

# NCDOT workers from coast help with mountain storm cleanup

October 21, 2024  $\mid$  Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)

Author: Richard Stradling; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1250 Words

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HENDERSONVILLE The hurricane caused historic flooding in North Carolina. Battle Whitley, an engineer for the N.C. Department of Transportation, looked at a map on the wall that showed more than 100 roads and bridges in his county alone that needed repairs. Whitley wondered how his crews would fix them all.

It'll take days at each site, he thought. This will never end.

Then Whitley stepped outside to see a convoy of dump trucks, bulldozers, backhoes and men arriving from Winston-Salem.

"And I'm not embarrassed to tell anybody, I literally broke down in tears when I saw that convoy coming in to help," he said.

The storm was Hurricane Floyd in 1999. Whitley was in charge of highway maintenance in Nash County, just east of the Triangle, one of the hardest hit by flooding.

Now Whitley is the highway maintenance engineer for NCDOT's Division 3, a six-county area in the coastal southeastern corner of the state. The memory of feeling overwhelmed and seeing that convoy arrive is one reason he's more than happy to be lending a hand in the mountains after Hurricane Helene.

Whitley led a group of 21 Division 3 workers to Hendersonville, with equipment and supplies, on Oct. 2, five days after Helene brought torrential rain and wind to the region. They were relieved by about 28 more NCDOT workers from the division a week later, part of a rotation in and out that he expects will extend through Thanksgiving and possibly Christmas.

All of them volunteered for the extra duty, which involves 12-hour days away from home clearing trees and mudslides and reconstructing washed-out roads. Many of the men recall when the mountain NCDOT divisions came to Eastern North Carolina after Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and Hurricane Florence two years later.

"It's kind of return the favor," said Sanford Williams, who has done road maintenance in Division 3 for 19 years.

"And part of our job is helping the public, kind of like a volunteer firefighter. It's just something we do."

Since Helene, thousands of state and local government workers have poured into Western North Carolina, including firefighters from Cary, utility crews from Raleigh and police from the small Union County town of Waxhaw. More than 1,500 search-and-rescue teams, public health nurses, veterinarians and others from 38 states have also come to help under a mutual aid agreement called the Emergency Management Assistance Compact.

Mountain storms are different

NCDOT has its own mutual aid system that pairs each of its 14 geography-based divisions with another. Division 3 is paired with Division 14, based in Hendersonville, on the assumption that a storm will wallop only one end of the state at a time.

The men from Division 3 are accustomed to hurricanes, and in some ways the work in the mountains is familiar.

But the steep terrain and what it does to water is not. On the coastal plain, two feet of rain causes an almost slow-

motion flood that can take days to work its way to the ocean.

"We're low and flat. So the water just rises and it just floods everything," said Jeff Garrett, NCDOT's Pender County maintenance engineer. "But it doesn't have any speed to it, for the most part. So it rises, crests and it goes back down, and you're just dealing with what's left."

Two feet of rain in the mountains, in contrast, creates torrents of water that cascade downhill, funneled into streams and rivers with such force that it carries trees, boulders, houses, cars and anything else in its path. That power is something the guys from Division 3 don't normally see.

"Everywhere we went has been a big surprise," Williams said.

A tributary of the Big Hungry River, normally a stream, brought down so many trees and so much debris that it created a logjam 150 feet wide in front of the culverts under Deep Gap Road.

"I don't know that we could have put that logjam in there as thick as the storm put it in there," Williams said. "It was a full day of removal to get it out."

Dustin Johnson, an equipment operator from Duplin County who says he can "run just about anything with a steering wheel or levers in it," was part of a Division 3 crew that reached a washed-out portion of N.C. 9 between Black Mountain and Bat Cave.

"There was a gap. Nothing. The road was gone," Johnson said. "We were like, 'How we going to get across?' They're like, 'You're going to build it.'"

They set about pulling soil and rock up the slope and tore up some of the surviving asphalt to move dirt from underneath into the gap, creating a road again. Johnson loved it and asked Whitley if he could stay on another week.

"When things slow down, I'll be ready to go back," he told him. "But as long as I'm still hot and ready to go and there's stuff to be done - big stuff to be done - I thrive for that stuff."

Worst storm in history for NCDOT

Helene has done more damage to the state's roads and bridges than any other storm in history, state Transportation Secretary Joey Hopkins said Monday. Nathan Tanner, a construction engineer who is coordinating the response in two counties in Division 14, can't argue with that.

"It's been way more extensive for us than we ever imagined," Tanner said. "It's not common for us to lose entire roadways."

As the major highways reopen and life appears to get back to normal, hundreds of mostly secondary roads remain closed.

Among them is Big Hungry Road, where men from Division 3 worked. A normally shin-deep stretch of the Hungry River washed over a 20-foot-high steel-and-concrete bridge, carrying most of it downstream and cutting off more than 70 people who live on Big Hungry Road.

NCDOT and a contractor used pieces of the destroyed bridge to build a walkway across the river and assembled a steel stairway up the steep slope, so people can get across. It will be more than a month or two before a temporary car bridge will be in place, Tanner said.

The partnership with Division 3 has been a godsend, Tanner said, as have the offers of help from other divisions.

"If you call a coastal county and say I need 72-inch pipe by tomorrow, they find a way to get you 72-inch pipe by tomorrow," he said.

Hot meals, showers, laundry and a cot

The men of Division 3 are sleeping on cots in a warehouse owned by the Biltmore Church, which donated the space off Interstate 26 near Flat Rock.

NCDOT normally puts people in hotels but wasn't sure what it would find given the widespread power and water problems after Helene. It has room for 250 of its out-of-town employees in the warehouse. A contractor from Texas provides meals, water, portable showers and toilets and laundry services.

Whitley said the first group from Division 3 wasn't sure what the accommodations would be like.

"So we said, 'Look, guys, when you're going up there pack as if you're going camping for seven days,'" he said. "We wanted to be self-sufficient so we weren't a burden on anybody up here."

Williams said they brought grills and 50 pounds of pork chops, smoked sausage, hot dogs and baloney, which they managed to eat between meals.

"Nothing went to waste," he said.

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# It's now simpler to apply to these NC colleges. And this week, you can do it for free

October 21, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Korie Dean; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1194 Words Page: 5A OpenURL Link

A new pilot program launched this month that makes it easier for high school students across North Carolina to apply to college. And this week, applicants can apply to many of the participating schools for free.

Each year, the College Foundation of North Carolina sponsors College Application Week - a weeklong event that allows high school seniors to apply to dozens of colleges and universities across the state for free through the CFNC website. This year's College Application Week runs from Oct. 21-27, with public and private four-year colleges and all 58 of the state's community colleges participating.

While the event is helpful to applicants in any year, that's even more true this year.

That's because, through two new programs, students can apply to many of the colleges participating in College Application Week by filling out a short form, instead of the long applications normally associated with the process. The new admissions programs are available throughout the fall application cycle - but combined, College Application Week and the new pilot programs mean that students can easily apply to college and, for this week only, do so for free.

The new NC College Connect program allows eligible students to apply to six four-year universities in the UNC System and all 58 community colleges across the state using a simplified application process. Students who are eligible for the simplified process at public schools should receive a letter in the mail with instructions to apply to colleges through the program.

More than two dozen private schools are offering a similar program, through the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities' direct admission program. Students will not receive a letter in the mail about this program because the state Department of Public Instruction is only partnering with NC College Connect, but the private schools' program remains available to eligible and qualified students.

Which colleges are participating in these new programs? Which ones are waiving application fees this week? And how can students take advantage of these resources?

Here's everything you need to know.

NC College Connect creates simplified application process

NC College Connect, which is new this fall, allows eligible students to apply to several of the state's public universities and all of the community colleges by filling out a significantly shortened application.

To be eligible, students must be enrolled in a public high school or charter school in North Carolina, must maintain a weighted GPA of 2.8 throughout their senior year, and must meet the state Department of Public Instruction's basic graduation requirements and the UNC System's minimum admission requirements.

Students who meet these criteria should receive a letter this month informing them that they are eligible for the NC College Connect program. The letter will include a QR code that students can scan, which will take them to the NC College Connect website.

Once on that page (cfnc.org/nc-college-connect), students can click the "Claim Your Spot!" button on the right side

to access the application. Students will need to log in to their existing CFNC.org account, or create one, to access the application.

Shun Robertson, interim senior vice president of strategy and policy with the UNC System, said the process is "very simple" and involves filling out just three pieces of information: the applying student's email address, their desired major and when they intend to enroll in college. There are no essays requested or required.

"They just answer those three questions, and then they've applied," Robertson said.

After students fill out their application, admissions professionals from the participating UNC System schools or community colleges will reach out to the student for more information, Robertson said. Students will also need to provide information about their residency status in North Carolina at a later point in the process, Robertson said.

The program does not ensure that students will be admitted to the schools they apply to, "but it is an easier way for them to get their application in the hands of the admissions counselors," Robertson said.

The public colleges and universities participating in NC College Connect are:

Elizabeth City State University

Fayetteville State University

**UNC** Asheville

**UNC Greensboro** 

**UNC Pembroke** 

Winston-Salem State University

All 58 North Carolina community colleges

NCICU offers direct admission program for private schools

Several private colleges across the state that are part of the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities group are offering a similar program to NC College Connect this fall, but students will not receive a letter informing them of the effort.

To be eligible for the NCICU direct admission program, students must have a weighted GPA of 2.8 during their senior year.

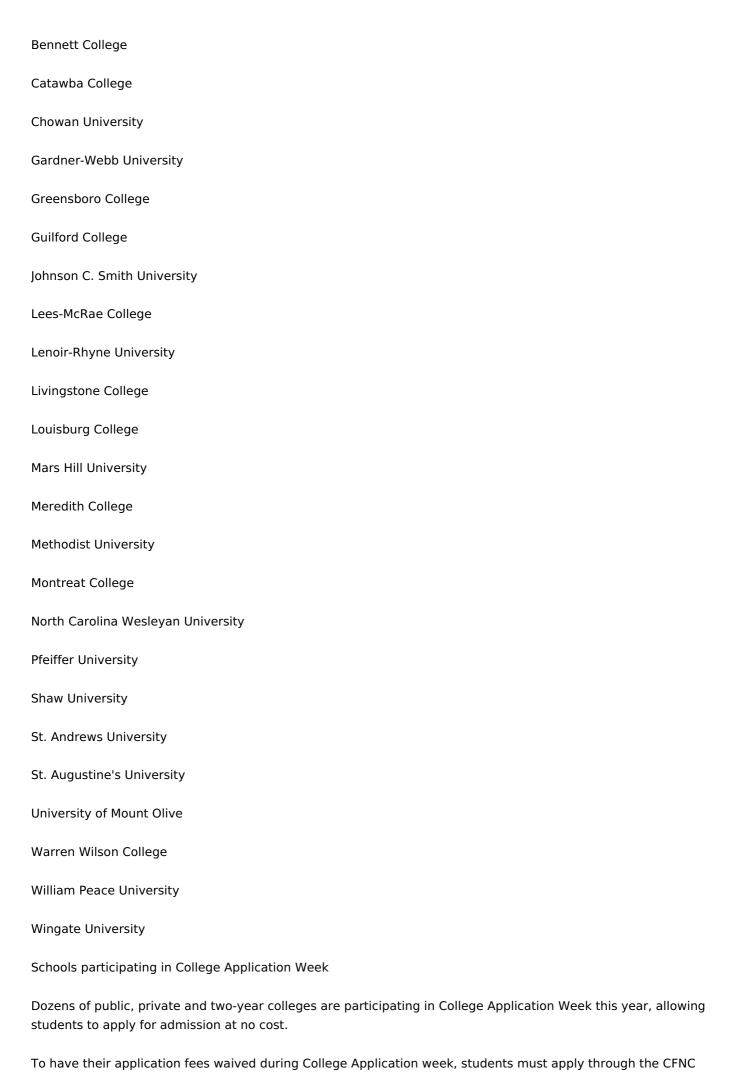
The program also offers a significantly shortened application, with just a handful of questions that NCICU says will take five minutes for students to complete. Students will receive additional information from admissions officials at the colleges after they submit their application.

There is no application fee if students apply to the participating universities through the direct admission portal, available at ncicu.org/direct-admission.

