenn., she attended UNC Chapel Hill and while there, she got funding for a research project to study food and social movements in Appalachia.

"I went for a summer and worked on farms, and I interviewed people and talked to nonprofit leaders and I kind of came across this irony that exists in a lot of rural communities," she said. "The community has an agricultural background, plenty of beautiful farms, but the people that lived that are going hungry and can't afford the food."

Murphy said she saw this dynamic first-hand while working on a farm and almost all the produce was sold to big cities such as Charlotte and Asheville because there wasn't enough of a demand locally, and people couldn't pay the price point for a lot of the products. She said farms often exist in food deserts, and the products are marketed as luxuries.

"To me this felt like a tremendous injustice," she said.

After graduating and moving to Cleveland County for a job, she said she met Emory and discovered he had the same conviction. She said he loves native plants and growing food.

"We came together and had this vision of how are we going to address this insane irony that people can only afford food that was shipped from 2,000 miles away," she said. "We wanted to open a pay what you can grocery and that's how Broad River Market was born. We had this vision we could create a space where people could leave with whatever they need regardless of what they could afford."

The two decided to name it Broad River Market in honor of the river that runs through the county.

"Our goal is to be a source of connection and to reach people across the foothills region, and we wanted to choose a name that tied us to the land and water that farmers and communities share, that brings us together," Murphy said.

Emory said he doesn't have a background in nonprofit work, but he's always loved growing food and his family always had a garden growing up, something he has continued every year.

When he met Murphy and found out about her work in food sovereignty and activism they started talking about starting a community farm and ways of getting food to people.

"It culminated in this." he said.

Emory said he grew up in Grover and still lives there. He said it is a food desert, and he remembers having to drive 15 minutes to get to the grocery store. As he's gotten older, he's realized not everyone has reliable transportation and finding ways to make food more accessible has become something he is passionate about.

Murphy said they have filed for their 501c3 with the state and are waiting on their nonprofit status.

Broad River Market held its first food giveaway shortly after Hurricane Helene wreaked havoc across the region.

Murphy said they were inspired to take action a little sooner than anticipated following the storm.

Some people missed work, children who relied on school lunches were out of school for a week, and families had to throw out groceries following the county-wide power outages creating additional hardships for people who were already vulnerable to hunger.

Broad River Market hosted a pop-up event at Hoyle Park on Jefferson Street in Shelby last week and gave out hot meals.

"It felt so important to us to show up even if we didn't feel quite ready," Murphy said. "We gave away 200 portions of food in addition to coolers of milk, lunchmeat, cheese, a table of fresh produce. We had baked bread that was donated by Open Hearts Bakery. We're just going to keep showing up and hopefully build toward that vision."

Emory emphasized what Murphy said.

"We had already been laying the ground work and looking to get started this fall, and we said now is the time," he said. "We didn't want to wait any longer."

He said they made the market happen in about three days.

"A lot of people were super excited to get meals and asked to bring some home. Folks came from the rescue mission close by. We had milk and eggs, deli meats and cheeses, and people were lighting up when they saw the groceries," he said.

Murphy said they have been working with Newgrass, which has provided kitchen space and helped them make meals to give away.

"We were able to secure some donations and purchase food that was then prepared by Newgrass kitchen staff," she said. "People were just really relieved that we were there."

Monday afternoon, Broad River Market held its second pop-up event at Hoyle Park and gave away sandwiches, sides, fruits, vegetables and other supplies.

Emory said a big part of the project is not only getting fresh food and produce to people who need it, but also supporting small farms by purchasing food from local farmers at cost. Emory said they have already purchased from one local farm for their pop-up events and are talking to others to get more on board.

He said they have future markets planned and intend to move around to different locations and hit every food desert in the county.

Murphy said they're still figuring things out as they go, but they have big goals. In order to reach those goals, they need community support and community buy-in.

For more information on Broad River Market and how to support them, find them on Instagram, Facebook or visit their website at broadrivermarket.org.

Reach reporter Rebecca Sitzes at rsitzes@gannett.com.

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'This is my shot': Wilmington comic hopes for viral boost to politically edgy new special

October 16, 2024 | StarNews (Wilmington, NC) Author: John Staton, Wilmington StarNews| Section: Entertainment | 868 Words OpenURL Link

A year ago, touring Wilmington comic Cliff Cash filmed an hour-long comedy special in front of a sold-out crowd at historic Thalian Hall downtown.

Now, the special, titled "The Long Road," is ready to see the light of day. It will premiere Oct. 20 as part of a ticketed event at the Brooklyn Arts Center in Wilmington, with half of proceeds going to relief efforts in Western North Carolina, which is recovering from devastation caused by Hurricane Helene.

After the premiere, according to a news release from Wilmington's Lighthouse Films, which produced the special under the direction of Lighthouse owner Brad Walker, "The Long Road" will be released on Cash's YouTube channel. On Nov. 3, an audio album of the special will be released on iTunes, Spotify and other streaming services by Los Angeles comedy label Ghost Runner Records.

"After extensive discussions with aggregators, distributors and industry veterans, we have decided to take a more unconventional approach to distributing this special," reads the Lighthouse release. "We will be independently launching the comedy special, allowing us to have full control over the narrative, rights and accessibility to the content."

Cash, who will be one of if not the only Wilmington-based comic to have released a professionally produced, hour-long comedy special, a mark of accomplishment in the industry, said he had hoped for the special to find a home on a major platform like Netflix.

"I feel great about the product, but I'd be lying if I didn't say that I'm bummed it didn't land on a major platform," Cash said. "I think it's good enough. ... I'm thrilled, happier than I could imagine with the job that Lighthouse did."

Lighthouse Films: How a Wilmington production company shot a documentary with comic and actor Kevin Hart

The 72-minute special starts with a two-minute intro set to the music of Wilmington musician Sean Thomas Gerard with Cash living out of the van he's driven some 800,000 miles while touring around the country.

By turns political, emotional and philosophical, Cash comes across like part stand-up comic, part motivational speaker.

Unapologetically political from the get-go, Cash gets the crowd in an uproar by using a Southern redneck accent to roast conservative politicians while also mocking racism, homophobia and transphobia, saying at one point, "I don't know if they're more scared of drag queen story hour because of the drag queens or the books."

He also gets silly, riffing on the sanitary conditions of public bathrooms or musing about how every culture around the world has its own version of his favorite salad dressing, ranch.

Cash is adept at steering seamlessly from a comic story about coming home drunk as teenager into a highly emotional one, getting choked up as he talks about how his older sister coming out as gay to him, and then to his conservative, religious parents years later, changed their family.

Cash, whose brother is Wilmington novelist Wiley Cash, is frank about the struggles he's faced, riffing on how his ex-wife was unfaithful to him and how he lost his marriage, dog, business and his late father over the course of a year, saying "I'm glad I failed, and I'm glad my wife cheated," because his life is better now than it was then. Going

through hard times, he tells the audience, "makes you better if you let it."

He also pokes fun at himself, saying that "I don't live with my mom" even if "all my stuff is there."

Cash, who's got a decent if modest following on social media (32,000 on Instagram), said he was told by an agent for big-name comedians that while his special's quality is good enough for a service like Netflix, specials on the big streamers tend to go with comics who have huge social media numbers.

"If I had a million followers on TikTok, Netflix would've picked it up," Cash said.

Cash said he's been meeting with potential comedy agents and managers, and working with a social media team in hopes of making reels of his special go viral in the run-up to the election.

"This is my shot. This is my moment," Cash said. "Something has to set you apart, and for me I want it to be the material."

As for his special's strong social and political slant, "I decided long ago that if was going to do this, I wanted to say something," he said. "I wouldn't have been doing this for 13 years if it was all just wiener jokes."

The live premiere, he said, is not only a chance for folks to see the special on the big screen, but also a way to raise money for Hurricane Helene relief in Western North Carolina, where Cash is from, while allowing Lighthouse "to recoup some of that cost" of filming the special.

"They took a chance on me and so far it hasn't paid dividends," Cash joked.

The comic said he's hopeful the special makes a big, election-season splash. But even if it doesn't, "I'll just keep plugging away."

Want to go?

- * What: "Cliff Cash: The Long Road" premiere
- * When: 6 p.m. doors, 7:30 p.m. screening, Sunday, Oct. 20. Audio album of "The Long Road" available on iTunes, Spotify and elsewhere starting Nov. 3.
- * Where: Brooklyn Arts Center, 516 N. Fourth St., Wilmington
- * Details: Tickets are \$35 and \$75; BrooklynArtsNC.com

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BRIEFLY

October 16, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Briefly | 258 Words OpenURL Link

US MILITARY: The Pentagon announced Tuesday more than 800 military personnel have seen their service records upgraded to honorable discharges after previously being kicked out of the military under its former "don't ask, don't tell" sexual orientation policy.

LISTERIA OUTBREAK: U.S. Agriculture Department officials have launched an internal investigation into how the agency handled reports of serious problems at a Boar's Head deli meat plant tied to a listeria outbreak that has killed at least 10 people and hospitalized nearly 50 in 19 states since May, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal said Tuesday.

OHIO VOTING: The Justice Department will send election monitors to Ohio's Portage County, where Republican Sheriff Bruce Zuchowski has been accused of intimidating voters. Last month, he said people with Kamala Harris yard signs should have their addresses written down so immigrants can be sent to live with them if the Democrat wins the presidency.

UNIONS: The number of petitions by workers to have union representation has doubled during President Joe Biden's administration, according to figures released Tuesday by the National Labor Relations Board.

FEMA THREATS: Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Criswell said Tuesday that FEMA personnel have resumed door-to door visits as part of Hurricane Helene-recovery work in North Carolina, an effort suspended amid reports they could be targeted by militia.

HAITI: The second-in-command of the Kraze Baryè gang — one of Haiti's most powerful gangs — was injured in a shootout with Haitian and Kenyan police in their first major incursion into gang-controlled territory since a U.N.-backed mission began earlier this year, police said Tuesday.

Associated Press

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Craven Arts Council to host artists, musicians, relief fundraiser

October 16, 2024 | Sun Journal (New Bern, NC) Author: Caramia Valentin The Sun Journal | Section: News | 761 Words OpenURL Link

The Craven Arts Council and Gallery announced its events and gallery options for November, including photos of North Carolina's beauty, a performance from The Bonafides and more.

Artwork from Donna Hodgins' Carolina Blues exhibit and Naida Koraly's exhibit, Joining Eve's Journey - Stepping on the Snake, will hang in the gallery.

The Bonafides will remember Rock and Roll Hall of Fame member Jerry Garcia with a performance of some of Garcia's greatest songs.

Additionally, the Craven Arts Council announced that they will be using the Craven Artist Relief Fund to help friends in the arts who were affected by Hurricane Helene.

Find out more about the upcoming events and how to donate to artists in western North Carolina.

Carolina Blues in the Director's Gallery

For November, the Craven Arts Council and Gallery will present Carolina Blues in the Director's Gallery, showcasing a photographic journey through North Carolina.

This exhibition is an anthology by Donna Hodgins, in which she exhibits original photography of North Carolina's landscapes, nature, and still life.

The collection highlights the region's beauty and reflects Hodgins' artistic evolution.

The opening reception at the Bank of the Arts, 317 Middle St., will be on Nov. 8 at Artwalk from 5-8 p.m.

The Craven Arts Council and Gallery is free and open to the public Tuesday-Saturday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Little Talks with a local fabric artist

The gallery will present Little Talks by Naida Koraly, a local fabric artist, on Nov. 9 at the Bank of the Arts.

Koraly's upcoming exhibition, Eve's Journey - Stepping on the Snake, will be featured in the Main Gallery throughout November and December.

Her exhibit is a collection of 38 originally designed and stitched fabric artworks focusing on the eyes of women throughout history. Each artwork includes women from different countries, cultures, and religions.

Koraly will cover her latest exhibition, creative process, and more at Little Talks on Nov. 9 from 2-3 p.m. Wine and other light refreshments will be provided.

Tickets are \$10 for Craven Arts Council and Gallery members and \$15 for non-members. Tickets can be purchased at the Bank of the Arts, online at cravenarts.org or over the phone at 252-638-2577.

'At the Gallery: Jerry Garcia' performed by local musicians

The Craven Arts Council and Gallery will present "At the Gallery: Jerry Garcia," performed by The Bonafides on Nov. 16 at the Bank of the Arts.

Doors will open at 6 p.m., with a pre-concert talk beginning at 6:30 p.m.

Born and raised in San Francisco, Jerome "Jerry" Garcia was a musical prodigy of the 1960s.

Garcia was introduced to the open-tuning style by his stepfather at age 15, and he began his musical career three years later by performing with local artists in the Bay Area.

Known as a principal songwriter, lead guitarist, and vocalist for the Grateful Dead and Jerry Garcia Band, he was known for his often improvised guitar riffs.

Garcia experimented with folk, bluegrass, electronic music, old-timey ballads, country, and reggae throughout his 30-year career. Garcia was introduced into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of the Grateful Dead one year before his passing in 1995.

The Bonafides are made up of nine friends based out of New Bern. Their musical tastes range far and wide with acoustic and electric guitars, mandolin, fiddle, bass, drums, banjo, and other instruments.

Tickets for the show are \$20 for gallery members and \$25 for non-members. Tickets are available in person at the Bank of the Arts or over the phone at 252-639-2577.

Western North Carolina relief fundraiser

In the wake of Hurricane Helene and its effect on western North Carolina, the Craven Arts Council and Gallery will contribute half of their Artist Relief Fund to the North Carolina Arts Foundation's Disaster Relief Fund.

In addition, the Craven Arts Council will donate half of all contributions made to their Craven Artist Relief Fund between Oct. 1 and Dec. 13.

Craven Arts Council officials said they are making the contributions to help support artists and organizations affected by the natural disaster.

The Craven Artist Relief Fund was created in the aftermath of Hurricane Florence and the destruction it caused in eastern North Carolina. The goal of the fund is to help artists reestablish their lives and their artistic practice following the wake of a natural disaster.

"As western North Carolina seeks to rebuild, we hope our contribution can help re-establish and provide support for our colleagues and friends in the arts, and we hope our community will join us," said Jonathan Burger, executive director of the Craven Arts Council and Gallery.

Donations to the Craven Artist Relief Fund can be made at the Bank of the Arts, 317 Middle St., over the phone at 252-638-2577, or online at www.cravenarts.org/craven-artist-relief-fund.

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Vice President Harris campaigns in Greenville

October 16, 2024 | Sun Journal (New Bern, NC) Author: Janet Conner-Knox Sun Journal correspondent | Section: Local | 980 Words OpenURL Link

GREENVILLE — Marsha Lyndell and Shenelle Howard met each other in the long winding line, waiting to get into Minges Coliseum on the East Carolina University campus to see Vice President Kamala Harris Sunday afternoon.

The venue, which has 8,000 seats, was full and there were more people than seats.

People got in line as early as 10:30 a.m. Harris spoke for 24 minutes around 4:20 p.m. But those who came did not seem to mind waiting for hours and they sang and danced as they waited.

Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, spent much of the weekend talking to North Carolina residents about her plans for the country, if she is elected president. North Carolina is one of seven states that have almost equal support from both parties, making them battleground or swing states. Harris and former President Donald Trump have concentrated a lot of their attention on these states, campaigning heavily as Election Day approaches a few weeks away.

It turns out, both Lyndell and Howard wanted to hear Harris speak so they could, hopefully, figure out who to vote for in the November election.

Lyndell, a lifelong Republican, voted for Trump the first time he ran, in 2016. She voted for Biden in 2020 and is unsure what to do this time around.

"I am not happy with Republicans and the things they are willing to say. I don't know when my party got so extreme in their views. No decency," she said. "I am not happy with Democrats, either. I just don't know what to do."

Howard, a lifelong Democrat, said she no longer believes Democrats will keep their promises.

"There are heads of households here who still make \$8 an hour and have the same burdens anybody else has, but not enough money to live," she said. "There is no housing for the working poor and many of them are African-American women. Nobody speaks to us, but they want our vote."

If they do not hear what they need, both Lyndell and Howard say they may not vote for anyone for president but will vote on the rest of the candidates down the ticket. For example, both favor Democrat Josh Stein over Republican Mark Robinson in the governor's race.

It is the undecided voter like Lyndell and Howard that can turn North Carolina and other swing states either blue or red.

As Harris spoke, she began by talking about how the damage from recent hurricanes is a nonpartisan issue, saying her prayers are with everyone who has been impacted by the storm.

"I am focused on those states and those officials, both Republican and Democrat, to let them know we will be with you every step of the way," Harris said. "In times like this, we stand together as one nation. That is who we are."

She warned the enthusiastic crowd, the race to the presidency will be a tight race.

"We have hard work ahead of us, but we love hard work," Harris said. "We will win."

Harris took the time to point out the differences between her and Trump, her Republican opponent, saying their visions are very different.

"His is focused on the past," Harris said. "The other, ours, (is) focused on the future."

Harris said her campaign is focused on helping working families across the country, finding ways to bring down the cost of living, investing in small businesses and supporting reproductive choices for women.

"None of that matters for Donald Trump," she said. "Instead from him, we are hearing from that same old tired playbook."

Harris said Trump has no idea how to help middle class families but is only focused on himself. She pointed out how all of the presidents have done sit down interviews with CBS on "60 Minutes" and released their medical health reports from doctors. She pointed out that Trump has not done either and challenged him to do so.

"He is unwilling to meet again for us to debate," she said.

Harris said it makes people wonder if Trump's unwillingness to debate again would show people he is weak and unfaithful.

"For these reasons and so many more, it is time to turn the page and chart a new way forward," Harris said.

Harris promised to work for all Americans by keeping the Affordable Care Act, and having a \$6,000 credit for families with children. She also promised a tax credit for people who are caregivers for family members.

Harris pointed out throughout her career she has only had one client, and that is the people. She believes it is why she has support from Republicans and Libertarians in this race.

While she says she has nonpartisan support, Democratic presidential candidates have not won in North Carolina since 2008.

Additionally, Harris' poll numbers are down in comparison to where they were in 2020 for President Joe Biden and where they were in 2016 for Hillary Clinton, at the same time in October during their races.

Harris acknowledges the challenge, but told her supporters on Sunday they must work for a North Carolina win.

U.S. Rep. Don Davis, D-N.C., also spoke at the rally and encouraged those in attendance to vote early.

"The road to the White House goes through eastern North Carolina," Davis said. "We can do it. We can win."

N.C. Sen. Rachel Hunt, a Democrat who represents Mecklenburg County and daughter of former governor Jim Hunt, was also at the rally and asked voters for their support in her bid for lieutenant governor.

Harris arrived in North Carolina Saturday and met with Black leaders at The Pit Authentic Barbecue restaurant, in Raleigh, before she joined volunteers who were there to pack bandages, baby formula, baby wipes, pain relief pills and other items for victims of Hurricane Helene, which tore through western North Carolina last month.

On Sunday, the vice president spoke during a church service at Koinonia Christian Center in Greenville prior to the campaign rally at the ECU campus.

The weekend trip was her second to the battleground state after it was struck by Hurricane Helene.

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Letters to the Editor

October 16, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer| Section: Letters To Editor| 3726 Words OpenURL Link

Editor's note: The deadline for letters pertaining to the 2024 election is Monday, Oct. 21 at noon for the Herald's Oct. 24 edition. The Herald's final edition before the November election is Oct. 28, meaning candidates would not have time to respond to letters in that edition prior to Election Day.

Maligning rescue efforts unforgivable

To the Editor:

I fail to see how any residents of Western North Carolina could ever forgive Donald Trump for using the worst natural disaster ever to befall our beautiful mountains for personal and political gains by falsely maligning the selfless efforts by FEMA workers and so many others who are trying to help regain some level of normalcy out of all the current chaos.

If we as a nation elect this person again, we deserve what we get ensuing from his irresponsible, erratic leadership.

This is not a question of political party; it is a question of helping us all begin to heal.