The private colleges participating in NCICU's direct admission program are:

**Barton College** 

Belmont Abbey College



portal, which is accessible through cfnc.org/apply-to-college.
The colleges participating in College Application Week are:
Barton College
Belmont Abbey College
Bennett College
Brevard College
Campbell University
Carolinas College of Health Science
Catawba College
Chowan University
Davidson College
East Carolina University
Elizabeth City State University
Elon University
Fayetteville State University
Gardner-Webb University
Greensboro College
Guilford College
High Point University
Johnson & Wales University - Charlotte
Johnson C. Smith University
Lees-McRae College
Lenoir-Rhyne University
Livingstone College
Louisburg College
Mars Hill University
Meredith College

Methodist offiversity
Montreat College
North Carolina A&T State University
North Carolina Central University
North Carolina Wesleyan University
Pfeiffer University
Queens University of Charlotte
St. Augustine's University
Salem College
Shaw University
St. Andrews University
UNC Asheville
UNC Pembroke
UNC School of the Arts
University of Mount Olive
Warren Wilson College
Western Carolina University
William Peace University
Wingate University
Winston-Salem State University
All 58 community colleges
If a school appears on this list andis participating in the NC College Connect or NCICU direct admission program, that means students can use the simplified application process and apply for free this week.
Additional schools waiving fees for Helene-impacted counties
In the wake of Hurricane Helene and the devastation it left across Western North Carolina, six additional universities

in the UNC System will waive application fees during College Application Week only for students enrolled at high

Appalachian State University

schools in counties included in FEMA's disaster declaration.

Students in those counties can apply to the following schools for free this week:

NC State University
UNC-Chapel Hill

**UNC** Charlotte

**UNC Greensboro** 

**UNC Wilmington** 

There may be additional resources available to these students in the coming months and in the spring, Robertson said.

"We understand that, for the students out in the west, they might have other priorities for this College Application Week," Robertson said.

More information

More information about the new NC College Connect program can be found at NCCollegeConnect.org.

More information about College Application Week can be found at cfnc.org/apply-to-college/nc-countdown-to-college.

More information about NCICU's direct admission program can be found at ncicu.org/direct-admission.

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# NC will have a new state superintendent next year. See which candidates want your vote

October 21, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: T. Keung Hui; Staff Writer | Section: News | 324 Words Page: 6A OpenURL Link

North Carolina voters will pick a new state superintendent to lead the public school system.

Current State Superintendent Catherine Truitt lost her reelection bid in the Republican primary to Michele Morrow. Now Morrow will take on Democrat Maurice "Mo" Green.

The superintendent of public instruction is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the state Department of Public Instruction. This includes the \$11 billion in state funding for public schools that DPI distributes to local school districts and charter schools.

The superintendent advocates and informs the state on issues in education, makes recommendations for policy changes to the legislature and governor and works with the State Board of Education.

Truitt was elected in 2020. During her tenure, she pushed for higher pay for teachers, changes in how reading and math are taught, overhauling how schools are graded by the state and harsher penalties for teachers who have sex with students.

Now a new superintendent will have to deal with issues such as helping Western North Carolina schools recover from Hurricane Helene and helping schools make up for pandemic learning losses.

Green and Morrow came out ahead in their respective March primaries to face off this fall.

Green is the former superintendent of Guilford County Schools, which is the state third-largest school district. He is the former executive director of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, a group that funds progressive causes.

Morrow is a registered nurse, conservative activist, homeschool parent and former Christian missionary.

The race has gotten national attention due to CNN reports about Morrow's past social media posts. Those include talking about killing Democrats such as former President Barack Obama, and encouraging President Donald Trump to use the military to stay in power in 2021.

Candidate questionnaires

The News & Observer and The Charlotte Observer asked Green and Morrow to fill out a candidate questionnaire. Only Green responded. Read Green's response and other questionnaires at newsobserver.com/voter-guide.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C5C0FA25A55828>



# Hickory native: Democracy is on the line this year

October 21, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Letters | 780 Words OpenURL Link

I grew up in Hickory during the 1950s and 1960s, married during the Vietnam War, and moved away in 1968 with my veteran husband. When I come home to visit my family, I am always reminded of the beauty of this area of the state and the generosity and hospitality of its people. Many of us can trace our family genealogy back to the 1600s and 1700s when western Europeans came over to escape persecution.

I am proud of my heritage, but I have also learned a lot from people in the state where I now live who trace their genealogy back to Eastern European countries where they escaped persecution in the early 1900s or during the first or second world wars. Their stories point out that there will always be power hungry dictators.

In the state where I live now and also in the South, I am disturbed by the hateful signs that I see and the fact that families are torn apart over political disagreements. This morning, I saw a sign that said, "I love Trump because he pisses off people I cannot stand." That sign expresses anger, and to help ourselves we need to put the anger aside and figure out which candidates are doing what is best for us.

Since this area was hit by Hurricane Helene last week, I have seen people in my sister's neighborhood pull together and try to help everyone. A neighbor loaned my sister a generator and other neighbors have helped us refuel it by pouring from heavy containers. I have been encouraged because no one has argued about politics for a few days. Today, I found a news station while I was driving. Unfortunately, a Republican commentator was stating that the federal government was not helping people in Asheville. I knew this was not true because other people in our area have told me that both FEMA and the National Guard are in Western North Carolina.

A few minutes later, the commentator contradicted himself by saying that the federal government was stopping people from going into dangerous areas to help people. Obviously, the government is in Western North Carolina and is trying to prevent other people from putting themselves in danger so there are more people to rescue. To find out the truth, I searched the internet at the library and found a WBTV program from yesterday that showed FEMA bringing truckloads of food and water to North Carolina.

To discover the truth about political commentary, evaluate it yourself and do additional research. To make a good decision for our families, research is needed. Cable networks are under the control of the owners and shareholders who do their bidding. Non-cable news reports on CBS, NBC, and ABC are more accurate and more balanced.

This week I talked to my sister's neighbor and some cousins who told me they always vote Republican because their families had always voted Republican. Others told me they vote Republican because their church friends vote Republican. The world keeps changing rapidly, and the Republican party is not the party that our parents knew.

Also, neither party is a Christian party. We need to look at policies and actions to see which candidates will help us.

Democrats want to build an opportunity economy which includes the following: raising the child tax credit to \$3,500 per child, giving parents of newborns a one-time tax credit of \$6,000, providing tax incentives for builders of affordable apartments and for families buying their first home, capping the cost of childcare to 7% of a family's income, enacting a federal ban on price gouging of food, and increasing the tax deduction for small business startups. To pay for this, taxes will increase for people who make over \$400,000 a year and for people with fortunes over \$100 million. It is time that the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes.

The Republican plan is very different. Former President Trump is focusing on tariffs for other countries. Many economists and Republicans say that this will hurt the American economy and lead to higher prices for consumers.

Trump also wants to lower the corporate tax rate from 21% to 15%. We all have seen that lowering the tax rate for companies does not help the working class. Instead, companies reward their CEOs and stockholders when that happens.

It is difficult for the average American with work and family responsibilities to find time to research the candidates, but democracy is on the line this year. We need to take the time to uncover the truth, vote wisely, and put our anger aside. Listen to the platform for candidates from both sides. Be sure to vote, but most importantly, be an informed voter.

Linda Willet

## Batavia, Illinois

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# Faith-based relief groups prepare for long haul

October 21, 2024 | High Point Enterprise (NC) Author: BOB SMIETANA Religion News Service | Section: Local | 683 Words OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE — With the one-two punch of Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton within two weeks of one another, faith-based disaster relief groups are getting ready for a long, slow recovery that may take years.

"It's going to take a long time," said Bruce Frank, pastor of Biltmore Church in Asheville, which is working closely with North Carolina Baptist Disaster Relief. Volunteers have already cooked more than 100,000 meals in the church parking lot.

Two hours away in Boone, staff and volunteers from Samaritan's Purse, an evangelical humanitarian group led by evangelist Franklin Graham, have been working to clear debris, set up water filtration systems and deliver food and other supplies by helicopter to communities cut off by the storm.

In rural communities the group has set up some 50 Starlink satellite kits to restore internet service and has furnished generators to supply power, set up oxygen shelters for patients unable to receive their usual supplies, and refilled more than 1,000 oxygen tanks.

So far, said Graham, more than 16,000 volunteers have shown up to help, with more expected. The group is working at sites in North Carolina, Georgia and Florida in Helene recovery. More help will be needed in the months to come, said Graham.

But Graham said plans are already underway for long-term rebuilding, primarily recruiting leaders for that work and arranging with suppliers for rebuilding materials. Meanwhile, volunteers already on the scene are installing culverts to drain water and helping to temporarily restore gravel roads washed out by the storm.

The nondenominational Christian volunteer group Eight Days of Hope has been working on rapid response to both Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton, setting up mobile feeding sites as well as trailers with laundry and shower equipment.

"So if you need a warm shower or you need your laundry done, you could come and do that and get a warm meal while you were there," said Hannah Fletcher, a spokesperson for the group.

Having just wrapped up its Milton response, Eight Days of Hope planned to continue its work for much of October in areas affected by Helene, while making plans to return for rebuilding work once communities have a long-term plan in place.

The group's more than 250 volunteer leaders nationwide specialize in mobilizing large numbers of disaster relief volunteers, working with churches and as well as long-term recovery leaders in local communities.

"We come in and we're like an adrenaline shot," Fletcher said. "We do a bunch of work on all the homes as fast as we can, and then eight days later, we're gone. Then the long-term recovery group kind of carries the rest of those houses to the finish line."

The Salvation Army has served nearly 6,000 meals to Florida residents affected by Milton and more than 400,000 meals in communities affected by Helene. The group also plans to assist with long-term recovery.

Todd Unzicker, executive director of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, said that so far more than 2,000 of its volunteers have been deployed to assist with recovery from Helene, but he is telling churches and

volunteers who are ready to help right now that there is plenty of work ahead.

"The challenge is saying, hold on," he said. "We are going to need you a month from now and six months from now."

Unzicker said that, of the convention's 3,000 churches, 1,100 are in communities affected by Helene.

He also said that Baptist disaster relief is working closely with state, local and federal officials in the aftermath of the storm. Those leaders are doing all they can, Unzicker said.

"North Carolina Baptists are grateful for all of our government officials," he said. "We pray for them and we're ready to stand by and work with them."

Frank, the pastor at Asheville's Biltmore Church, has been encouraged by the way people in his congregation and others have responded to Helene, noting that the church's 828Strong ministry began as a way to respond to needs during COVID-19 and that the work has continued since.

"Unlike COVID, which kind of tore people apart, this has brought people together," he said. "The church has stepped up, both our church as well as other churches."

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# Emergency workers providing space heaters, water in McDowell County weeks after Helene

October 21, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Mike Conley | Section: Local | 309 Words OpenURL Link

McDowell County Emergency Management is working with people to help get space heaters and water distributed around the community.

McDowell County has assigned local emergency representatives to each community. The representatives are tasked with quickly resolving problems, such as coordinating the distribution of space heaters and ensuring access to clean water for those experiencing long-term water outages, according to a news release from emergency management.

"In addition to local representatives, our community paramedics are working diligently to answer calls for homebound commodity requests," the release said. "We are providing essential supplies such as warm weather gear, space heaters, animal food and more, to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens are supported during this critical time."

Damage assessment teams are documenting private and public property damage in McDowell County, the release said. The documentation helps demonstrate the full impact of Hurricane Helene to state and federal officials.

"By doing so, we are ensuring that essential resources and aid continue to flow into McDowell County to assist with long-term recovery," the release said. "We are grateful for the dedication of our local fire departments, EMS, rescue services, and law enforcement agencies, whose tireless efforts have been instrumental in our response and recovery. We also extend our deepest thanks to the volunteers, faith-based organizations, and community groups who work tirelessly each day to support recovery efforts. Along with the support of our EOC representatives and the resilience of our communities, we are working together to ensure McDowell County recovers stronger than ever."

For additional information or to request assistance, contact the McDowell County Helene Hotline at 828-652-3241 or visit mcdowellcares.org.

Temporary cell tower in NW McDowell

McDowell County Emergency Services set up a Verizon SPOT temporary cell tower at Sunnyvale Church on N.C. Highway 80 to provide critical cell service to citizens experiencing long-term phone outages, the release said.

The temporary tower ensures access to reliable communication for emergencies.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C5AE568471C970>



# Chamber: Dozens of businesses in McDowell critically damaged by hurricane; 7 may not reopen

October 21, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: MIKE CONLEY nconley@mcdowellnews.com| Section: Business | 826 Words OpenURL Link

At least 60 businesses were critically damaged by Hurricane Helene in late September, according to the McDowell Chamber of Commerce.

Some of those may never reopen, chamber President and CEO Kim Effler said.

"We define a critically damaged business as one that is inoperable for a lengthy period due to significant structural or operational setbacks," she said to county commissioners. "Unfortunately, we believe that seven of these businesses may never return."

As of Monday, Oct. 14, Effler said the chamber has identified critical damage at 21 businesses in Old Fort, 18 businesses in Marion, 15 businesses in North Cove/Little Switzerland, six businesses in Nebo, and two businesses in Dysartsville.

Effler spoke to the McDowell County Board of Commissioners about the business action plan for the local community on Monday, Oct. 14.

The chamber has worked to contact businesses directly to assess damage and help business owners recover.