F. Patrick McGuire, Cullowhee

Has had it with the misinformation

To the Editor:

Friends, I am so sick of being lied to. Yet this is the mode of operation up and down the ballot for Republicans. Their dishonesty is designed to create a visceral alarm, and relies on the faith we put in the words of leaders. It takes time, but an internet search can clear up what the truth is.

Border crossings are out of control. TRUTH: Border crossings with Mexico are now less that half what they were during Trump's last year in office. When a bipartisan committee worked out a strong border bill last year, Donald Trump successfully pressured House Republicans to squash it so he could continue to use immigration as a campaigning line. This is why Biden had to take action and put in regulations.

The U.S. is rampant with crime. TRUTH: The US violent and property crime rates have been dropping the last few years. Data shows that US born citizens commit crimes at more than double the rate of undocumented immigrants.

Haitians in Ohio are eating pets. TRUTH: The woman who first made up this lie has apologized for it. The Republican Governor of Ohio says this is a lie. JD Vance admitted he created this false story. This lie didn't just affect Haitians, it affected the entire community. Over 30 bomb threats have disrupted schools, government, and a hospital. This has created fear in children and tied up police and emergency services.

Our economy needs "fixing." TRUTH: This administration has been "fixing the economy" for four years. Biden/Harris policies have allowed the US to recover from the pandemic faster than other countries. Our economy is outperforming and inflation is lower than Europe. The stock market has hit record highs, a record number of jobs has been created, wages are growing faster than inflation, and unemployment rates are at historic lows.

Now Republicans are lying about the hurricane relief effort. TRUTH: Governors of every affected state have said the

federal response has been excellent. Biden and Harris had supply trucks at the ready prior to the hurricane. FEMA disaster funds are not being sent to immigration. There is a separate FEMA fund that gives grants to provide resources for immigrants. The government is NOT confiscating property. The initial emergency payment is \$750, then homeowners can apply for multiple grants to rebuild. FEMA has already provided over \$137 million, 7,000 personnel, 15 million meals/14 million liters of water/157 generators/a half million tarps. They have rescued thousands of N.C. residents and given funds to rebuild roads.

I was born and raised in these mountains. All my life I have heard stories about exemplary men of fine character. One of those character traits was always honesty. And in the more than 35 years I spent in N.C. schools, I never met a parent who wanted their child to learn to lie. In fact, they expected us to teach kids to be honest. Current Republican values are certainly not North Carolina Mountain values. Aren't you sick of being lied to?

Kathryn Kantz, Sylva

How one nonprofit is helping out

To the Editor:

Internet rumors and politicians' lies run rampant about the Hurricane Helene recovery efforts in regard to the immigrant population of WNC. I want to assure readers that only households with at least one citizen (have a Social Security Card) are eligible for FEMA support for the catastrophic damages to their homes and other property. Other charitable aid is also flowing into our area that applies to all residents. The local non-profit network in WNC is strong and responding tirelessly to the needs of our clients. Let me tell you about the one I proudly work for: UNIDXS WNC is a 5013c non-profit founded 3 years ago by our director Ricardo Bello Ball. Our mission is to support the hispanic population of the 7 western rural counties of North Carolina. Our service takes many forms: English, Spanish, and GED education and help with translation/ interpretation for meetings and office visits. We also intervene with landlords. This year we formed a youth group at SMHS called "Fuerza Latina" to provide positive role models for students (monthly meetings with speakers).

Since Hurricane Helene struck, our small team has been working overtime to provide water, food, clothing, generators, dehumidifiers, fans etc. to the hardest hit neighborhoods in Jackson County. We are collaborating with FEMA, County government, area churches, JCPS, community centers and other nonprofits such as Vecinos, in this enormous task. Since UNIDXS' clientele are mostly families with children and the elderly, this extends our reach. This is especially important since many Spanish speakers feel hesitant to ask for help. We assist any who qualify get the aid they need.

UNIDXS WNC is applying for and receiving charitable grants from NC Counts Coalition, Hispanic Federation and others to fund these efforts. As I write, our storage space (generously provided by a local business) is filling up with all kinds of material aid that goes directly to our clients. But we are going to need a lot more to meet the needs of folks who live in substandard housing. For example, one family with small children in our county was completely flooded and is now battling mold on the sodden walls. There are still families without power, heat, water or even a working refrigerator in Jackson County. Some are living under tarps due to Helene damages to the roof. Winter is coming. The list of needs is very long.

If you can help, please call: 828-242-7345, visit our website at www.unidxswnc.org or email rball@unidxswnc.org
As a non-profit, UNIDXS WNC will happily accept donations of all kinds and make sure they get put to the best use.

Sarah Hirsch, Sylva

Not voting is still essentially casting a vote

To the Editor:

Not voting is not okay.

Voters who don't vote for Trump or Harris are giving a vote to Trump complicity.

Unless your vote is a counteraction to stop him that inaction magnifies the weight of Trump support.

As Desmond Tutu put it "If you are neutral in situations of injustice you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

Not voting makes a voter complicit in allowing Trump to win since it doesn't put someone in his place.

MAGA Republicans are on the verge of changing America via Project 2025.

Vote to keep our country a Democracy with a Harris vote.

It's up to you now to decide America's future.

Dottie Hoche, Sylva

Unwraveling those abortion 'exceptions'

To the Editor:

I'm writing to clarify some muddy language in a hot-button election issue – reproductive rights. In recent weeks, many candidates have sought to distance themselves from "abortion bans," claiming that they support "reasonable" exceptions, or even that they don't support "a national ban" at all.

The catch is that these people try to appear moderate by changing the meaning of the word "ban." They've pivoted to euphemisms like "national restriction" or "national limit." They claim a true "ban" is only a law with no exceptions of any kind, so they can say they're "against a national ban" and for a "national limit."

But they don't mention that those "limits" still manage to ban almost every abortion. If they contain ANY exceptions, now those bans can be called "restrictions."

And those exceptions are often written to be unusable. They can require rape survivors or doctors to make police reports (like South Carolina's ban), even though lawmakers know that most survivors don't report, for fear of being blamed. "Exceptions" can threaten survivors who do report with prison time, if their state later decides that the report may be false (like an exception briefly debated in Tennessee, before the exceptions for rape survivors were cut from that law altogether.) "Exceptions" can require doctors to somehow determine whether a rape is "prosecutable" (like lowa's ban) before providing abortion.

"Exceptions" can say that a pregnancy is "viable" as long as the fetus can survive at all outside the womb, even if the fetus will die within hours or days. "Exceptions" can read that a non-viable pregnancy has to be "uniformly diagnosable", like North Carolina's ban, which doesn't actually explain what that means, or whether a pregnancy is non-viable if any fetus with that genetic anomaly has ever been known to survive (reported in the News-Observer in September 2023).

But if any of those unusable "exceptions" are in place, lawmakers are now calling those bans "limits" or "restrictions." It sounds moderate, reasonable, responsive to the will of the people.

But it's not.

For voters who are sincerely, absolutely against any abortion for any reason ever, the "national restriction" or "national limit" lawmakers are the ones you want.

For voters who don't want raped children to be forced to carry to term (like Tennessee's ban), or don't want women

in sepsis forced to die rather than have abortions (like Texas' ban), or don't want women to be forced to carry nonviable pregnancies to term only to watch their babies die (like too many bans), maybe look elsewhere. Because a "national limit" with a few vaguely-worded exceptions is still an absolute ban.

I encourage all readers to vote their values. And I encourage all readers not to be fooled by misleading language into thinking that extreme lawmakers have suddenly become moderate.

Instead, look at the laws those people have already supported. "From their fruits you will recognize them", as it says in the Bible (Matthew 7:16)—a book which never explicitly mentions abortion at all.

Catherine Carter, Cullowhee

The most important election of our lives

To the Editor:

I think it's time for me to put my two cents of opinion in. Now that voting is about to begin I'm feeling a little nervous about the outcome. I firmly believe this is the most important election of my life. The future of this country is at risk, losing our freedom and democracy. Donald Trump is truly unfit, unstable and is the biggest liar of all time. He only listens to himself and shows no empathy for anyone. He only wants to be president to stay out of jail. Someone like him should never have such power, especially in the times that we are in.

This election is more than a one-issue vote, it's much bigger, if all our freedoms and safety are taken away as Project 2025 would be in effect. Don't forget how he handled Jan. 6. He watched it on TV and did nothing. Is this the kind of person we want as president? I say no.

Trump's endorsement of Mark Robinson for our governor is a good example of Trump's poor judgment. Robinson would be a disgrace for our state.

We have a good, decent qualified Democrat, Josh Stein, that we can be proud of.

I also think there are many smart Republicans switching over to vote Democratic for this one time as they can see what a disaster Trump would be for our country. This election will affect many generations to come. Remember that as you cast your vote. It will be in the history books.

We have a very qualified woman who is ready to take on the job from day one and we can all sleep better – Kamala Harris.

Stacy Munn, Whittier

Here's what the Blue Dots are all about

To the Editor:

I recently wrote a poem titled "The Blue Dot," to share the meaning behind the Blue Dot posters popping up all over town. It encapsulates my thoughts on the upcoming election and the importance of voting for Harris/Walz.

The blue dot symbolizes more than just a color; it represents a call to action. It urges us to work with what we have and to understand the deeper value at the core of our choices. This blue dot is not an end but a beginning – a starting point for meaningful conversations about the stakes we all have in this election.

The blue dot has been described as a "Silent Roar," a subtle yet powerful way to express our commitment to voting blue for the freedoms we cherish. These freedoms include the right to love, dream, marry, and be who we are. They encompass the freedom to shatter ceilings, think freely, live healthily, to meet our basic needs, and feel safe

without hiding.

We must defend the freedom to make personal choices, to own a gun, and also to believe that our children will survive their school day. We must protect the freedom to worship as we choose, or to live a secular life without religious constraints.

We cannot afford to wait until our freedoms are further threatened to value them. We must act now, not waiting for others to join us. While collective action is powerful, individual action is equally crucial.

You don't have to align with Democratic policy, but this year, it is imperative to vote blue. We must vote against the man who threatens to make this election our last.