"Since rejoining as a team, we have taken a micro-level approach to connect directly with businesses," Effler said at the meeting. "Of the 885 businesses in the county, we have contacted approximately one-fourth so far. Among the 152 businesses reached, 80 reported that they are now fully operational."

Local leaders faced challenges in reaching many businesses due to phone service disruptions, both at the chamber office and at the businesses. Some businesses reported structural damage, mud or mold, but many remain determined to rebuild, repair and reopen, Effler said.

"Unfortunately, a few businesses, such as Buck Creek Trout Farm and Mountain Stream Campground, are total losses and will not rebuild," said Effler. "In the initial days following Hurricane Helene, businesses reported urgent needs including electricity, phone service, internet access, road repairs, and water and sewer restoration."

Effler said the chamber is working to help all businesses, chamber member or not.

"We also recognize that neighboring counties may not have the same strength and resources, and we are here to assist them as well," Effler said.

Many of the recovery efforts are loan-based rather than grants. Effler said the chamber is advocating for loan forgiveness.

"Our goal is to ensure that McDowell County's economy not only recovers but emerges stronger and more resilient from this historic disaster," Effler told commissioners. "Our plan focuses on four key areas: child care center reopenings, support for Baxter Healthcare, collaborative recovery through the Business and Industry Recovery Resource Center, and direct outreach to our local businesses."

Child care needs in McDowell

The lack of available child care that existed before Hurricane Helene hit is a bigger concern now, Effler said.

"Without reliable care for children, many employees cannot return to their jobs," Effler told commissioners.

McDowell County is home to 29 licensed child care facilities, with 14 county-operated locations and five private centers now open.

"We are in the process of contacting 10 facilities to assess their status, and two facilities have sustained critical damage and remain closed until repairs are completed," Effler said to the commissioners. "Reopening these centers will allow employees to return to their jobs, stabilize our businesses and support the county's economic recovery."

## Baxter Healthcare plant

The Baxter Healthcare IV and dialysis fluid plant in North Cove is a major employer in McDowell County and a critical factory in the health care supply chain. Last week, Baxter welcomed back 1,000 employees. Before Helene, the Baxter plant had 2,500 workers.

"Their remediation efforts have included deep cleaning of equipment and production lines, ensuring safety and product quality," Effler said. "The installation of a second temporary bridge highlights their focus on maintaining continuity of operations.

"Supply chain concerns related to Baxter have made national news and are being closely monitored in collaboration with local, state and federal partners. In partnership with N.C. Commerce, we are prepared to process unemployment claims in batches if needed and will work to ensure that displaced employees return to work as quickly as possible."

### **Business Resource Center**

The Business and Industry Recovery Resource Center is a collaboration with the Marion Business Association and McDowell Technical Community College, Effler said.

"It offers both essential resources and human connection to businesses and individuals who have experienced significant losses," she said.

To date, the resource center has served 10 small businesses directly and 38 businesses across all partner agencies. Through partnerships with the Small Business Administration, NCWorks, the Workforce Development Board and the McDowell Tech Small Business Center, local leaders have created a space where businesses can access support, according to Effler.

## Support through chamber nonprofit

In response to these challenges, the McDowell chamber launched a donation campaign through its nonprofit foundation, raising \$67,000 to date. The money will be used for small business grants for those in need, Effler said.

"I want to emphasize that our business recovery efforts will continue until our economy is fully restored. While we are not experienced in business disaster recovery, the support from this community and other chambers has been invaluable," Effler said. "Lake Norman, Greenville and many others have lifted us up in this time of need. Through the collaborative work of the chamber, our partners and the community, we are confident that we will recover stronger than ever."

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#### Citation (aglc Style)

MIKE CONLEY nconley@mcdowellnews.com, 'Chamber: Dozens of businesses in McDowell critically damaged by hurricane; 7 may not reopen', *McDowell News, The* (online), 21 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a>

p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C5926463872B48>



# Watchdog group asks why - NC utilities can cut off customers despite Helene hardships

October 21, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Joe Marusak; Staff Writer | Section: News | 715 Words Page: 6A OpenURL Link

Gov. Roy Cooper included no provision in his statewide Tropical Storm Helene executive order to bar utilities from disconnecting residents who are behind on their bills - unlike his mandate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The North Carolina Utilities Commission also has enacted no such protections, unlike its orders during the pandemic.

On Oct. 7, due to Helene, Georgia Power announced it was suspending disconnections and waiving late fees until at least Dec. 15 for residential and business customers. In North Carolina, Duke Energy has made no such public announcement.

The lack of action by Cooper and utility regulators in North Carolina concerns a utility watchdog group.

"While many residents are in recovery mode and trying to put their lives back together, a constant threat haunts some: losing utilities again," Sue Sturgis, a North Carolina-based researcher with the nonprofit Energy and Policy Institute, said in an email to The Charlotte Observer.

At least 100,000 North Carolinians rely on electricity for their medical and assistive equipment and devices, she said.

Any customer can be cut off, watchdog group says

During COVID, Cooper prohibited providers of electricity, gas, water and wastewater services from disconnecting customers and collecting fees, penalties and or interest for late payments.

Cooper's COVID mandate lasted 60 days and gave residential customers at least six months to pay outstanding bills, Sturgis said. His mandate followed a North Carolina Utilities Commission order that suspended disconnections for nonpayment.

"Why aren't North Carolina's utility regulators and its largest utility doing the same for people affected by disaster?" Sturgis asked.

Cooper's press office didn't respond to four email and phone messages from the Observer over the past week.

Duke Energy and other utilities can still disconnect "any customer with a balance, despite the state of emergency that's still in effect," Sturgis said.

Duke is waiving disconnections, official says

Sam Watson, general counsel for the state utility commission, said several utilities, including Duke Energy, are voluntarily waiving disconnection and late fees, among other measures, for customers in Helene-affected areas.

Customers in need of relief from their bills should first contact their utility, Watson said. If the person they talk with is unable to resolve the issue, ask for their supervisor, he said.

If necessary, Watson said, contact the state's Public Staff Consumer Services Division at 919-733-9277 or 866-380-

9816 or via email at consumer.services@psncuc.gov.

By Tuesday, Duke Energy had restored power to all but 6,500 customers in the Carolinas and to all but 2,221 by Wednesday afternoon, according to the company outage map, down from more than 2.5 million.

Power was restored to all customers in the hard-hit mountain county of Buncombe, which includes Asheville, the outage map showed.

Still, after the deadly wildfires on the island of Maui in 2023, Hawaii's Public Utilities Commission ordered disconnections suspended, Sturgis said.

"Hawaii's largest utility, Hawaii Electric, even publicly announced its moratorium on disconnections," she said. "Why aren't North Carolina's utility regulators and its largest utility doing the same for people affected by disaster?"

"The North Carolina Utilities Commission and the Public Staff know about Duke Energy's voluntary suspension of disconnections and late fees,' Sturgis said. "But how are the people struggling to rebuild their lives in disaster-stricken Western North Carolina supposed to know about the policy?"

"There's been no public announcement by the company or by any state agency," she said. "Duke Energy has repeatedly said it's committed to customer outreach, but it's failing to offer any information up front about the disconnection suspension."

"Compare this with Georgia Power's announcement via press release that it suspended disconnections and late fees through at least Dec. 15 for people affected by Helene," she said.

"Always here to assist customers"

Regarding customers who can't pay their outstanding bills due to Helene, "we are taking a flexible, personal approach to working with those that are facing financial hardships," Duke Energy spokesman Jeff Brooks said in a statement for this story.

"Those in the heavily impacted areas of upstate SC and western NC will be extended the flexibility needed to help them through this difficult time," Brooks said.

"We're always here to assist our customers," he said.

Customers without power are in the "harder and hardest hit areas," Brooks said. "So, these would be places that we are doing more rebuilding of infrastructure than repair. Some areas have been completely devastated, and all infrastructure is being rebuilt."

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Joe Marusak, Staff Writer, 'Watchdog group asks why NC utilities can cut off customers despite Helene hardships', *News & Observer, The* (online), 21 Oct 2024 6A <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C5C075358E0D70>



# Helene wrecked their Western NC towns - and homes, then came - the bees and fire ants

October 21, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Catherine Muccigrosso; Staff Writer | Section: News | 541 Words Page: 2A OpenURL Link

An additional struggle to western North Carolina's Hurricane Helene recovery involves an increase in stinging insects like bees, yellow jackets and fire ants. That has had led state health authorities to make a large purchase of allergy medications.

The N.C. Department of Health and Human Services does not track reports of people who have been stung or bitten by insects. But the agency has had "anecdotal reports of increased numbers of stinging insects in the affected areas of western North Carolina," spokeswoman Summer Tonizzo told The Charlotte Observer Tuesday by email.

"We have made a large purchase of epi-pens and Benadryl," the state health agency said in a statement to The Charlotte Observer late Monday.

The state did not say how much it was spending on that purchase. A state Health Department official was not made available for an interview.

The medication is being distributed to EMS and disaster relief agencies, hospitals and shelter operators.

Helene hit North Carolina on Sept. 26 causing landslides and flooding leaving mass destruction with 27 counties designated as major disaster areas. Gov. Roy Cooper said Tuesday there were 95 confirmed deaths and 92 people still missing.

NC medical orders and waivers

On Friday, State Health Director Betsey Tilson issued a standing order authorizing pharmacists licensed or practicing in North Carolina an emergency waiver to dispense epinephrine auto-injectors for treatment of allergic reactions to stinging and biting insects, and other allergens, according to the NC Board of Pharmacy's website.

The requests can be made from people with allergies, a caregiver, family member or friend of a person at risk of experiencing or having a history of an anaphylactic reaction.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also activated the Emergency Prescription Assistance Program to help uninsured residents replace lost medications or medical equipment because of the storm.

More contact with insects

Many of the reported insect stings were from electricians and other outdoor workers, according to the Associated Press.

"If your habitat was disturbed, you're going to go out and look for more places to live," said Sarah Stellwagen, assistant professor of biological sciences at UNC Charlotte with a background in entomology.

As for yellow jackets, they can be easily disturbed if someone walks across their ground nest.

"As people are out there moving debris around and getting their property back in order, I think they're probably coming in contact with these things more than they normally would," Stellwagen said.

People also may be around bugs more regularly because they're living without power and spending more time outside, or because of structural damage, homes may not sealed off.

More about stinging insects

Insects, just like squirrels and other animals, also are preparing for winter so there's more competition for food. "There's lots of (insects) cleaning up the organic material as well," Stellwagen said, such as waste and rot after the flood.

She suggested wearing bug spray and watch for nests during cleanup in the mountains. And this time, Mother Nature may be helpful.

"Because it's getting cooler, I think people will start seeing some relief from these things for sure," Stellwagen said, "particularly when we get some regular frosts."

Catherine Muccigrosso: 7043585198, @CatMuccigrosso

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Catherine Muccigrosso, Staff Writer, 'Helene wrecked their Western NC towns and homes, then came the bees and fire ants', News & Observer, The (online), 21 Oct 2024 2A <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C5C075315CD740>



# NCDOT workers from coast help with mountain storm cleanup

October 21, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1250 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

HENDERSONVILLE The hurricane caused historic flooding in North Carolina. Battle Whitley, an engineer for the N.C. Department of Transportation, looked at a map on the wall that showed more than 100 roads and bridges in his county alone that needed repairs. Whitley wondered how his crews would fix them all.

It'll take days at each site, he thought. This will never end.

Then Whitley stepped outside to see a convoy of dump trucks, bulldozers, backhoes and men arriving from Winston-Salem.

"And I'm not embarrassed to tell anybody, I literally broke down in tears when I saw that convoy coming in to help," he said.

The storm was Hurricane Floyd in 1999. Whitley was in charge of highway maintenance in Nash County, just east of the Triangle, one of the hardest hit by flooding.

Now Whitley is the highway maintenance engineer for NCDOT's Division 3, a six-county area in the coastal southeastern corner of the state. The memory of feeling overwhelmed and seeing that convoy arrive is one reason he's more than happy to be lending a hand in the mountains after Hurricane Helene.

Whitley led a group of 21 Division 3 workers to Hendersonville, with equipment and supplies, on Oct. 2, five days after Helene brought torrential rain and wind to the region. They were relieved by about 28 more NCDOT workers from the division a week later, part of a rotation in and out that he expects will extend through Thanksgiving and possibly Christmas.

All of them volunteered for the extra duty, which involves 12-hour days away from home clearing trees and mudslides and reconstructing washed-out roads. Many of the men recall when the mountain NCDOT divisions came to Eastern North Carolina after Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and Hurricane Florence two years later.

"It's kind of return the favor," said Sanford Williams, who has done road maintenance in Division 3 for 19 years.

"And part of our job is helping the public, kind of like a volunteer firefighter. It's just something we do."

Since Helene, thousands of state and local government workers have poured into Western North Carolina, including firefighters from Cary, utility crews from Raleigh and police from the small Union County town of Waxhaw. More than 1,500 search-and-rescue teams, public health nurses, veterinarians and others from 38 states have also come to help under a mutual aid agreement called the Emergency Management Assistance Compact.

Mountain storms are different

NCDOT has its own mutual aid system that pairs each of its 14 geography-based divisions with another. Division 3 is paired with Division 14, based in Hendersonville, on the assumption that a storm will wallop only one end of the state at a time.

The men from Division 3 are accustomed to hurricanes, and in some ways the work in the mountains is familiar.

But the steep terrain and what it does to water is not. On the coastal plain, two feet of rain causes an almost slow-

motion flood that can take days to work its way to the ocean.

"We're low and flat. So the water just rises and it just floods everything," said Jeff Garrett, NCDOT's Pender County maintenance engineer. "But it doesn't have any speed to it, for the most part. So it rises, crests and it goes back down, and you're just dealing with what's left."

Two feet of rain in the mountains, in contrast, creates torrents of water that cascade downhill, funneled into streams and rivers with such force that it carries trees, boulders, houses, cars and anything else in its path. That power is something the guys from Division 3 don't normally see.

"Everywhere we went has been a big surprise," Williams said.

A tributary of the Big Hungry River, normally a stream, brought down so many trees and so much debris that it created a logjam 150 feet wide in front of the culverts under Deep Gap Road.

"I don't know that we could have put that logjam in there as thick as the storm put it in there," Williams said. "It was a full day of removal to get it out."

Dustin Johnson, an equipment operator from Duplin County who says he can "run just about anything with a steering wheel or levers in it," was part of a Division 3 crew that reached a washed-out portion of N.C. 9 between Black Mountain and Bat Cave.

"There was a gap. Nothing. The road was gone," Johnson said. "We were like, 'How we going to get across?' They're like, 'You're going to build it.'"

They set about pulling soil and rock up the slope and tore up some of the surviving asphalt to move dirt from underneath into the gap, creating a road again. Johnson loved it and asked Whitley if he could stay on another week.

"When things slow down, I'll be ready to go back," he told him. "But as long as I'm still hot and ready to go and there's stuff to be done - big stuff to be done - I thrive for that stuff."

Worst storm in history for NCDOT

Helene has done more damage to the state's roads and bridges than any other storm in history, state Transportation Secretary Joey Hopkins said Monday. Nathan Tanner, a construction engineer who is coordinating the response in two counties in Division 14, can't argue with that.

"It's been way more extensive for us than we ever imagined," Tanner said. "It's not common for us to lose entire roadways."

As the major highways reopen and life appears to get back to normal, hundreds of mostly secondary roads remain closed.

Among them is Big Hungry Road, where men from Division 3 worked. A normally shin-deep stretch of the Hungry River washed over a 20-foot-high steel-and-concrete bridge, carrying most of it downstream and cutting off more than 70 people who live on Big Hungry Road.

NCDOT and a contractor used pieces of the destroyed bridge to build a walkway across the river and assembled a steel stairway up the steep slope, so people can get across. It will be more than a month or two before a temporary car bridge will be in place, Tanner said.

The partnership with Division 3 has been a godsend, Tanner said, as have the offers of help from other divisions.

"If you call a coastal county and say I need 72-inch pipe by tomorrow, they find a way to get you 72-inch pipe by tomorrow," he said.

Hot meals, showers, laundry and a cot

The men of Division 3 are sleeping on cots in a warehouse owned by the Biltmore Church, which donated the space off Interstate 26 near Flat Rock.

NCDOT normally puts people in hotels but wasn't sure what it would find given the widespread power and water problems after Helene. It has room for 250 of its out-of-town employees in the warehouse. A contractor from Texas provides meals, water, portable showers and toilets and laundry services.

Whitley said the first group from Division 3 wasn't sure what the accommodations would be like.

"So we said, 'Look, guys, when you're going up there pack as if you're going camping for seven days,'" he said. "We wanted to be self-sufficient so we weren't a burden on anybody up here."

Williams said they brought grills and 50 pounds of pork chops, smoked sausage, hot dogs and baloney, which they managed to eat between meals.

"Nothing went to waste," he said.

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# NC will have a new state superintendent next year. See which candidates want your vote

October 21, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: T. Keung Hui; Staff Writer | Section: News | 324 Words Page: 6A OpenURL Link

North Carolina voters will pick a new state superintendent to lead the public school system.

Current State Superintendent Catherine Truitt lost her reelection bid in the Republican primary to Michele Morrow. Now Morrow will take on Democrat Maurice "Mo" Green.

The superintendent of public instruction is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the state Department of Public Instruction. This includes the \$11 billion in state funding for public schools that DPI distributes to local school districts and charter schools.

The superintendent advocates and informs the state on issues in education, makes recommendations for policy changes to the legislature and governor and works with the State Board of Education.

Truitt was elected in 2020. During her tenure, she pushed for higher pay for teachers, changes in how reading and math are taught, overhauling how schools are graded by the state and harsher penalties for teachers who have sex with students.

Now a new superintendent will have to deal with issues such as helping Western North Carolina schools recover from Hurricane Helene and helping schools make up for pandemic learning losses.

Green and Morrow came out ahead in their respective March primaries to face off this fall.

Green is the former superintendent of Guilford County Schools, which is the state third-largest school district. He is the former executive director of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, a group that funds progressive causes.

Morrow is a registered nurse, conservative activist, homeschool parent and former Christian missionary.

The race has gotten national attention due to CNN reports about Morrow's past social media posts. Those include talking about killing Democrats such as former President Barack Obama, and encouraging President Donald Trump to use the military to stay in power in 2021.

Candidate questionnaires

The News & Observer and The Charlotte Observer asked Green and Morrow to fill out a candidate questionnaire. Only Green responded. Read Green's response and other questionnaires at newsobserver.com/voter-guide.

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# It's now simpler to apply to these NC colleges. And this week, you can do it for free

October 21, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Korie Dean; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1194 Words Page: 5A OpenURL Link

A new pilot program launched this month that makes it easier for high school students across North Carolina to apply to college. And this week, applicants can apply to many of the participating schools for free.

Each year, the College Foundation of North Carolina sponsors College Application Week - a weeklong event that allows high school seniors to apply to dozens of colleges and universities across the state for free through the CFNC website. This year's College Application Week runs from Oct. 21-27, with public and private four-year colleges and all 58 of the state's community colleges participating.

While the event is helpful to applicants in any year, that's even more true this year.

That's because, through two new programs, students can apply to many of the colleges participating in College Application Week by filling out a short form, instead of the long applications normally associated with the process. The new admissions programs are available throughout the fall application cycle - but combined, College Application Week and the new pilot programs mean that students can easily apply to college and, for this week only, do so for free.

The new NC College Connect program allows eligible students to apply to six four-year universities in the UNC System and all 58 community colleges across the state using a simplified application process. Students who are eligible for the simplified process at public schools should receive a letter in the mail with instructions to apply to colleges through the program.

More than two dozen private schools are offering a similar program, through the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities' direct admission program. Students will not receive a letter in the mail about this program because the state Department of Public Instruction is only partnering with NC College Connect, but the private schools' program remains available to eligible and qualified students.

Which colleges are participating in these new programs? Which ones are waiving application fees this week? And how can students take advantage of these resources?

Here's everything you need to know.

NC College Connect creates simplified application process

NC College Connect, which is new this fall, allows eligible students to apply to several of the state's public universities and all of the community colleges by filling out a significantly shortened application.

To be eligible, students must be enrolled in a public high school or charter school in North Carolina, must maintain a weighted GPA of 2.8 throughout their senior year, and must meet the state Department of Public Instruction's basic graduation requirements and the UNC System's minimum admission requirements.

Students who meet these criteria should receive a letter this month informing them that they are eligible for the NC College Connect program. The letter will include a QR code that students can scan, which will take them to the NC College Connect website.

Once on that page (cfnc.org/nc-college-connect), students can click the "Claim Your Spot!" button on the right side

to access the application. Students will need to log in to their existing CFNC.org account, or create one, to access the application.

Shun Robertson, interim senior vice president of strategy and policy with the UNC System, said the process is "very simple" and involves filling out just three pieces of information: the applying student's email address, their desired major and when they intend to enroll in college. There are no essays requested or required.

"They just answer those three questions, and then they've applied," Robertson said.

After students fill out their application, admissions professionals from the participating UNC System schools or community colleges will reach out to the student for more information, Robertson said. Students will also need to provide information about their residency status in North Carolina at a later point in the process, Robertson said.

The program does not ensure that students will be admitted to the schools they apply to, "but it is an easier way for them to get their application in the hands of the admissions counselors," Robertson said.

The public colleges and universities participating in NC College Connect are:

Elizabeth City State University

Fayetteville State University

**UNC** Asheville

**UNC Greensboro** 

**UNC Pembroke** 

Winston-Salem State University

All 58 North Carolina community colleges

NCICU offers direct admission program for private schools

Several private colleges across the state that are part of the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities group are offering a similar program to NC College Connect this fall, but students will not receive a letter informing them of the effort.

To be eligible for the NCICU direct admission program, students must have a weighted GPA of 2.8 during their senior year.

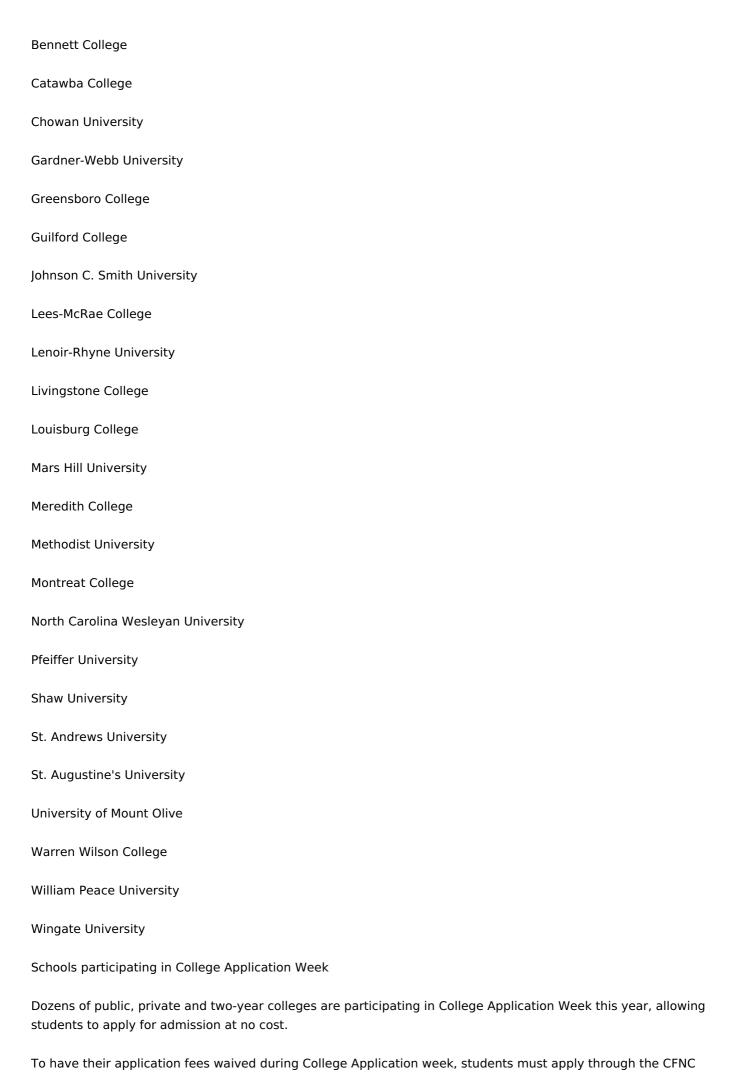
The program also offers a significantly shortened application, with just a handful of questions that NCICU says will take five minutes for students to complete. Students will receive additional information from admissions officials at the colleges after they submit their application.

There is no application fee if students apply to the participating universities through the direct admission portal, available at ncicu.org/direct-admission.

The private colleges participating in NCICU's direct admission program are:

**Barton College** 

Belmont Abbey College



portal, which is accessible through cfnc.org/apply-to-college.
The colleges participating in College Application Week are:
Barton College
Belmont Abbey College
Bennett College
Brevard College
Campbell University
Carolinas College of Health Science
Catawba College
Chowan University
Davidson College
East Carolina University
Elizabeth City State University
Elon University
Fayetteville State University
Gardner-Webb University
Greensboro College
Guilford College
High Point University
Johnson & Wales University - Charlotte
Johnson C. Smith University
Lees-McRae College
Lenoir-Rhyne University
Livingstone College
Louisburg College
Mars Hill University
Meredith College

Methodist University
Montreat College
North Carolina A&T State University
North Carolina Central University
North Carolina Wesleyan University
Pfeiffer University
Queens University of Charlotte
St. Augustine's University
Salem College
Shaw University
St. Andrews University
UNC Asheville
UNC Pembroke
UNC School of the Arts
University of Mount Olive
Warren Wilson College
Western Carolina University
William Peace University
Wingate University
Winston-Salem State University
All 58 community colleges
If a school appears on this list andis participating in the NC College Connect or NCICU direct admission program, that means students can use the simplified application process and apply for free this week.
Additional schools waiving fees for Helene-impacted counties
In the wake of Hurricane Helene and the devastation it left across Western North Carolina, six additional universities

in the UNC System will waive application fees during College Application Week only for students enrolled at high

Appalachian State University

schools in counties included in FEMA's disaster declaration.