Kim Mitchell, Sylva

No one should be immune to a fair trial

To the Editor:

After reading Special Counsel Jack Smith's superseding indictment, it is very clear why Donald Trump is desperate to avoid a try by jury of his peers. His lies and deceit will be laid bare.

Sadly, many Republicans will hold their noses and vote for Trump. If Trump should win the presidency, he will have to decide if he wants to dismiss the case, thereby denying all Americans the opportunity to witness the truth extracted by cross-examination and rebuttal. Could the Supreme Court intervene in this historic case?

Trump, like any American accused of a crime, it entitled to a fair trial. He deserves that. So does America. Why should Trump or any president be immune to a fair trial?

Dave Waldrop, Webster

Ignore gasbaggery, ask real questions

To the Editor:

There has been a lot said about democracy being on the ballot but it's mostly Democrat gasbaggery. The Democratic Party is the main threat to democracy because they are obviously afraid of it in action. Who tried to eliminate the opposition by lawfare and efforts to remove candidates from the ballot? Remember, Trump was not the only candidate they went after. Who has spoken against the First and Second amendments and been engaged in online censorship? Who has advocated for packing or even eliminating the Supreme Court when rulings don't go their way? Who wants to abolish the Electoral College so that a handful of large Democrat controlled urban centers could dictate to the rest of the country? Who wants to eliminate the Senate filibuster to ensure easy passage of partisan legislation? Who has opened the southern border and has no concerns about noncitizens voting? It sounds like a lot of breaking of norms to me. But Trump is supposed to be the norm breaker. Pffft!

Let's think a little. With the great effort expended to make sure that Donald Trump never gets back in the White House regardless of voter's wishes, is it really far-fetched to believe that somewhere in the Deep State there was a plan to assassinate him? Why after all these years, everything about the JFK assassination has not been declassified? Why do we still not know much about Trump's would-be killer and there is largely media silence? It appears that the FBI is the place where investigations go to die, at least as far as public disclosure is concerned.

Furthermore, with the dismal response by the government after Hurricane Helene it has been abundantly clear to me that our leaders are not interested in governing, only getting elected by lies and fraud. Maybe this is why it is getting difficult for the armed forces to reach their recruitment goals. If a prospective enlistee felt that by joining he wouldn't be defending his country but only the imperial designs of the DC gangsters, why would he join? Why,

indeed?

David Parker, Sylva

A tale of two letters

To the Editor:

The Oct. 10th edition of the Sylva Herald had letters concerning the upcoming elections. There were two in particular that I believe should be shown in juxtaposition.

The first letter quoted 16 statements by Donald Trump. He also states the provenance of each quote, when it was spoken, where it was spoken and to whom it was spoken. The quotations seem to include bombast, braggadocio, and outright lies by Mr. Trump.

The second is a list of 20 actions and policies of the Biden administration that are, according to the writer, are not working. In many of the listings the writer provides figures on unemployment numbers, costs of commodities, including the costs of energy, housing and many other items. Nowhere does the writer tell us where the information that he is broadcasting is coming from. To weigh my vote, I need to have the facts and figures, and I need to know the origin of these so that I may determine their veracity. The letter, states that this is "Latest from Trump-Vance Rapid Response: Foreign-Born Workers Thrive In Kamala's Economy. American Citizens? Not so much." If this is the origin of this information, why should I trust or believe it? It has come from an election organization that is led by a man we know is a convicted felon and serial liar. The letter also says "When President Trump is re-elected on November 5th, we will lower inflation, put more money back into the hands of hardworking Americans and Make America Prosperous Again." In this, the writer does not give specifics as to how this is to be accomplished, making this an empty political promise as there is no program or policies proposed.

The letter is a list of twenty things the writer says is wrong. Nowhere does he have a kind or encouraging word to the people, only negative comments. It reminds me of the phrase that was once penned by another Republican politician when he referred to the "Nattering Nabobs of Negativism." That was from Spiro Agnew, the Vice-President under Richard Nixon that resigned his office because he was convicted of a felony. And then, of course, Nixon resigned because of attempting to overthrow the electoral system with the Watergate conspirators.

One resigned because of a felony, the other for attempting to cheat the electoral system and overthrow the government. It seems that the current Republican candidate for president has done both and the far right wing of the Republican Party is OK with it.

Consider that Mr. Trump is not eligible to vote in this election. Under the law, convicted felons are not allowed to vote until his/her sentence is served. As a convicted felon, he is not allowed to own a firearm. Yet if Mr. Trump is elected, we place the might of the armed forces and the entire nuclear arsenal in his hands. Consider your vote well.

Luther Jones, Sylva

The two 'Big Es' in front of us all

To the Editor:

The first "Big E" is Environment! The 2024 State of the Climate Report, "Perilous Times on Planet Earth," says we're nearing an irreversible climate disaster that's a global emergency. Scientists monitor 35 planetary vital signs and 25 are at record levels. In '23: coal and oil consumption increased; global tree cover loss and concentrations of CO2, methane, and nitrous oxide increased; ocean temperature and acidity, and average global sea levels are at record highs while ice mass and glacier thickness are at record lows. The number of heat-related deaths in the U.S. increased 117 percent from 1999-2023. Many scientists predict widespread famines, conflicts, mass migrations, and

increased extreme weather events. Jackson County escaped the worst of Helene but what if the next one hits here like it did in Buncombe County? If the wind had been stronger we'd have had more trees and power lines down due to the ground being saturated, more mudslides, more internet and phone outages, etc. People in high-risk areas are already finding their home insurance costs skyrocketing or insurance unavailable. All this can happen to us. So, what do we do? Vote Democrats! Second "Big E" is the Election. Republicans say that Democrats are out of touch with "real" America but they have recruited multi-millionaires to run for Senate in MT, OH, PA, and WI. At a Trump rally Musk, dressed in black, said, "As you can see, I'm not just MAGA - I'm dark MAGA." Is this not scary? Trump, referring to Musk, said, "I'd put him in the Cabinet, absolutely." Musk's response: "I can't wait." Musk, the richest man in the world, has given millions to GOP causes this cycle. Trump's worth is estimated to be between \$3.9 billion and \$7.6 billion. Harris has a net worth of about \$8 million, \$4.4 from the house she and her husband are still paying on, salary of \$235,000/year, and \$1 million in state, local, and federal pensions. Vance is worth about \$10 million but Walz is worth less than \$1 million. He has no stocks or real estate, just state and teacher pension plans and life insurance. Do you think any of these Republicans understand anything about your struggles, values, or needs? Can they identify with you and work for you? How did Harris and Walz acquire their "wealth" - no crimes or fraud, no silver spoons, just determination and the hard work of public service. They are the only choice for president and vice president. Vance wrote the Forward to Project 2025 that calls for disbanding the National Weather Service and NOAA or replacing their scientists with political hacks. It would also increase oil and gas development on federal lands. Rep. Edwards has only voted for environmental legislation 6 percent of the time vote for Caleb Rudow! A vote for Trump is a vote for Vance and Musk. It's a vote against the environment and the future we leave for our children and grandchildren. Vote for Democrats.

Gene Tunnell, Cullowhee

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Storm causes tiny problems for most of us

October 16, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Top Stories | 778 Words OpenURL Link

By Sylva Herald News Editor Dave Russell

Today, Thursday, Oct.17 marks the anniversary of two natural disasters that have impacted me.

Thirty five years ago I worked at a bank in San Mateo, California, about 25 miles south of the Golden Gate Bridge. It was just after 5 p.m. and as I filed away the papers I'd worked on, I heard a rumbling.

"Loud train," I thought. I worked near the rail line.

Then all hell broke loose.

Suddenly the floor felt like I was standing on a trampoline while someone else bounced on it. My office furniture toppled over, ceiling tiles fell, it got dark and strobe lights from the blaring alarms flashed.

I couldn't reach my desk, so I stood in a metal doorway and covered my eyes.

Then it passed.

They would name it Loma Prieta, a 6.9 magnitude earthquake that originated near Santa Cruz.

Being a Georgia boy, I was not terribly freaked. I'd just moved to the San Francisco Bay Area and thought that sort of thing happened all the time. It wasn't until I saw the Californians freaking out that I knew this was different.

At home, our water-hating dog had swam the canal to a neighbor's house. All the bookshelves, the TV, stereo, etc., were on the floor. The fridge door had opened and a one liter bottle of rice wine vinegar fell out and broke and ran under the linoleum.

There were fatalities, downed bridges, fires and much more suffering surrounding us. I wasn't hurt, and neither was my wife, Annemarie. We had no power, water or telephone, but we never complained. Minor inconveniences, comparatively speaking.

Flood brings minor problems

I live 80 paces from the Swannanoa River in Oteen on the east side of Asheville, and inconveniences are all I suffered from Helene, which hit three weeks ago today.

Little problems, like walking 1.5 miles to get home because the river destroyed the road to my house. No power, no water, no cell signal, a garden of 25 years gone, a red, dusty haze in the air and in every little crevice.

Fortunately the 80 steps from my door to the Swannanoa's riverbank are all downhill. Standing among the muck and spaghetti of roots by the river after Helene, as far as I could see upstream were the cement block foundations of about five homes, but the damage goes far around the bend.

About 7 river miles upstream is the little unincorporated town of Swannanoa, the epicenter for storm-related deaths.

Bathing in rainwater out of a bucket is a pleasure compared to the losses suffered there.

When Jackson County Fire Marshal Michael Forbis convinced me this storm was for real, I had to decide where to ride it out.

With my 84-year-old bedridden father and his wife, four hours away? With Annemarie and her sister, who suffers from Alzheimer's? Do I come to the Herald and work, using social media to keep folks updated?

Dad, in Oxford, Ga., won out. He's on oxygen and a power outage would be trouble. I drove the four hours.

Friday broke and I could't reach anyone in Asheville. I saw the flooding on telly but hesitated to drive home, not knowing what the roads would be like and afraid of getting in the way.

Saturday morning my son managed to get a message and relayed my mother-in-law had died of the cancer she'd suffered for so long. Family members reported her death to authorities and were given a body bag and toe tag. They had no idea when she might be be picked up, given how busy the morgue was.