Students in those counties can apply to the following schools for free this week:

NC	State	University

**UNC** Charlotte

**UNC-Chapel Hill** 

**UNC Greensboro** 

**UNC Wilmington** 

There may be additional resources available to these students in the coming months and in the spring, Robertson said.

"We understand that, for the students out in the west, they might have other priorities for this College Application Week," Robertson said.

More information

More information about the new NC College Connect program can be found at NCCollegeConnect.org.

More information about College Application Week can be found at cfnc.org/apply-to-college/nc-countdown-to-college.

More information about NCICU's direct admission program can be found at ncicu.org/direct-admission.

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# Photos: Trump crisscrosses NC for 3 campaign stops, views Helene aftermath

October 21, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Travis Long and Jeff Siner, News & Observer | Section: election | 1871 Words OpenURL Link

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump campaigned in North Carolina Monday, with stops to see flooding damage from Helene in Asheville followed by a rally in Greenville in the afternoon and a speech in Concord in the evening.

Trump will speak again Tuesday in Greensboro, completing a two-day swing through the closely contested state.

Here are photos from the events:

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-27.JPGFormer President Donald Trump takes the stage during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-28.JPGFormer President Donald Trump takes the stage during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-29.JPGFormer President Donald Trump takes the stage during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-30.JPGFormer President Donald Trump takes the stage during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-31.JPGFormer President Donald Trump takes the stage during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-32.JPGFormer President Donald Trump takes the stage during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-33.JPGFormer President Donald Trump takes the stage during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-34.JPGFormer President Donald Trump takes the stage during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a

faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-35.JPGFormer President Donald Trump takes the stage during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-36.JPGFormer President Donald Trump speaks during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-37.JPGFormer President Donald Trump speaks during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-39.JPGFormer President Donald Trump speaks during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-41.JPGFormer President Donald Trump speaks during a rally at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-44.JPGFormer President Donald Trump acknowledges the crowd while leaving the stage following a rally speech at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-45.JPGFormer President Donald Trump acknowledges the crowd while leaving the stage following a rally speech at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-47.JPGFormer President Donald Trump dances while leaving the stage following a rally speech at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-48.JPGFormer President Donald Trump dances while leaving the stage following a rally speech at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-49.JPGFormer President Donald Trump dances while leaving the stage following a rally speech at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-50.JPGFormer President Donald Trump dances while leaving the stage following a rally speech at Minges Coliseum in Greenville on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election

Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-01.JPGA supporter of former President Donald Trump poses with a pickup truck outside Minges Coliseum in Greenville prior to a rally on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-03.JPGSupporters of former President Donald Trump gather outside Minges Coliseum in Greenville prior to a rally on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-17.JPGSupporters of former President Donald Trump gather outside Minges Coliseum in Greenville prior to a rally on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-04.JPGSupporters of former President Donald Trump are interviewed outside Minges Coliseum in Greenville prior to a rally on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-07.JPGA man breakdances for tips as supporters of former President Donald Trump gather outside Minges Coliseum in Greenville prior to a rally on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-09.JPGA man breakdances for tips as supporters of former President Donald Trump gather outside Minges Coliseum in Greenville prior to a rally on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-10.JPGSupporters of former President Donald Trump gather outside Minges Coliseum in Greenville prior to a rally on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-11.JPGBottles of honey in the likeness of former President Donald Trump is for sale outside Minges Coliseum in Greenville prior to a rally on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-13.JPGSupporters of former President Donald Trump gather outside Minges Coliseum in Greenville prior to a rally on Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

RAL\_102124-TRUMP-GREENVILLE-TEL-18.JPGA supporter of former President Donald Trump takes a photograph on his phone outside Minges Coliseum in Greenville prior to a rally on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024. With two weeks until Election Day, Trump went on a three-city tour, in which Trump will also see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in Asheville and speak at a faith conference in Concord.

CLT\_TRUMP\_SWANNANOA\_20.JPGSecret Service members look to secure the area where former President Donald J.

Trump would speak following a tour of Swannanoa, NC Monday, October 21, 2024.

CLT\_TRUMP\_SWANNANOA\_09.JPGFormer President Donald J. Trump addresses the media in Swannanoa, NC on Monday, October 21, 2024 following his tour of damage caused by Hurricane Helene in the local area.

CLT\_TRUMP\_SWANNANOA\_19.JPGFormer President Donald J. Trump, center, addresses the media after touring the Swannanoa, NC area to see the damage caused by Hurricane Helene on Monday, October 21, 2024.

CLT\_TRUMP\_SWANNANOA\_07.JPGFormer President Donald J. Trump gives a thumbs up after speaking to the media with local Swannanoa, NC officials on Monday, October 21, 2024. The former president toured damage in the local area caused by Hurricane Helene.

CLT\_TRUMP\_SWANNANOA\_04.JPGAdam Smith, left, a former Green Beret presents former President Donald J. Trump, right, with a cross memento during the former president's tour of damage caused in Swannanoa, NC area by Hurricane Helene on Monday, October 21, 2024.

CLT\_TRUMP\_SWANNANOA\_05.JPGSwannanoa, NC residents line US 70 hoping for a glimpse former President Donald J. Trump during the former president's tour of damage caused in the area by Hurricane Helene on Monday, October 21, 2024.

CLT\_TRUMP\_SWANNANOA\_01.JPGFormer President Donald J. Trump, right, is hugged by a local Swannanoa, NC business owner, left, who led Monday's group in prayer during Trump's stop in the area to see the damage caused by Hurricane Helene.

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#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Travis Long and Jeff Siner, News & Observer, 'Photos: Trump crisscrosses NC for 3 campaign stops, views Helene aftermath', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 21 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C906625E7159A8>



## They lost their homes to Helene — but they still want to stay. What comes next?

October 21, 2024  $\mid$  News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Lexi Solomon, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 1403 Words OpenURL Link

In the three weeks since Hurricane Helene tore through Western North Carolina, it's not yet clear how many of the more than 3 million people in its path can go home, in some cases to communities where their families have lived for generations.

As residents in mountain communities survey the destruction, shock has given way to anger and frustration for some. People are staying where they can, some even in tents, at a time when temperatures are dropping. Yet there's resilience in the face of the seemingly insurmountable.

Some Avery County residents interviewed by The News & Observer still aren't certain of the full scale or cost of damage done to their homes.

Joyce and David Lyons lived in their Avery County mobile home on the Elk River since 1992, then watched it bob downstream like a toy after barely escaping with their lives.

"It just looked like a child had picked it up," David Lyons said while sitting outside the American Red Cross shelter on Shady Street in Newland.

They lost all possessions except for David's 60-pound oxygen tank, which Joyce hauled out during their escape, and the clothes on their backs. Not even Joyce's engagement ring survived the storm.

LYONS02-101024-EDH.jpgJoyce Lyons helps her husband David head back to the Red Cross shelter in Newland, N.C., on Thursday, Oct. 10, 2024. The couple's mobile home on the Elk River, which they lived in since 1992, was engulfed by flood waters and floated away after Hurricane Helene passed the area. They are living in the shelter until they can find temporary housing.

With the road to their property destroyed, the couple hadn't returned since Helene. They stayed with a neighbor for two nights, then left there on a raft manned by a swift water rescue team.

After that, they called the shelter their home, then a motel in Banner Elk paid for by FEMA. It wasn't easy being in an environment where you have so little control, especially after losing so much.

The shelter's bathroom cleaning products aggravated David's COPD, leaving him coughing many nights.

A FEMA worker floated the idea of buying a camper. But there's no way to tell what they'll be able to purchase until FEMA can assess the damage to their trailer – wherever it ended up – and calculate how much aid they'll receive.

They hoped it would happen within days, Lyons said, though assessments were briefly delayed earlier this month after workers had to pull out of the field because of threats.

'I don't understand it'

For Paul Laws, 52, there's no question as to what he and his family want, but it's unclear whether they can have it.

Though their little blue house on the street named after his father is still standing in Avery County, Helene rendered it unlivable. Laws, a former prison guard and law enforcement officer, shared the home with his wife, a pharmacist at a local hospital, and their 15-year-old daughter.

The powerful waters of the Elk River carried his teenager's brand-new car, a gift for when she got her license, and his beloved pick-up truck 500 yards down the gorge, crushing them among trees and rocks. Those same waters swept through the home Laws built from scratch in 2016, taking furniture and treasured belongings with it.

Initial assessments indicate the home's foundation, flooring, insulation, drywall, cabinetry and trim all need to be repaired or replaced, Laws said. The family also lost most of their furniture to the flood.

IMG\_2668.jpgPaul Laws is working on tearing out the damage done by the remnants of Hurricane Helene, which flooded the home he built from scratch in 2016, taking furniture and treasured belongings with it.

Disappointment that aid from FEMA won't cover repairs to all the damage done to homes is adding to the anger and frustration, say some in Avery County.

"We're barely going to get \$31,000," Paul Laws said he was told.

"FEMA is here to help; the man we had was really nice, and it's not the FEMA representatives that are the problem. It's the regulations that are the problem," Laws said.

Laws said he can't understand why North Carolina's members of Congress aren't rushing to increase funding for FEMA, which has provided \$129 million in assistance to North Carolinians as of Monday.

He reached out to Rep. Virginia Foxx, who grew up in Avery County and lives in Banner Elk, more than a week ago, he said, but never heard back.

"I don't understand it, and why our representatives and legislators haven't said a word about more FEMA funding is beyond me," he said.

'This is where their entire lives are'

Heather Bender, 42, didn't lose her home, but knows many in Avery County who did, including five of her coworkers at Wheels Contracting. Since the storm hit, she's handed out supplies at Spear Country Store in Newland, and what she hears from community members has been consistent.

"They're gonna stay," Bender said. "This is where their entire lives are. This is where generations of their family have been."

In a county with a 14.8% poverty rate, it's sometimes not so much a choice as a reality, she noted.

"When they say evacuate or go somewhere else, these people don't have that option," Bender said. "They don't have that luxury. They can't go and get a hotel somewhere else."

And even if they could, many wouldn't want to.

David and Joyce Lyons, for example, are intent on staying in their community where they've lived for most of their 39-year relationship.

"I want to go back to Elk River," David Lyons said. "I love it down there."

LYONS01-101024-EDH.jpgJoyce Lyons gets a hug from Pastor Brent Price outside the Red Cross shelter in Newland, N.C., on Thursday, Oct. 10, 2024. Joyce and her husband Davids's mobile home on the Elk River, which they lived in since 1992, was engulfed by flood waters and floated away after Hurricane Helene passed the area. They have been living in the shelter until they can find temporary housing.

To try to help people return to their homes, locals and many others from beyond the storm's path have pitched in. In Avery County, a van filled with volunteers from Michigan crossed the county, offering to help people clean up.

Laws is working with the Wake Forest-based Living Stone Building Company, which is soliciting donations to help his family repair their home for free.

That kind of generosity has been a balm as Laws and others in Avery County combat the uncertainty of the future.

"That's who I would really like to thank. God bless them, because they didn't hesitate," Paul Laws said.

Stevie Thomas, 42, lost the tiny home she shared with her boyfriend in Minneapolis. She works at the Baxter IV fluids factory in North Cove, which was damaged in the storm, keeping her and her coworkers out of work for several weeks.

The company has paid her and other workers, she said. But instead of spending her time looking for housing, she's been organizing the handout of winter coats, portable heaters and other needed things at a makeshift distribution center that three local churches set up in her town.

RAL\_100124-HELENE-KLM-02.JPGA person walks next to a demolished building in Frank, N.C. on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024, days after Hurricane Helene brought heavy rain and flooding to the western part of the state.

"This community is amazing," Thomas said. "Everybody comes together and works together."

"It's our town," she said, tearing up. "We grew up here."

Grieving what was lost before Helene hit

Looking forward, Paul Laws is frustrated by what happened before the most extreme local flooding in his lifetime.

Flood insurance would have provided additional financial help, and Laws had it for several years before it became inaccessible to him, he said. He canceled after payments skyrocketed from \$500 to \$2,700 a year around 2019, he said.

"I tried my best to insure it, I did, but we could not afford it," Laws said. "It went up so much."

As of June, only 17 households in Laws' ZIP code had flood insurance, and just 155 households in Avery County were insured, FEMA data shows.