I drove to the in-laws and my wife and I put on the toe tag and gently laid Edie Kasper in the body bag, said our goodbyes and zipped it closed. A Buncombe County van managed to pick her up not too much later.

Edie grew up in Berlin, Germany, before, during and after WWII and it made her tough as nails, though she resembled Sophie Loren. When told she had cancer, I thought "That cancer has no chance against Edie," but it was time.

There were so many of us in the house that my wife and I slept in Edie's bed that night, but that was OK, too. A new experience and it felt a little strange, but just a minor issue.

I still have a home and an intact family. Filling the toilet tank with creek water is not a problem compared to the devastation around me, even if we have to do it for a year.

My heart goes out to all who lost family members or suffered other loss. Real loss.

I won't insult them by complaining about little inconveniences. Not even the smell of rotten fish from the freezer or vinegar beneath the linoleum.

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Early voting on the 'big ballot' starts

October 16, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer| Section: Top Stories | 551 Words OpenURL Link

By Dave Russell

Election 2024, the Big One, today (Thursday, Oct. 17) takes a big step toward the Nov. 5 Election Day, which could be the finish line and mean it's all over. Could be.

Early voting begins today (Thursday) and runs through Nov. 2. Voters can do same-day registration at the Early Voting sites, and will need to attest to their eligibility and provide proof of residence.

All voters coming to the polls need a form of ID.

"We do have an exemption form and it includes allowances in natural disasters," Jackson County Board of Elections Director Amanda Allen said. "Overall, though, I think voting will be as normal as possible in Jackson County. Same places, same things, big ballot."

To find out more about the exemption form, call the Board of Elections at 586-7538.

Of 80 early voting sites in the 25 counties hit by Hurricane Helene, 75 will open and have power, Allen said Monday.

Acceptable ID

The N.C. State Board of Elections recognizes any of the following forms of ID, unexpired or expired for one year or less:

North Carolina driver's license or State ID from the NCDMV (also called "non-operator ID").

Driver's license or non-driver ID from another state, District of Columbia, or U.S. territory, if the voter registered within the last 90 days.

U.S. passport or U.S. passport card.

North Carolina voter photo ID card issued by a county board of elections.

College or university student ID approved by the State Board of Elections.

State or local government or charter school employee ID approved by the State Board of Elections.

Military or veterans ID card (with photo) issued by the U.S. government.

Tribal enrollment card (with photo) issued by a tribe recognized by the State of North Carolina or the federal government.

ID card (with photo) issued by an agency of the U.S. government or the State of North Carolina for a public assistance program.

Western Carolina University student and employee IDs and Southwestern Community College student IDs are approved.

Absentees

Any North Carolina registered voter may request, receive and vote a mail-in absentee ballot. Registered voters may request a ballot through the online Absentee Ballot Request Portal on ncsbe.gov, or fill out an Absentee Ballot Request Form and return it to the county board of elections. To track a ballot through the mail see the state's BallotTrax portal.

All of these tools can be found at www.ncsbe.gov/voting/vote-mail.

Request forms for absentee ballots are available at the Board of Elections office on Skyland Drive. Completed applications may be submitted either by mail, email, fax or delivered in person.

The deadline for making absentee ballot requests is 5 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 29.

The ballot must be returned to the office by the close of polls - 7:30 p.m. - on Election Day, Nov. 5.

Jackson County voters have requested 1,000 absentee ballots so far, and about 238 have been returned, Allen said.

That marks a huge drop from 2020, when Covid pushed the requests to 3,600 at this point. Of those, 1,425 were returned.

To vote in Jackson County you must be a U.S. citizen; have resided here at least 30 days before the election date; be at least 18 years old or turn 18 by the date of the election; and not be serving a felony conviction, including probation, post-release supervision or parole.

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Storm adds to town's to-do list

October 16, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 301 Words OpenURL Link

By Dave Russell

While Hurricane Helene largely spared Jackson County its worst and not a single tree fell in town limits, Sylva did not escape totally unharmed.

Stone wall

The failing stone wall on Scotts Creek behind Sylva's public works office leans more towards the water following the hurricane. Stone covers a section of the wall that collapsed in March, dropping the rear wheels of a brush truck off the edge.

"The cracks from the additional sections further from the creek and the cracks in the parking lot are larger and growing," town Manager Paige Dowling told the town board at last Thursday's meeting. "We're hopeful to be able to use FEMA assistance repair the wall and parking area."

Skatepark

Sylva Pipes, the town skatepark behind Motion Makers, was damaged during the flooding of Scotts Creek. The town is reaching out to its insurer to start a claim, Dowling told the town board. "We need to determine whether to replace the ramp or collect the insurance money and put it towards a future skatepark," she said.

Meanwhile, work on Bryson Park continues.

The pourable rubber surface has been installed and can be bounced on.

Town officials met last week with Jeff Bliss of Bliss Products to discuss furnishings for Bryson Park.

"We discussed benches, tables, bike racks, exercise equipment and other items that the board and the public expressed interest in," Dowling said. "We almost have a finalized contract with Bartlett Operations for the pavilion renovation. We're hopeful that construction can begin this month, and the estimated construction time is five months."

Fixing up the park's pavilion and completing the playground, both of which are funded, would make the project 90 percent complete, Sylva Public Works Director Jake Scott said on Tuesday.

"The only thing left will be the fence at that point," he said.

The fencing is vinyl-coated chain link, he said.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Writer, 'Storm adds to town's to-do list', *Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The* (online), 16 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C40356CDC75030



Cedar Cliff's auxiliary spillway complete

October 16, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Top Stories | 755 Words OpenURL Link

By Dave Russell

The primary spillway at Cedar Cliff Dam has always handled whatever Mother Nature threw at it, but the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission wanted more.

FERC wanted the dam's owner, Duke Energy, to increase the maximum flood that can safety pass through the Cedar Cliff spillways. In addition to increasing the size, Duke decided to spiffy up the auxiliary spillway with the latest water management technology.

"The single most important safety feature of any dam is a functioning spillway," Duke's Chief Dam Safety Engineer Brad Keaton said onsite last Thursday. "I don't care what dam it is, if there is a stream or runoff that can flow into that body of water, that spillway has to be functional and has to be adequate to have enough capacity to move water during large storms, because otherwise it goes over the dam and the dam fails."

High waters

Cedar Cliff's upgrades more than doubled the capacity of the dam.

The previous dam design utilized two fuseplugs, earthen barriers designed to collapse in high water, and could handle 80,000 cfs at the dam.

"This project takes that to 192,000cfs," Keaton said.

The high waters brought about by Hurricane Helene's visit nearly matched the highest flood release since the dam's construction in 1952.

"The flood we just had was right around 8,900cfs that was being moved by the East Fork," Keaton.

The flood of record for the East Fork was 28,000cfs in 1940, and a 9,000 cfs flood in 1952 marked the flood of record since dam was completed.

Looking downstream over the tail waters, the auxiliary spillway snakes around the left side of the dam and primary spillway runs through the right side.

"For the new configuration of the spillways, floods up to about 10,000 cubic feet per second are handled through the primary spillway gate," Keaton said. "Floods from 10,000cfs to 59,000cfs will flow over the tops of the new fusegates."

The new tech

Forming a squiggly line about the length of a football field stand the row of fusegates, a water management system designed and sold by Hydroplus. The units are separated by expansion joints.

"They look like a solid barrier, but there are six individual pieces," Keaton said. "In the case of a larger flood, the first one would topple over and make a gap and release water down the auxiliary spillway."

The flood that would topple the first fusegate would see the East Fork of the Tuckaseigee River pushing about 59,000cfs through the main spillway, a lake level of 110.5feet (10.5 feet above full pond).

Pressure from below

The fusegates sit on a concrete seal about 5 feet thick. Their weights vary from 1 million to 1.3 million pounds, part of the mechanics to force them to fall at different times.

"We had to jack them up to verify they had the exact right weights," Keaton said.

They appear identical on the outside, but differing amounts of concrete in their construction leave different size cavities under each one.

"Right now there is not water under there, it is just air," Keaton said. "When the big flood comes and it is time for one of those to turn over, not only does the weight of it determine when it topples, but there are inlets in the intake building at six different elevations. When the water gets to the first elevation, it goes into the inlet and it fills that cavity under that one. You get water underneath there and it negates some of the weight and that triggers it."

Toe blocks, stainless steel bars on the back side of the fusegates, force them to topple over instead of slide downstream. They are designed to crumble upon toppling.

The intake building is a bunker of a building with a strong steel grate on the side facing the lake. Inside, the inlets reach out like elevated troughs.

As water rises and begins flowing through the debris grate, it reaches the lowest inlet and begins to fill the 2-foot diameter pipe that runs to its corresponding fusegate, which will topple first. As levels continue to rise, water would reach the next highest inlet, filling the empty cavity beneath its fusegate and toppling it, and so on.

Engineers fashioned a physical model of the fusegate system before construction began. "We could run the flows through, see how these fusegates perform and test certain aspects of it, and it is just amazing to see it now and how it looks and works just like the models," Keaton said. Preliminary work began in 2019, and only lacks is a small smattering of shot-crete on a retaining wall face be finally be called "complete."

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Staff Writer, 'Cedar Cliff's auxiliary spillway complete', *Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The* (online), 16 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C40356E99366F0



NC sheriff's respond to WNC following Helene

October 16, 2024 | Tabor-Loris Tribune (NC) Author: Deuce Niven; Tribdeuce@Tabor-Loris.Com| Section: News| 494 Words Page: 2 OpenURL Link

North Carolina's response to the Hurricane/Tropical Storm Helene disaster in western North Carolina has latterly spanned the state from the coast to the mountains, with plenty offered from Columbus and surrounding counties.

Multiple efforts to collect donations of supplies and cash across Columbus have included the Tabor City Fire Department in partnership with local businesses and schools.

County government has been involved in multiple levels, including the Columbus County Sheriff's office, with manpower, donations, equipment, and more sent west in the past weeks.