"Considering the worst hurricanes we ever had were Hugo and the one in '04, [where] the water was 40 yards from ever even getting close to our house, it was nothing to worry about at that point," Laws said. "It was really nothing to worry about until now."

State flood plain maps sat his property in a spot with only a 1% annual chance of flooding.

"I think nobody really knew just how bad this was gonna be," Laws said.

News & Observer photojournalist Ethan Hyman contributed to this reporting.

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## Photos: Sturgill Simpson concert in Cary benefits Helene relief in North Carolina

October 21, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Scott Sharpe, News & Observer | Section: entertainment | 336 Words OpenURL Link

Sturgill Simpson thought he'd be in Asheville Monday night as part of his "Why Not?" Tour.

But after Helene devastated much of Western North Carolina, the concert was moved to Cary's Booth Amphitheatre for a benefit show. Proceeds from Simpson's Monday night show will be donated to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund.

Monday's benefit is just one of many being held across the state with singers of all genres performing to raise money for Helene relief. That includes the Concert for Carolina on Saturday at Charlotte's Bank of America Stadium and Music for the Mountains in Raleigh on Sunday. That concert, organized by Band Together and Lincoln Theatre, features performances by Old Crow Medicine Show, Chatham County Line, BJ Barham and more.

"From Wilmington With Love," featuring headliner Ben Folds and musicians from Western North Carolina, will be in Wilmington on Oct. 29.

Simpson will be back at Booth Amphitheatre Tuesday for a show that was previously scheduled. Simpson is playing music from his entire catalog as well as his most eighth and most recent studio album, "Passage du Desir," which was released in July under the stage name, Johnny Blue Skies.

Here are photos from Monday's benefit concert.

- s2.jpgSturgill Simpson performs a special benefit concert to support disaster relief initiatives in NC following devastating flooding from Helene. He performed at Cary, N.C.'s Booth Amphitheater, Monday night, Oct. 21 2024.
- s3.jpgSturgill Simpson performs a special benefit concert to support disaster relief initiatives in NC following devastating flooding from Helene. He performed at Cary, N.C.'s Booth Amphitheater, Monday night, Oct. 21 2024.
- s1.jpgSturgill Simpson performs a special benefit concert to support disaster relief initiatives in NC following devastating flooding from Helene. He performed at Cary, N.C.'s Booth Amphitheater, Monday night, Oct. 21 2024.
- s5.jpgSturgill Simpson performs a special benefit concert to support disaster relief initiatives in NC following devastating flooding from Helene. He performed at Cary, N.C.'s Booth Amphitheater, Monday night, Oct. 21 2024.

s6.jpgSturgill Simpson and his band perform "Midnight Rider" during a special benefit concert to support disaster relief initiatives in NC.

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# A meditation after the storm: What Helene left behind in the North Carolina mountains

October 21, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Andrew Carter, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 4366 Words OpenURL Link

#### I. HAYWOOD COUNTY

On the first Friday night of high school football in Haywood County since Helene, there was no better place to be than a tiny stadium in the shadow of Cold Mountain, a place to gather and a place to mourn. Locals began arriving more than two hours early. They filled the parking lot out back and set up grills and lawn chairs on a hill overlooking the field. They lined the fence down below. They packed the bleachers and left hardly an empty seat 90 minutes before kickoff.

This was an event. An escape. A fleeting Friday night of diversion. It was a communal expression of grief and of support. Of love, for each other and this land they call home. The embraces lasted longer. Old friends shared relief. The game between Pisgah High and West Henderson did not mean anything at all, given all that had happened. And yet in other ways it meant everything, because what else could bring unity like this?

More than two weeks after the most catastrophic storm in Western North Carolina in more than a century, the toll is only barely coming into focus. The raging rivers and creeks have receded, leaving behind broken hearts and roads and trails of debris in the trees, but the loss is incalculable. And how to move on? And to rebuild? And to clean up? How to grieve and persevere? Everyone here is confronting those questions.

They're discovering, too, that along with everything else it's done, Helene has revealed things about people maybe they didn't know about themselves, or each other. Strength, yes. But an unflinching sense of ... hope? Community? It was palpable everywhere from the ruins to a football game.

XT304743.jpgThe Bethel Middle School football stadium hosted Pisgah High School's first game back on Oct. 11, 2024, after Hurricane Helene which flooded Pisgah's regular home field. At Bethel Middle School, in the shadow of surrounding mountains, thousands gathered to cheer on the Black Bears.

High school football is not a phenomenon across North Carolina the way it is in Texas. But it is that way in parts of the mountains, and that way, especially, in Haywood County. The aftermath of the storm intensified the emotion. People walked into the gate crying at the sight of it - something almost like normalcy.

There was no admission charge, just a bucket for cash donations for relief efforts. "Give a little, help a lot!" a sign said out front. "Accepting donations in lieu of ticket sales."

Nothing was normal, though. The way people greeted each other was one tell. The hugs were longer and fuller, often followed by a variation of the same question: "How'd you make it out? How's your house?" Most people overheard had made it out fine but they all knew someone who hadn't. And they all knew of places that'd been decimated, in this county and all around.

Two of Pisgah's players had lost their homes. The team, itself, had lost its home field - Pisgah Memorial Stadium - after the Pigeon River flooded. The river, which runs through downtown Canton, covered the field up to the crossbar of the goal posts. It destroyed surrounding businesses, leaving behind shells of what used to be. Shops. Restaurants. People's lives and livelihoods.

It was the fourth time the river had flooded Canton in the past 20 years but never before this bad. And it hit just 18 months after Canton lost its 115-year-old paper mill, which for more than a century had been the economic engine of the community.

With its field in disrepair, Pisgah on Friday night moved the game to Bethel Middle School. The Black Bears made the short bus ride south and dressed in an auxiliary gym.

They put on jerseys that read "Mill Town" on the front, despite the closure. They strapped on helmets that said "Toughness" on the back, as if it came in endless supply. And yet maybe it did around here. "You choose toughness," Ricky Brindley, Pisgah's head football coach, said that night. "You're not born with it." And so that, Brindley said, is "something that we want to preach to our kids, that no matter the situation, we're going to choose toughness."

CLYDEHELENE-NE-101624-RTW\_7.jpgPisgah High School football coach Ricky Brindley works with his team during practice on Wednesday, October 16, 2024 in Canton, N.C. Two of the team's players lost their homes during Hurricane Helene. The team lost its home field, Pisgah Memorial Stadium from Pigeon River flooding.

The national anthem played and soon Brindley and his team made the walk down the hill. They ran onto the field to the roar of a community ready for something to cheer. A weathered man named Paul Jones bellowed from the fence, his voice booming, cracking: "You know what to do, boys! So ya better DOOOO IT! Hey! HEY! Do it for the community! Do it for the CUH-MEWN-IT-Y!"

Jones' power had only come back two days earlier. His wife's oxygen tank had been running low until a friend came through with an emergency resupply. He'd been stranded for a little while in his part of Haywood County but knew a lot of people in the surrounding mountains who'd been stuck for longer; people who'd been suffering more than he had. But he'd been suffering, too, until tonight.

"Tonight," he said, "I'm in paradise." Because he survived and he was here, screaming for Pisgah.

CLYDEHELENE-NE-101624-RTW\_3.jpgVolunteers from Olive Grove Church, in Clinton, N.C., gut a heavily damaged home on Broad Street in Clyde, N.C., on Wednesday, October 16, 2024. Historic flooding of the Pigeon River in the wake of Hurricane Helene destroyed the home's interior.

## II. CLYDE TO CULLOWHEE

When Jones wasn't screaming for Pisgah, sometimes he was crying for it, and for everything. He lives in Clyde, where more than two weeks after the storm, clean-up was only just beginning. Clyde is a town of about 1,200 in eastern Haywood County, along the Pigeon River; a "Smoky Mountain version of cozy, small-town Americana," according to the welcome sign.

During Helene, the river transformed the way most all rivers and creeks throughout Western North Carolina transformed: It swelled beyond imagination. In Clyde, it tore through the homes along Broad Street, one of the main roads downtown. Not some of the homes or most of the homes. But every home.

Some had already been gutted by the morning after the football game. Workers in hazmat suits cleared out others. Piles of drywall and insulation and furniture and board games and books and stuffed animals and clothes and carpets and housewares and everything else people owned sat outside. There was a chair. A mattress. A mudcovered washing machine.

CLYDEHELENE-NE-101624-RTW\_8.jpgA vehicle flooded by the Pigeon River in the wake of Hurricane Helene is covered with a thick layer of mud at 3610 Broad Street in Clyde, N.C., photographed on Wednesday, Oct. 16, 2024. The river crested at 27.6 feet, damaging almost every home on Broad Street

There was also a message that someone had written in marker on cardboard and left in front of the madness:

"This is stuff," it said, and then, in capital letters: "LOVE AND UNITY LAST FOREVER."

The faint smell of a cookout blew in along the breeze. Just down the street and in front of the post office, a small crew of volunteers from Burlington had brought a couple of smoker grills and enough hot dogs and burgers for 1,600 people. The man behind it all was Jason Ross, a Burlington car dealership owner who became one of thousands drawn to try to help in the mountains after Helene. They'd filled a box truck with donations from the Piedmont.

CLYDEHELENE-NE-101624-RTW\_1.jpgThe top of the mountain ridge above Clyde, N.C. is covered with a dusting of snow, as trees lower in the valley show their fall colors on Wednesday, October 16, 2024 in Clyde, N.C.

He and his crew are used to cooking for big groups; they go around the country and enter chili cook-off competitions.

"In good times we go to Florida, everywhere," Ross said of those contests. In these not good times, he "had an idea to make some meals and bring up and cook. And then the donations started coming. And then we ended up with, I think, 55 bicycles. And everything you see out here."

He started to cry, and apologized. "I'm just trying to keep it together," he said, a challenge for any witness to what Helene left behind.

The food line remained steady, with Ross bunning the dogs and burgers and his friend Big Tim Walker manning the grills while Bobby Jo handed out the trays. A team effort. Many of the people who came parked cars with back seats full of things they had saved. Children looked over the toy pile out front. Boxes of new bikes, for kids, waited to be claimed by families in need.

There have been scenes like that all over Western North Carolina, where volunteer fire departments and post offices and churches are transformed. Highways and back roads are full of signs directing people to them. Helpers serve hot meals and hand out supplies at spots converted by necessity to town squares to gather and check in.

CLYDEHELENE-NE-101624-RTW\_26.jpgThe view of Broad Street in Clyde, N.C., from David Matteson's home on Wednesday, October 16, 2024. Matteson and his wife lost all of their household belongings after historic flooding of the Pigeon River in the wake of Hurricane Helene almost three weeks ago.

A lot of places, though, suffered minimal damage, or none. The drive from Clyde to Cullowhee, for a Western Carolina football game Saturday afternoon, passed through a lot of such places. It was normal life: cars lining drive-thrus, stores open, traffic backing up at stoplights in small towns. In the less affected places, some people felt guilty.

"People ask how I'm doing, and I didn't even have a tree down," said Alex Gary, the athletics director at Western Carolina, where students have been out of class since the day before the storm and won't return until Oct. 21. The Catamounts played Saturday in front of fans for the first time since Helene. During a timeout they honored first responders. A woman who'd organized helicopter drops and rescue missions received a standing ovation.

"It's a little taste of being back to normal" for Western North Carolina, Gary said of the game, and it was a comforting sight, indeed, to take in an ordinary college football Saturday in Cullowhee. In a lot of other towns, though, Helene brought a discomforting question along with all the devastation: What was normalcy anymore?

XT304858.jpgThe small town of Marshall, about 15 miles northwest of Asheville, was among Western North Carolina's most devastated places during the Hurricane Helene. The storm flooded every downtown building and left a trail of debris and wreckage including the welcome sign at the edge of town.

### III. MARSHALL

Few places speak to that question more than Marshall. Until Helene, it was a beautiful and pristine small town on the French Broad River, about 15 miles northwest of Asheville. Marshall for a long time has been a haven for artists and anyone who seeks the majesty of the surroundings, a postcard come to life down to the old courthouse out of a Hollywood set.

The Wednesday night before the storm, a local veterinarian named Suzanne Sheldon went to the most acclaimed restaurant in town, the Star Diner. It's in what used to be a Gulf station on the edge of the river. It began raining hard that night and Sheldon, well aware of the forecast, thought:

"Oh, Lord. Here we go."

"And then two days later, it was gone," she said of the Star.

About an hour before sunset Saturday night, she and her wife, Melinda, were seeing it all for the first time. They walked across the bridge the French Broad had breached and then down the ruins of Main Street and toward the railroad tracks that used to run parallel to the river but now twisted and dived into the river; a mess of steel rails mangled by the rush of the water and everything it carried with it. In Marshall it still looked more than two weeks later like it had been bombed.

Everywhere Suzanne and Melinda turned, there was a memory. There was Mal's, the little dive with a pool table and live music; "the best damn bar I've been to," says one Google review among many raves. There was the The Sweet Monkey, not long ago a catering and take-out spot. Now it is a hole in a shell of a building, like everything else.

RAL\_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-12.JPGKelley Greene of Marshall helps clean up downtown on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River caused catastrophic flooding. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Sidewalks were caked with mud and eerie mementos, like the stranded kegs outside of Mal's. A little girl did cartwheels a ways down a dirt-covered road while her father loaded debris in a pick-up. Suzanne and Melinda paced around the railroad tracks, back and forth, seeing nothing but surreal catastrophe. There wasn't anything they could say, so they stood silently. After a while they held hands while they walked back toward the bridge, taking in the quiet stillness of a town destroyed.

Around the corner from what was the post office, gone like everything else, a man named Erich Hubner was cleaning out the town's art council. With all its charms, Marshall is a seductive place for the creative. Hubner, well-connected in the community, said he hadn't talked with any business owner or local artist who planned to leave. The question is when any can come back?

"I don't know how quickly it will be," Hubner said. "But it seems like the actual creative spirit is really strong - still - in spite of what's been the unplanned renovation of Marshall."

He paused and managed a smile and a joke, amid the water line on the wall behind him that was more than 6 feet high: "Everybody gets a second chance on their floor plans down here," he said, standing in a place stripped down to the studs.

The inside of pretty much every place in town will need to be reconstructed, one panel of drywall at a time. It'd take strength and it'd take patience, and maybe most of all, it'd take faith.

A message on the boarded window of the florist shop down the street suggested the people of Marshall were up for the task. Five words, scrawled in orange spray paint, spoke for a town without power in the literal sense but hardly the metaphoric:

"We will not be broken."

HELENE-NE-101724-RTW\_3.jpgLittle Crabtree Creek is littered with storm debris and vehicles on Thursday, October 17, 2024, three weeks after Hurricane Helene flooded the South Toe River and adjacent creeks near Micaville in

Yancey County, N.C.

#### IV. BURNSVILLE TO 19E AND THE CELO INN

Who can know how long the healing might take, though? Maybe there could be a timeline to rebuild a road (or maybe not) but what about all the trauma and the grief? In the worst-hit parts of the mountains, people were still without power or water nearly three weeks after the storm. Their toilets weren't flushing. Their phones weren't working, even if they could be charged. In some cases they were stranded.

The sounds of rescue helicopters were ubiquitous two days after the high school game in parts of Western North Carolina. In Burnsville on Sunday morning, a low-flying military-green Chinook helicopter passed over the town square, headed south toward the Black Mountains.

Horror stories were still pouring out there, of people cut off and stuck. In the shadow of Mt. Mitchell, the Sunday morning service at Burnsville First Baptist began with a counselor, not a pastor, leading the congregation in a grounding exercise to "reset the brain." Name five things you can see, he urged, four things you can touch, and so on.

RAL\_OLDFORT-NE-100624-RTW\_4.JPGKaren Burnette, right, stands for the closing prayer during services at Salem Free Will Baptist Church on Sunday, October 6, 2024 in Old Fort, N.C. Still without power more than a week after Hurricane Helene, they gathered outside to sing, read scripture and comfort each other.

A church staffer then gave instructions on how to use the emergency toilets. She called herself the "pastor of poo," to laughs, and offered guidance on how to fill a gallon bucket and force a stubborn commode to flush. The "mini-Wal-Mart." as she called it - the church's stock of donated items - needed volunteers, too.

One member of the congregation fought tears to recite a poem she'd written about the enduring allure of these mountains - how "the broken Earth still gives way to the majestic... the beauty in the ashes."

Pastor Tommy James built his sermon on the story of Job, the Old Testament figure whose faith ultimately overcomes his doubts after he loses everything.

"Life often brings to us things we never, never imagined," James told his congregation. And so it was with Job, whose losses tested him before his belief prevailed. James hoped the message might resonate but he didn't "want to try and fix people." He knew that "some people are mad and some people are really sad," and that was OK.

"We just want to let them be wherever they are," he said. "But then hopefully they'll hear a word or a song that can lift them, even if it's just for a moment."

His church was lucky. All members had been accounted for. Across the town square, outside the Nu Wray Inn, messages on three whiteboards underscored how a lot of people around here were not OK.

Some went like this:

"From Dean and ShariWe are alive. Major damage to property."

"From Beth and KenWe are alive, house gone."

On another board, there were two columns with long lists of names - "Looking For" above one set and "Safe" atop the other. Someone had written encouragement in a list of prayer requests: "We are APPALACHIAN: We got this!"

A white board next to that carried the latest info on roads and bridges, which ones had been cleared or fixed.

HELENE-NE-101724-RTW 1.jpgA bridge on Blue Rock Road, near Celo, N.C., that crosses the South Toe River, was

washed into the river during historic flooding in the wake of Hurricane Helene three weeks ago. Photographed on Thursday, October 17, 2024.

The stretch of Highway 19E between Burnsville and Spruce Pine had become the main and only navigable artery in a maze of apocalyptic sights. The damage around there, along the Cane River and Cattail Creek to the west, and the South Toe and North Toe rivers a little more east, was as severe as anywhere.

Along 19E, even the Crabtree Creek rose and surged with enough ferocity to destroy homes and sweep away cars in tiny Micaville. The remnants of some kind of children's playset - purple and plastic - remained stuck against a tree two weeks after the storm. Just around a bend on Micaville Loop Road, State Road 80 remained largely impassable in the days after the storm.

The road climbs toward Mt. Mitchell, the nation's highest peak east of the Mississippi. Driving it was a lesson on Helene's destruction. The topography makes it clear. The slant of land so prone to mudslides. The fragility of a curvy two-lane road. The clarity that, yes, anything can just fall down a mountain.

Anything can be swept away, in a strong enough current of mud or water or a mix of both. About 10 miles south of Micaville and up a little ways in elevation, the Celo Inn was one such place. One of those small treasures of the North Carolina mountains, a rustic five-room bed and breakfast on the South Toe River.

HELENE-NE-101724-RTW\_6.jpgThe Celo Inn, photographed on Thursday, October 17, 2024, was destroyed by flood waters from the South Toe River in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

Nicholas Maldanado and Kavita Hardy, the innkeepers, had heard all about the flood of 1977, which filled the basement with water. They were prepared for such a thing. But by 9 a.m. that Thursday the river was already up to the steps out front when they fled to a nearby elementary school. A few hours later, after it calmed, Maldanado walked down the hill to see the river reach the roof. The small cottage where he and Kavita lived was gone.

For decades, the inn had been a community refuge and a cherished destination for people who came back year after year. Now on late Sunday afternoon, a mud-covered piano sat where everyone used to gather. The kitchen, a step down from the main room, was coated in sludge. Outside, Maldanado unloaded more trash. He and Kavita had been fighting off depression and shock, he said.

The Celo Community, a nature commune built on an ideal of upholding humanity, had come together to help build that inn. It took almost 10 years, and then in a day it was gone.

XT304943.jpgThe Celo Inn was long a beloved destination in the Black Mountains, along the South Toe River. During Helene, the river covered the entire first floor of the inn. Two weeks after the storm, all that remained inside was a mud-covered piano, which sat in the middle of a room where people used to gather.

### V. ASHEVILLE, RIVER ARTS DISTRICT

There are places like that all around up here, ones that no amount of faith can bring back. They are just gone, now part of the terrain that reclaimed them. The mountains are full of decaying remnants of what was; fading testaments to what it took to build a mountain life in the first place.

One such landmark has been the Caudill Cabin, which still stands in the valley of what's now Doughton Park off the Blue Ridge Parkway. More than 100 years ago the cabin and others linked a humble community known as Basin Cove. The area was known for its fertile farmland and wide fields, and it had to be as beautiful as it was rugged.

In the summer of 1916, awful floods tore through the mountains. According to an account in The Wilkes Patriot, "While the lowlands were being lashed and torn by the raging torrent, great landslides were ripping the very heart out of majestic mountains and hills in many places."

Most of Basin Cove was destroyed in '16, but Caudill Cabin survived. Martin Caudill escaped with his family to higher ground while neighbors died. His old cabin still stands, visible from an overlook along the Parkway and accessible by about a three-mile hike. It begs visitors to consider what life was like more than 100 years ago and how it all ended down there, in the rushing water.

The cabin connected the present with the past as proof that something as humble can withstand terrible destruction. Helene will leave behind physical artifacts like that and will reconfigure some areas, like Basin Cove was reshaped.

CLYDEHELENE-NE-101624-RTW\_18.jpgDavid Matteson and his wife lost all of their household belongings after historic flooding of the Pigeon River in the wake of Hurricane Helene almost three weeks ago. Matteson poses for a portrait on the curb of his Broad Street home in Clyde, N.C., on Wednesday, October 16, 2024. Volunteers have helped him remove the mud and rip out the drywall to begin the rebuilding process.

Who knows how many hiking trails Helene might reclaim; how many roads might have to be abandoned, how many towns like Chimney Rock or Marshall will only come part of the way back, if that far? It's always the character of a place, though, that proves most resilient.

That's true all over the mountains. Certain places have received more attention but all of Western North Carolina is in mourning. To understand the grief, and the early recovery, is to feel the power of both in different communities.

A high school football game in the countryside. An impromptu cookout, near a neighborhood where people lost it all. A couple walking quietly through an historic downtown where the river covered everything.

A Sunday morning service where people learned to cope with trauma. A drive along a road through the chaos. A walk through a beloved inn that has likely served its final guest.

Mid-October is when I often come to experience the divinity of autumn in the North Carolina mountains. This time it was to see what Helene left behind.

Asheville is the unofficial capital of these mountains, a city beloved for its art and food and nature. And yes: its beer. The flood left behind unreal sights and no safe drinking water. It is a city changed forever, in a region changed forever.

Nearly anything and everything that was near the French Broad is gone. White Duck Taco Shop, where lines often stretched out the door at times of peak demand, was under water. 12 Bones and Wedge Brewing always seemed far away enough from the river, but were not. Nothing was safe and nothing is clear.

XT304980.jpgAsheville's River Arts District suffered some of the most catastrophic damage during Hurricane Helene. A city official said recently that 80 percent of the district was destroyed. In the days after the storm a makeshift statue was erected off of Lyman Street, next to the French Broad River. The figure stood atop a pile of cinder blocks and held a sign that spoke not only for the city, but the entire region.

Destruction at Asheville's River Arts District is enough to make anyone wonder what's really possible for a rebuild. What was one of the city's main attractions is a mess of debris and heartbreak, abandoned cars covered in dirt and favorite establishments washed out. Most galleries are gone. A city official last week said 80 percent of the district was destroyed.

But also: Asheville is still Asheville. It was a fitting sight on Sunday just after sunset in the River Arts District to round a bend along Lyman Street and encounter a monument befitting this moment and city. It was the work of an artist, clearly, a tall scarecrow-like figure perched atop an even taller pile of cinder blocks.

A smile was painted on its face. Its hands were outstretched, thumbs up. It held a sign:

"Hope ... even when the creek rises."

The few people out and about slowed down to take pictures. All around was endless decimation, debris piles and reminders that a lot of things would be different. Yet Helene reinforced that some things never change. That the spirit of a place and its people can outlast even the worst of storms.

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## It's now simpler to apply to these NC colleges. And this week, you can do it for free

October 21, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Korie Dean, News & Observer Section: education | 1214 Words OpenURL Link

A new pilot program launched this month that makes it easier for high school students across North Carolina to apply to college. And this week, applicants can apply to many of the participating schools for free.

Each year, the College Foundation of North Carolina sponsors College Application Week - a weeklong event that allows high school seniors to apply to dozens of colleges and universities across the state for free through the CFNC website. This year's College Application Week runs from Oct. 21-27, with public and private four-year colleges and all 58 of the state's community colleges participating.

While the event is helpful to applicants in any year, that's even more true this year.

That's because, through two new programs, students can apply to many of the colleges participating in College Application Week by filling out a short form, instead of the long applications normally associated with the process. The new admissions programs are available throughout the fall application cycle - but combined, College Application Week and the new pilot programs mean that students can easily apply to college and, for this week only, do so for free.

The new NC College Connect program allows eligible students to apply to six four-year universities in the UNC System and all 58 community colleges across the state using a simplified application process. Students who are eligible for the simplified process at public schools should receive a letter in the mail with instructions to apply to colleges through the program.

More than two dozen private schools are offering a similar program, through the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities' direct admission program. Students will not receive a letter in the mail about this program because the state Department of Public Instruction is only partnering with NC College Connect, but the private schools' program remains available to eligible and qualified students.

Which colleges are participating in these new programs? Which ones are waiving application fees this week? And how can students take advantage of these resources?