"Whether you donated supplies, gave a helping hand, or simply spread the word, you are part of something bigger," Sheriff Bill Rogers said in a recent social media post. "Together, we are showing the world that Columbus County stands by its neighbors, no matter the distance." Partnerships have been plentiful, and included the CCSO joining forces with the Bladen County Sheriff's Office to deliver assistance and supplies, part of the Statewide Disaster Assistance Network (SDAN) is a program created and operated by the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association, a NCSA news release said.

NCSA President Sheriff Mike Roberson of Chatham County activated SDAN a day before Helene swept from Florida through the Southern Appalachian region.

Though dire, the forecasts then did not predict the devastation Helene would bring.

Helene proved to be "causing widespread flash flooding, mudslides, and extremely dangerous, life threatening conditions, the NCSA release said.

"We knew immediately that this storm would have a massive impact in our state," Roberson said. "The effects have been like nothing we have seen in the recent past.

Activating the Statewide Disaster Assistance Network allowed the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association to begin working right away to coordinate resources and let sheriffs' offices from around the state get assistance to those counties impacted as soon as possible." Response has come from at least 78 sheriffs' offices from across the state in and included 578 deputies, 18 detention officers, 18 telecommunicators, and more, the NCAS reported.

SDAN has also coordinated the relocation of almost 350 county jail inmates to other jails, in addition to inmates in state prisons re-located across the state, some to Tabor Correctional Institution, the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction reported.

Rescue equipment provided by sheriffs' offices have included aerial and underwater drones, helicopters, tactical Bear cat vehicles, utility terrain vehicles (UTVs), generators, high-water vehicles, and more.

Sheriffs in the impacted areas say they are grateful, the NCSA reported.

"I am once again amazed and am so very blessed for everyone on the NCSA team," said Watauga County Sheriff Len Hagaman. "We are now both 'Watauga and NCSA Strong." McDowell County Sheriff Ricky Buchanan was equally grateful. "With the help of sheriffs and deputy sheriffs from across the state, we have been able to maintain an increased law enforcement presence in our county, 24-7, since this disaster occurred," Buchanan said.

"This has allowed us to focus our attention on those hit hardest by this disaster."

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Deuce Niven, Tribdeuce@Tabor-Loris.Com, 'NC sheriff's respond to WNC following Helene', *Tabor-Loris Tribune* (online), 16 Oct 2024 2 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C9A032E3098B20



My Corner - Ridiculous paranoia is causing real harm

October 16, 2024 | Tabor-Loris Tribune (NC) Author: Deuce Niven | Section: Opinions | 540 Words Page: 4 OpenURL Link

"Just because you're paranoid does not mean they're not out to get you." - Joseph Heller This quote from Heller's book Catch-11 and the 1970 film it inspired seems to be a mantra, maybe the mantra, for politics this election cycle. I've used it in jest uncounted times over the years.

The reality now is anything but funny.

Misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories that defy logic or common sense have become politicized not only in the current Presidential campaign, but in many down-ballot races too.

Erased for many, it seems, is the difference between fact or opinion. I love, hate, or have no feeling about rain in an opinion.

Rain is wet, and when pure is simply a couple of hydrogen atoms bonded with a single oxygen atom, in mass quantities of course.

That's a fact that, these days, I'm sure is up for debate in some circles.

Chuckle quietly, or laugh at loud at flat-earthers, those who are convinced Man has yet to travel to the Moon, or that those of a particular religion employ space lasers to start forest fires. There is some humor to be found in such stupidity.

There's nothing funny about the conspiracy theory, paranoia fueled talk and active incidents impacting recovery efforts in the Carolinas in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. Some of those have had specific, real-time impacts on that work, many have at the very least diverted the attention of officials forced to respond to inane speculation or outright messages of disinformation.

Just Monday FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, "temporarily suspended outreach activities at the Bowman Library in Orangeburg County following a safety incident," a FEMA news release said.

During the weekend some FEMA operations were paused in Rutherford County, employees engaged in relief efforts around hard hit Chimney Rock and Lake Lure relocated after reported concerns that "armed militia" was threatening government workers.

One man was charged with going armed to the terror of the public in the Rutherford County incident, The Washington Post reported, and officials there believe he was a solitary threat, not part of a group.

Still, threats can't be ignored, even those that necessary response robs countless people of a more rapid response to their situation, no matter how dire or mundane.

I'm thankful this kind of nonsense wasn't common in 2016 and 2018, when Hurricane's Matthew and Florence had communities here in their cross hairs. Overall our losses were minor compared with those in western North Carolina from Helene. But the response from disaster teams from the federal government on down were just as vital for those in need.

Full disclosure, my dad was a FEMA reservist for many years, responding to a number of hurricane disasters

including Andrew in Florida, and at least a couple that impacted Columbus County.

His life reflected a belief that people aren't perfect, but can pull together for a common cause and for the common good.

FEMA, like every group of people, includes all sorts of people, good, bad, smart, some less so.

As a whole, the evidence is clear that FEMA and countless other agencies, groups and individuals have responded to the devastation wrought by Helene as quickly as possible, and have given their best effort.

Those who peddle misinformation and disinformation to the contrary could well suffer the consequences when disaster befalls them.

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Deuce Niven, 'My Corner - Ridiculous paranoia is causing real harm', *Tabor-Loris Tribune* (online), 16 Oct 2024 4 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C9A032F16B42A8



Yam royalty gives back

October 16, 2024 | Tabor-Loris Tribune (NC)

Section: News 149 Words

Page: 10 OpenURL Link

Recently selected Yam Festival royalty is reflecting the spirit of festival directors, giving to those in western North Carolina devastated by Hurricane Helene, by preparing 76 boxes of supplied for the relief effort.

Those boxes will be part of anther Tabor City Fire Department relief mission this week, while the queens and princesses have launched a \$5 raffle that will also go towards hurricane relief, with winners to receive a Yam Man or box of sweet potatoes. Those taking part include, from left, Teen Miss Shaeleigh Wriglesworth, Mini Miss Landrie Tompkins, Baby Miss Harlynn Johnson, Junior Miss Paris Mote, Young Miss Greenlee McKenna, Little Miss Emily Martin, Tiny Miss Ellie Ward, Queen Chloe Fowler, and Mrs. Savanna Conner.

"I want to thank them, their parents, and grandparents for their generosity shown today. Everyone participated by bringing items for the boxes and bringing boxes for packing," said pageant director Shauna Cox.

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'Yam royalty gives back', *Tabor-Loris Tribune* (online), 16 Oct 2024 10 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C9A0330A06DD30>



Stay prepared for the storm

October 16, 2024 | Tabor-Loris Tribune (NC) Author: Jenn Boyd; Tribjenn@Tabor-Loris.Com| Section: News | 393 Words Page: 2 OpenURL Link

Two full months remain in this year's hurricane season, which ends Nov. 30.

That, combined with the devastation Hurricane Helene left in the western Carolinas has prompted Grand Strand Water & Sewer to re-release its Hurricane Preparedness Checklist for 2024.

Important tips include: Drinking water Store drinking water in clean, airtight containers, allotting one gallon per person, per day. Be sure to have a five-day supply on hand.

Water for sanitary purposes A family of four will need approximately 25 gallons of water for sanitary purposes.

Wastewater disposal could be disrupted during a hurricane or tropical storm, so flush your commodes, only when necessary, until normal services are restored in your community.

Check water pressure If you experience low to no water pressure, check with your neighbors to determine if your entire area is being affected before calling GSWAS, or whom your provider is in your area.

Once you have determined you need to contact GSWAS or your provider, be patient because representatives may be assisting other callers.

Disinfect water After a hurricane or tropical storm, service restoration may take several days.

If water line breaks occur, some water may become contaminated. If you are concerned about your water purity, take these steps to disinfect your water.

Allow cloudy water to settle and strain top water through a clean cloth or coffee filter to remove any sediment or floating matter.

Vigorously boil water for at least one minute and allow to cool before use Chemically disinfect water by adding two drops of chlorine laundry bleach per quart of water. Thoroughly mix chlorine and water mixture and let stand for 30 minutes before using, keeping in mind you will smell a slight chlorine odor in the water.

Stay informed Listen to your local TV and radio stations for weather updates. Visit www.gswas.com or your local provider for updates or any questions you have during this storm season.

Be a good neighbor Take time to reach-out to any neighbor in need.

Check on your elderly and disabled neighbors who may need a helping hand.

We are all in this together, so stay safe, diligent and informed.

"If a storm strikes, Grand Strand Water & Sewer will do everything possible to maintain water and wastewater services, as well as rapidly restore them if disrupted," said Grand CEO Christy Holder. "We are committed to our customers and community during these difficult times." For other customer service questions or information, call 843-443-8202.

• Citation (aglc Style)

Jenn Boyd, Tribjenn@Tabor-Loris.Com, 'Stay prepared for the storm', *Tabor-Loris Tribune* (online), 16 Oct 2024 2 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C9A032E569FCD8



Nearly 100 in NC may be missing after Helene

October 16, 2024 | Times-News (Burlington, NC) Author: ALAN WOOTEN THE CENTER SQUARE | Section: News | 358 Words OpenURL Link

In the third week since Hurricane Helene struck the North Carolina mountains, as many as 92 people may still be missing.

Gov. Roy Cooper said Tuesday the number "is not a definitive count because the task for is continuing its work."

"The number will continue to fluctuate as more reports come in and others are resolved," he said.

U.S. Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-N.C., said last week in an interview with Fox News Radio that in her district in the northwest mountains, "I think there are still many people that we haven't been able to get to because of the washout of the roads."

Recovery efforts have been challenged by arguably the state's worst natural disaster. Tuesday morning, the state reported 579 road that were still closed — three interstate highways, 38 federal highways, 58 state roads, and 480 secondary roads. Early estimates are that about 100 mountain bridges need replacement.

Add in layers of both failed infrastructure like 12,000 without power on a Tuesday morning with temperatures in the 30s, water systems still to be rebuilt, and circulating misinformation, and the task is enormous.

"I have directed the Department of Public Safety to coordinate law enforcement assistance for FEMA and other responders who need it to help ensure their safety and security so people can keep getting the help that they desperately need," Cooper said.

Deanne Criswell, administrator of FEMA and a leader among more than 2,000 from the federal government who are in North Carolina, said operational changes have been made.

"It's heartbreaking to see words or active acts of hatred toward anyone, let alone federal responders who are here to help people in this critical time," she said.

Helene came ashore in the Big Bend of Florida on Sept. 26 as a Category 4 hurricane. It moved swiftly through Georgia and dissipated over the Appalachian Mountains and Tennessee, dumping more than 30 inches of rain in some places.

An exact number of deaths across multiple states is unclear, though it is believed to be between 206 and 251, about half of them in North Carolina.

Only Hurricanes Katrina in 2005 (1,392 deaths), Audrey in 1957 (416) and Camille in 1969 (256) killed more people since 1950.

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'We're gonna make it work' - WNC Christmas tree growers worry about road access after Helene

October 16, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Jacob Biba; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 1645 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

NEWLAND – Less than two weeks after Tropical Storm Helene hit Western North Carolina, Matthew Horney and Larry Smith, two area Christmas tree growers, weaved between the Fraser firs Smith planted years ago atop the steep, rolling hills above Newland, a small town in Avery County.

Horney, a large-scale grower who owns Appalachian Farms of Cranberry and sells Fraser firs wholesale to stores like Home Depot, planned on returning to Smith's farm a few days later to trim the bottom limbs off those trees. Soon, he would ship them out for wreaths, garland and grave blankets, a decoration placed on gravesites believed to offer protection to the dead during the holiday season.

Both Horney and Smith said, given the landslides, flooding and wind Helene wrought on this portion of WNC, they were both very lucky. Though they suffered significant tree losses – Horney said he lost 5,000 market-ready trees to landslides, more than 3% of his total planned harvest of 150,000 – damage was relatively limited. The trees Horney lost can be sourced elsewhere, either from other farms he has in the area, he said, or from stock he hadn't planned on harvesting.

Despite the limited damage, Horney, Smith and other growers in North Carolina, the country's second leading producer of Christmas trees behind Oregon, do have one pressing concern – road access. Helene ripped apart roadways in Avery, Watauga, Mitchell and Yancey counties, where many of the state's Christmas tree growers operate. It's still unclear if the North Carolina Department of Transportation will allow tractor trailers, which growers rely on to ship trees across the country, to access those roads before trees are scheduled to ship, the growers said.

Windy roads

In an Oct. 9 email to the Citizen Times, Jennifer Greene, the executive director of the North Carolina Christmas Tree Association, an industry group representing growers, said NCCTA is still working with growers to gather information about the storm, but she doesn't expect Helene to have a significant impact on the supply of Fraser firs from North Carolina this holiday season.

"It will take some time to fully assess the extent and implications of damage to Christmas tree farms affected by the hurricane, but our farmers have weathered the storm and are ready to persevere," Greene said. "The next step will be working together to create a plan for harvest and shipping as we prioritize the safety and welfare of our farmers, their families and their workers."

Most North Carolina tree farms grow Fraser firs, which make up 96% of the more than 50 million Christmas trees growing in the state today, according to the NCCTA. The trees thrive in higher elevations, and the switch-backed roads often leading to these farms are already windy and difficult to maneuver.

Then Helene hit.

Flood waters washed out bridges across WNC. Landslides covered highways. And downed trees blocked steep, narrow farm roads growers like Smith rely on to transport trees from fields to loading areas. But if growers can access materials like gravel and culverts to repair those roads, farm road access won't be an issue, they said.

"We're generally used to doing that ourselves," Sam Cartner, an Avery County grower told the Citizen Times Oct. 9.

Growers typically harvest their trees in early to mid-November, and the months and weeks leading up to that time are filled with prep work. From July 1 until harvest time, Horney said he has about 20 people working his farms, trimming trees.

Now, in these last few weeks before harvest, growers who would normally be tuning up equipment like bailers are instead working to get their roads accessible. They're also waiting to hear from the N.C. DOT about whether tractor trailers and commercial traffic will be able to access highways like U.S. 221, N.C. 181 and U.S. 19E, which are usually one of the first legs of a Fraser fir's journey out of the area and into someone's home.

Cartner, who is harvesting the Christmas tree this year for the White House's Blue Room, said the N.C. DOT is doing a good job repairing those roads, but if the agency were to deem them unsafe for tractor trailers, it would be a major concern.

But Smith was more direct.

"It would be devastating," he said.

Smith, Cartner and Horney all believe N.C. 181, which runs in and out of Newland and can be used to access Interstate 40 in Morganton, will be accessible to tractor trailers. So, at the very least, they'll be able to ship trees out that way, they said, even though it would add time and likely increase shipping costs.

But they're less certain about other highways, like U.S. 19E, which runs east from Burnsville in Yancey County through Spruce Pine in neighboring Mitchell County before turning north through hard hit areas along the North Toe River like Plum Tree.

"I'm sure there's a lot of farmers that need access to it and it won't be open," Cartner, who ships trees to cities as far away as Salt Lake City, Utah, said of U.S. 19E. "So that's a big deal."

And then there's smaller state-maintained roads, like Laurel Branch Road in Watauga County between Vilas and Zionville, where Horney lost 5,000 trees in a landslide. He said that road is "practically gone."

"They're destroyed – that little community," Horney said. "You don't want to go in there and tear the road up even worse."

So, to ship the trees from that farm, he said, it all depends on what the N.C. DOT can get done in the next few weeks.

Jonathan Rand, a N.C. DOT spokesperson, told the Citizen Times in an Oct. 11 email that the agency has been in contact with Avery County staff advocating for growers. The agency has started working on secondary connector roads to reopen them to commercial motor vehicles, or CMVs, like tractor trailer, he said. But some roads were so damaged by landslides that timelines for reopening are unavailable.

"We have mobilized to specific locations and are working diligently, with the tree farms in mind," Rand said.

In Avery County, according to Rand, U.S. 19E is currently closed to CMVs from 3 Mile Highway (N.C. 194) at the county's southern end to N.C. 194 in Cranberry, while U.S. 221 was closed near 3 Mile Highway and now has narrowed lanes. But N.C. 181 is "in good shape" he said. It's open all the way into Morganton and to I-40.

According to Rand, N.C. DOT is working quickly to repair U.S. 19E in Avery County, but there are several portions of the highway where only one lane is intact. The agency was unable to provide a timeline for reopening. "In those places and others where shoulders are gone and pavements have incurred damage, further assessment is needed and it's currently unsafe for CMVs," he said.

But even with limited tractor trailer access on these roads, Cartner, Smith and Horney all said they would be able to find ways to get their trees out to customers.

A changed landscape

Standing in a parking lot at the Hardee's in Newland Oct. 9, Smith said Helene has "changed the landscape of Western North Carolina forever."

Down Pineola Street, debris was piled high in parking lots. Elsewhere, portions of road had collapsed into the North Toe River. Landslides scarred steep surrounding hillsides.

Later that afternoon, Smith pulled his Chevy Silverado into the driveway of his son Wally's home, which has been in his family for five generations. During Helene, some of Smith's farming equipment was buried in debris, but he was able to dig it all out. He lost one truck in the North Toe, which flows along the property. Another truck, slapped with bumper stickers that read "Real Trees Make Scents," got washed out by flood waters. He said he typically parks it in Newland and sells pumpkins out of it on the honor system.

Nearby, his grandkids were jumping on a trampoline. Seeing them jump, Smith said that "life was getting back to normal."

But looking back at the North Toe, which caused so much damage in the area, he said it was like someone "pulled a plug in a bathtub." A barn on the property was totally destroyed by the river's raging water.

About 30 minutes later, near Spear, south of Plumtree, which looked like it got hit by a tsunami, Smith said, a man stood in the middle of the North Toe and fished.

Bridge after bridge over the river had been washed away.

One those bridges led to a 125-acre farm where Smith is growing 10,000 Christmas trees. A red Toyota Tundra that raged down the North Toe was wedged beneath what remained. Smith said he'll have a new bridge constructed, but not in time to harvest the 1,000 trees he planned to sell Horney this year. So, now he's devising a plan to access them. He has about four weeks to do so. But Smith shrugged it off. If he can't get to them, he knows he can replace them with trees from his other farms and just sell them next year if he has to.

Fraser firs, he said, are on a roughly 10-year cycle from seedling to harvest. That's why he doesn't have a life insurance policy, he said. If he dies, his family will have a decade's worth of trees they can sell – guaranteed income.

Above the bridge, a worker operated an excavator, shoring up the shoulder on U.S. 19E. Proof of the progress, Cartner mentioned earlier in the day.

Smith said what he and other growers are facing this year is merely a logistics issue. They're all working together to get their farm roads accessible. They're confident they'll get their trees out to where they need to go.

"We're gonna make it work," he said.

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

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'Apocalyptic' scene awaited Nashville nurses

October 16, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Beth Warren; Nashville Tennessean | Section: News | 1506 Words Page: A2 OpenURL Link

A Nashville nurse supervisor is describing an "apocalyptic" scene inside an Asheville hospital's emergency room days after Tropical Storm Helene devastated the North Carolina region.

Bruce Mitchell, an assistant chief nursing officer at TriStar Skyline Medical Center north of downtown, said when a supervisor asked him if he would lead a team deploying to Mission Hospital said he was ready to go.

"Put me in coach," he said.

Mitchell's breadth of experience spans 37 years and included a decade as a helicopter paramedic.

"Flying into unfamiliar areas in crisis is something that I'm familiar with," he said in an interview with The Tennessean. "But all those years of preparation didn't fully prepare me for what I was walking into when I walked into the emergency room."

Mitchell had loaded onto a bus of more than 50 nurses from various HCA Healthcare hospitals Sunday, Sept. 29, two days after Helene hit. The bus detoured around flooded roadways and wound around backroads. It left Nashville at 7:30 a.m. and took eight hours to reach Asheville, typically less than a five-hour drive.

During the drive, nurses studied handouts of the hospital's record keeping system and floor plan. As the bus neared the hospital, Mitchell popped in ear plugs, closed his eyes and visualized the layout of the emergency room's life-saving supplies — aware that in a crisis, he wouldn't have time to search.

He imagined the Asheville hospital would be covered with mud and branches. Instead, the building was intact.

The havoc awaited inside.

"As you walked through the emergency room, you'd be stepping over people," Mitchell said. "It was very apocalyptic.

"Patients were reaching out and grabbing a hold of your shirt" and some were crying out for help.

That image haunted Mitchell.

About 1,000 people crammed into the emergency room and lobby. Some were badly injured, others were panicked not knowing the extent of their injuries. Some were experiencing homelessness and others were frantically searching for missing loved ones. Some were reliant on oxygen tanks that had run out and others needed refills on medicine, even methadone, but pharmacies and clinics were closed.

Amid the throngs of people, there were injured babies and hysterical children.

Mitchell and the other Nashville nurses arrived tired and were supposed to tour the ER and then get a few hours of sleep. Instead, they dropped their bags in a storage room and went straight to work, allowing others who had been treating patients nearly non-stop for three days the time to sleep or go out and search for their own families.

"I was visibly looking for traumatic injuries. When we are in a mass casualty situation, we're looking for who is dead

or almost dead," Mitchell said.

"You're critical, but I can save you... or you're injured, but you're not gonna die so you're just gonna have to wait."

In a typical hospital setting, he said: "I can stop every time and listen to somebody and help in some capacity" or have another nurse step in.

After Helene, there wasn't time.

"You're in a large space of hundreds of people and you're just scanning," the nurse supervisor said, tearing up at the memory. "You're trying to decide who you're going to pick above everybody else. And, of course, everybody is watching ya and wondering why that person is getting help when they're not."

The emergency room, built with 100 beds, was packed with 500 patients. About another 500 crowded in the adjacent lobby as nurses treating patients, including some requiring IVs. Even in the hallways, men and women clawed at nurses, begging for help.

"It was emotional," Mitchell said, his voice cracking. "As a nurse, you want to help everybody, but you're stepping over people trying to figure out who is the sicker of the sick."

Patient cots were clustered close together in groups of 12 so doctors and nurses could hop from person to person. Some didn't make it.

Mitchell remembers a few happier moments when panicked residents were reunited with loved ones, including when he reconnected a woman with her missing elderly mother who fell and had a significant gash to her head. And staff helped an elderly man find his wife. The two clasped hands from adjacent stretchers.

And there were a few times when he took a moment to hold a patient's hand. Sometimes he uttered a prayer.

"Just holding their hand for a second and listening, that's what nursing is about," Mitchell said. "It's good for me and the patient. I need to hold someone's hand. I need to pray."

Little rest for the weary

Periodically, ambulances would pull up and paramedics would drop off patients, leaving them in chairs and simply saying: "I gotta go," before rushing out to attempt more rescues.

Residents would bring in bodies they found and loaded in the bed of their pickup trucks.

"We didn't have a way to identify anybody" immediately, Mitchell said. "They were covered in mud."

The morgue quickly filled up, so the hospital system brought in refrigerated trucks to serve as mobile morgues.

Inside the hospital, toilets were overflowing and the odorous sludge had been there for days. It would take two or three additional days before the toilets were able to flush and even then, the running water from the sinks remained dirty.

Patients had a variety of injuries, including broken arms and legs and chainsaw injuries from trying to clear away fall trees and debris. Nurses ran out of wash clothes and wipes and most of the patients were caked in mud, masking the injuries.

And even a natural disaster didn't stop crimes that sent shooting and stabbing victims to the ER.

At 1 a.m. Monday, a weary Mitchell finally plopped into bed, a black canvas fold-out cot in a room of 100 medical

personnel. He and others used eye masks because the emergency generator kept the overhead lights on.

Initially, men and women tried to discretely change into sweats or whatever they had to sleep in.

"The next night, we were all so exhausted," Mitchell said. "You didn't care who was beside you, who saw you in your britches."

Doctors, nurses and other staff on differing shifts would get out of bed or climb into bed at varying times, making it difficult to sleep.

"You close your eyes at night and you think about all the stuff you saw during the day," Mitchell said.

And, sometimes there was the popping sound of gunfire.

"There were certainly gunshots at night that we would hear and reports of gas stations being robbed and other things," the veteran nurse said.

Military personnel and agents with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection guarded the emergency room in case of civil unrest from frustrated residents unable to find water, food or medicine.

Two days after the nurses arrived from Nashville, showers were set up at the hospital and a on the third day there were laundry services available. Still, those who didn't have time to clean their clothes were excited when someone later dropped off boxes of clean underwear.

"It was hot and humid and you can imagine what that does to your clothes and how that makes you feel," Mitchell said

After three nights, HCA Healthcare secured hotel rooms. Even though the hotels didn't have electricity or water, it was a quiet place to rest.

Mitchell said he didn't shower during his five nights in Asheville, but before climbing back on the bus Friday, Oct. 4, to head home, he poured some water on a washcloth and heated it up in a microwave to tidy up.

Amid the turmoil, Mitchell said he felt supported by HCA, which has continued to bring in water, food and supplies along with mobile units containing kitchens, bathrooms, showers, laundry and handwashing stations.

Guilt over leaving Asheville

The Nashville nurses quickly bonded with their counterparts in Asheville and leaving was difficult.

"I can't image what it was like for people who were there before we got there and they were still there when we left,' Mitchell said, describing feeling guilty.

As the bus pulled out of the Mission Hospital parking lot to return to Nashville, another bus of relief nurses from another town pulled in. Mission staff and relief personnel treated more than 2,500 patients and delivered more than 60 babies since the start of the storm.

Five days after Mitchell returned from the Asheville disaster zone, Hurricane Milton pummeled Florida, a personal blow to Mitchell and his wife, Suzi. They have a home in Hendersonville and are searching for a job in the Nashville area for his wife, who is currently director of trauma services for HCA Florida Lawnwood Hospital in Fort Pierce, a town damaged by a deadly tornado blamed on Milton.

Bruce Mitchell and his wife plan to sell their home in Port St. Lucie, also in Milton's path and damaged by tornadoes. When Mitchell talked to The Tennessean Thursday, phone lines were down and he didn't know the condition of their

house.

Regardless, his thoughts are on what he can do to help others.

Mitchell told his supervisor on Thursday: "Please send me.' "

Reporter Beth Warren covers health care and can be reached at bwarren@tennessean.com.

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Armed militia threats to FEMA in NC? - Sheriff says no, one man acted alone

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ASHEVILLE — Federal emergency response personnel working in Helene-devastated areas of Rutherford County were subject to threats over the weekend, resulting in a halt to some aid operations over a potential "armed militia" and the arrest of an armed Forest City man, officials said.

Just before 1 p.m. on Oct. 12, the Rutherford County Sheriff's Office received a call from U.S. Army soldiers at a gas station in neighboring Polk Countyafter speaking with a gas station attendant, according to Capt. Jamie Keever. The attendant had relayed a threat made by a customer toward FEMA employees helping in the Lake Lure and Chimney Rock area — towns in Rutherford County — and the sheriff's office was called to investigate.

The customer, identified as William Jacob Parsons, 44, had made a "vague threat" that he was going to "go mess up some FEMA personnel," Keever told the Citizen Times Oct. 14. Parsons was armed with an AR style rifle and two handguns, according to his arrest warrant.

Parsons was arrested that night, Oct. 12, and charged with going armed to the terror of the people, his arrest warrant shows. Keever said he was booked into the Rutherford County Detention Center under a \$10,000 bond, which he later paid, and was released.

The same afternoon, the U.S. Forest Service received an email from Federal Emergency Management Agency, which said a National Guard unit working for FEMA "came across some militia members who said they were out hunting FEMA," according to spokesperson Jason Nedlo with the Forest Service's Southern Area Blue Incident Management Team.

Federal emergency response personnel in the county halted operations on Oct. 12 and moved to a different area because of the reported "armed militia" threats, The Washington Post reported, citing the email sent to multiple federal agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service.

"FEMA has advised all federal responders (in) Rutherford County, NC, to stand down and evacuate the county immediately," an official with the U.S. Forest Service sent to other federal agencies, according to The Post. "The message stated that National Guard troops 'had come across x2 trucks of armed militia saying there were out hunting FEMA."

But, according to Capt. Keever with the sheriff's office, "there's no indication right now that there was a truckload of militiamen," despite the initial report stating there was.

"After further investigation, it was determined Parsons acted alone and there were no truck loads of militia going to Lake Lure," the sheriff's office said in a news release.

A senior FEMA official in Washington confirmed that workers have been pulled back from going door to door, as is their usual method of helping in disaster areas and are instead working out of Disaster Recovery Centers "as we work through this challenge."

The official, speaking on the condition of anonymity for security reasons, said FEMA staff were "not evacuated entirely," but instead are working out of the centers, "which are fixed locations that have security at them."

Parson's arrest comes amid a spiral of misinformation and rumors on social media about federal responses to

Helene, which are focused in part on the Rutherford County towns of Chimney Rock and Lake Lure. These include rumors that Chimney Rock will be bulldozed, and government agencies are blocking help to the town.

Governor Roy Cooper released a statement in a joint news release with FEMA later in the day Oct. 14, highlighting how state, federal and local response workers are "working around the clock." Cooper said he has directed the North Carolina Department of Public Safety to help "partners like FEMA to coordinate with law enforcement to ensure their safety and security as they continue their important work."

"We know that significant misinformation online contributes to threats against response workers on the ground, and the safety of responders must be a priority," Cooper said in the Oct. 14 release.

The FEMA official also said the agency is trying to combat a lot of rumor and disinformation "that is swirling" in disaster relief and recovery areas, "which can be challenging because a lot of it is, 'I heard this, I heard that,'" the official told USA TODAY.

The official said FEMA will continue to assess its security posture, working with local law enforcement.

As of Oct. 14, FEMA has provided more than \$96 million in housing and other types of assistance for over 75,000 households, according to a news release. FEMA and the state continue to operate four Disaster Recovery Centers in Asheville, Lenoir, Marion and Sylva, plus additional site will open in Hendersonville Oct. 16. To find the nearest center, visit FEMA.gov/DRC.

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