Here's everything you need to know.

NC College Connect creates simplified application process

NC College Connect, which is new this fall, allows eligible students to apply to several of the state's public universities and all of the community colleges by filling out a significantly shortened application.

To be eligible, students must be enrolled in a public high school or charter school in North Carolina, must maintain a weighted GPA of 2.8 throughout their senior year, and must meet the state Department of Public Instruction's basic graduation requirements and the UNC System's minimum admission requirements.

Students who meet these criteria should receive a letter this month informing them that they are eligible for the NC College Connect program. The letter will include a QR code that students can scan, which will take them to the NC College Connect website.

Once on that page (cfnc.org/nc-college-connect), students can click the "Claim Your Spot!" button on the right side to access the application. Students will need to log in to their existing CFNC.org account, or create one, to access

the application.

Shun Robertson, interim senior vice president of strategy and policy with the UNC System, said the process is "very simple" and involves filling out just three pieces of information: the applying student's email address, their desired major and when they intend to enroll in college. There are no essays requested or required.

"They just answer those three questions, and then they've applied," Robertson said.

After students fill out their application, admissions professionals from the participating UNC System schools or community colleges will reach out to the student for more information, Robertson said. Students will also need to provide information about their residency status in North Carolina at a later point in the process, Robertson said.

The program does not ensure that students will be admitted to the schools they apply to, "but it is an easier way for them to get their application in the hands of the admissions counselors," Robertson said.

The public colleges and universities participating in NC College Connect are:

Elizabeth City State University Fayetteville State UniversityUNC Asheville UNC Greensboro UNC Pembroke Winston-Salem State University All 58 North Carolina community colleges

RAL\_102023-FAYETTEVILLE-TEL-02.JPGFayetteville State University students walk on Fayetteville State's campus Friday, Oct. 20, 2023. Fayetteville State began offering heavily discounted tuition through the NC Promise Tuition Program in fall 2022.

NCICU offers direct admission program for private schools

Several private colleges across the state that are part of the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities group are offering a similar program to NC College Connect this fall, but students will not receive a letter informing them of the effort.

To be eligible for the NCICU direct admission program, students must have a weighted GPA of 2.8 during their senior year.

The program also offers a significantly shortened application, with just a handful of questions that NCICU says will take five minutes for students to complete. Students will receive additional information from admissions officials at the colleges after they submit their application.

There is no application fee if students apply to the participating universities through the direct admission portal, available at ncicu.org/direct-admission.

The private colleges participating in NCICU's direct admission program are:

Barton CollegeBelmont Abbey CollegeBennett CollegeCatawba CollegeChowan UniversityGardner-Webb UniversityGreensboro CollegeGuilford CollegeJohnson C. Smith UniversityLees-McRae CollegeLenoir-Rhyne UniversityLivingstone CollegeLouisburg CollegeMars Hill UniversityMeredith CollegeMethodist UniversityMontreat CollegeNorth Carolina Wesleyan UniversityPfeiffer UniversityShaw UniversitySt. Andrews UniversitySt. Augustine's UniversityUniversity of Mount OliveWarren Wilson CollegeWilliam Peace UniversityWingate University

RAL\_STAUG04-120523-EDH.JPGAn entrance to St. Augustine's University on Oakwood Ave. in Raleigh, N.C., photographed Tuesday, Dec. 5, 2023.

Schools participating in College Application Week

Dozens of public, private and two-year colleges are participating in College Application Week this year, allowing

students to apply for admission at no cost.

To have their application fees waived during College Application week, students must apply through the CFNC portal, which is accessible through cfnc.org/apply-to-college.

The colleges participating in College Application Week are:

Barton College Belmont Abbey CollegeBennett CollegeBrevard CollegeCampbell UniversityCarolinas College of Health ScienceCatawba CollegeChowan UniversityDavidson CollegeEast Carolina UniversityElizabeth City State UniversityElon UniversityFayetteville State UniversityGardner-Webb UniversityGreensboro CollegeGuilford CollegeHigh Point UniversityJohnson & Wales University - CharlotteJohnson C. Smith UniversityLees-McRae CollegeLenoir-Rhyne UniversityLivingstone CollegeLouisburg CollegeMars Hill UniversityMeredith CollegeMethodist UniversityMontreat CollegeNorth Carolina A&T State UniversityNorth Carolina Central UniversityNorth Carolina Wesleyan UniversityPfeiffer UniversityQueens University of CharlotteSt. Augustine's UniversitySalem CollegeShaw UniversitySt. Andrews UniversityUNC AshevilleUNC PembrokeUNC School of the ArtsUniversity of Mount Olive Warren Wilson CollegeWestern Carolina UniversityWilliam Peace UniversityWingate UniversityWinston-Salem State UniversityAll 58 community colleges

If a school appears on this list and is participating in the NC College Connect or NCICU direct admission program, that means students can use the simplified application process and apply for free this week.

Additional schools waiving fees for Helene-impacted counties

In the wake of Hurricane Helene and the devastation it left across Western North Carolina, six additional universities in the UNC System will waive application fees during College Application Week only for students enrolled at high schools in counties included in FEMA's disaster declaration.

Students in those counties can apply to the following schools for free this week:

Appalachian State UniversityNC State UniversityUNC-Chapel HillUNC CharlotteUNC GreensboroUNC Wilmington

There may be additional resources available to these students in the coming months and in the spring, Robertson said.

"We understand that, for the students out in the west, they might have other priorities for this College Application Week," Robertson said.

More information

More information about the new NC College Connect program can be found at NCCollegeConnect.org.

More information about College Application Week can be found at cfnc.org/apply-to-college/nc-countdown-to-college.

More information about NCICU's direct admission program can be found at ncicu.org/direct-admission.

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## **AMOREM** responds to Hurricane Helene impact

October 21, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: STAFF REPORTS | Section: Archives | 369 Words OpenURL Link

LENOIR — In the wake of tropical storm Helene, AMOREM continues to give every effort to meet the needs of its patients, their families and staff, according to a press release from AMOREM.

Care was provided around the clock during the storm and AMOREM's patient care units remained open to serve the needs of patients and their families. AMOREM maintained its mission and made every effort to ensure that there were no disruptions to care. After the storm, AMOREM staff members conducted welfare checks on more than 900 patients and their families to ensure patients and their families were safe and accounted for. During these checks, staff identified any urgent needs and shared disaster relief resources with patients and their families, according to the press release.

"The safety and wellbeing of our staff, patients and their families are the top priority," says AMOREM CEO April Moore. "I have been humbled by the outpour of support from individuals and organizations nationwide and grateful for our staff who have worked tirelessly to ensure AMOREM's mission is fulfilled."

In an effort to compile as many resources as possible for AMOREM's 12-county service area, the AMOREM Emergency Response Team created a document to inform staff, patients and families of local hurricane relief resources. This list included nearby shelters, ice and water pick-up locations, supply locations, oxygen pick-up locations and various other needs to support the community. The resource list was updated multiple times throughout the day and continues to be updated regularly to best support the community, according to the press release.

The Emergency Response Team also created an Emergency Assistance Fund to support AMOREM patients, their families and staff members who were victims of the storm, according to the press release.

The staff and volunteers at Thrifts & Gifts supporting AMOREM gathered donations of clothing, stuffed animals, blankets and other various items to distribute to the High Country communities that were severely impacted by Hurricane Helene. A large delivery of donations was made by this team the Saturday after the storm. The thrift store team also is assisting with clothing needs of patients who have been forced to relocate to AMOREM's service area due to the impact made by the storm, according to the press release.

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### • Citation (aglc Style)

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## Third Wood, Fire, Smoke festival focuses on Helene relief

October 21, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: SHELBY POWELL spowell@newstopicnews.com| Section: Archives | 543 Words OpenURL Link

Lenoir's third annual Wood, Fire, Smoke festival was held on Saturday, Oct. 19, in the parking lot behind the county building from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Although the festival usually focuses exclusively on the handmade work of local vendors, this year saw a concerted effort by vendors and staff to raise funds and gather resources to facilitate storm recovery following Tropical Storm Helene.

The festival began as a barbecuing event called Smoking in the Foothills, but shifted after the pandemic into a local artisan's fair, according to the festival's project manager, Sara Wert.

Many of these artisans were present on Saturday, bringing handmade glassware, ironwork, ceramics, wooden sculpture, kitted and crocheted goods and artwork for sale to attendees. Live demonstrations were also held by Nathan Stevens of Stevens Forged Ironworks and the North Carolina Glass Center to show off the processes of blacksmithing and glass blowing. Mundy's Carving held a live chainsaw carving show early in the day as well.

Wood, Fire, Smoke's third occurrence made a concerted effort to center Helene relief efforts within the county. All donations to the festival, as well as vendor and musician fees, were donated to The United Way of Caldwell County. Extra booth spots given out for free to local nonprofits like the Caldwell Senior Center so that these organizations could speak about the efforts they were making and the tangible impact they are having on storm relief.

Many of these organizations, alongside local vendors, were collecting funds to send out to other regions affected by the storm. Local beekeepers, like Triplett Bee Farm, collected funds to send to beekeepers in need. NC Glass Center collected funds for affected members, and the WNC Sculpture Center collected funds from all its sales to send to Penland School of Crafts in Spruce Pine.

Others, like Dennis and Kathy Jones of Mystical Manics, donated a portion of funds directly to United Way. Phillip Page, Highway Miles and Opal Moon all donated their time and labor to perform live music on the Hogwaller stage to raise funds for relief efforts. UNC Health personnel volunteered to help locals write thank-you cards to send to local line workers, who immediately responded to the storm damage to restored power and communications to the county. The Senior Center was collecting supplies and donations to send in a care package to the Senior Center of Avery County.

Physical donations of supplies were kept in a pile at the front of the festival. Although United Way and festival organizers are still working to get exact numbers for participation and donations from the festival, Wert said that the festival was able to collect over 500 gift cards to local business. The original plan was to give out 200 cards to those who donated from the festival, but with the new number Wert said that nearly everyone who donated directly to the festival would receive a card.

In a recent Facebook post, festival organizer said, "because of all of our amazing community members and Vendors who donated to the cause, we were able to collect a massive amount of donations that will all remain within our Caldwell County Communities in need. This year may not have come together the way we originally planned, but in many ways it was more successful than ever."

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## How residents can receive FEMA assistance for private roads, bridges

October 21, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: STAFF REPORTS | Section: Archives | 763 Words OpenURL Link

If an individual had a privately-owned road or bridge damaged or destroyed by Helene, federal assistance may be available for replacement or repairs, according to a press release from FEMA.

What are the eligibility requirements to receive FEMA individual assistance for private road and bridge repair?

To receive Home Repair Assistance for privately-owned access routes, the following conditions must be met:

A FEMA inspection determines repairs are necessary to provide drivable access to the primary residence. The applicant is responsible (or shares responsibility with other homeowners) for maintaining the privately owned access route to their primary residence. The privately-owned access route is the only way to reach the applicant's primary residence; repair (or replacement) of a secondary route is necessary for practical use (for example, it is impossible to access the residence without a bridge or road); or the safety of the occupants or the residence would be adversely affected because state or local government emergency equipment (ambulances, firetrucks) cannot reach the residence.

How do I access FEMA individual assistance?

Homeowners and renters in North Carolina designated counties and tribal members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians who were affected by Helene should apply with FEMA, according to the press release.

The fastest way to apply is online at DisasterAssistance.gov or via the FEMA app. You may also call 800-621-3362. If you use a relay service, such as video relay, captioned telephone or other service, give FEMA your number for that service, according to the press release.

Survivors who applied for assistance from FEMA need to stay in touch with the agency to update their application with any new information. The easiest way to provide new or missing information is by visiting a Disaster Recovery Center or by calling the FEMA helpline at 800-621-3362.

Why did I receive less than \$200 to fix my private bridge?

If you report damage to FEMA and receive a dollar amount between \$179 - \$195, you may have received this money to pay a contractor to inspect and provide an estimate of the cost to repair damage to your HVAC, septic system, well, retaining wall or single-family road or bridge. After you receive the contractor's estimate, file an appeal. Your FEMA letter will explain the documents to submit, according to the press release.

The appeal can be submitted in one of the following ways:

Go to a nearby Disaster Recovery Center. Find the center nearest you by visiting fema.gov/drc.Mail: Individuals and Households Program, National Processing Service Center; P.O. Box 10055; Hyattsville, MD 20782-8055.Fax: 800-827-8112.Online at DisasterAssistance.gov. Log into your account and upload supporting documents via the Correspondence Upload Center.

Who applies if multiple families live off a private road that was damaged?

FEMA encourages each affected homeowner to apply for assistance. In instances where multiple homes share a privately-owned access route, assistance is shared between applicants, requiring additional coordination and

documentation between FEMA and the applicants. In some cases, more than one owner may receive funds for a contractor's estimate. Please be sure to use these funds as intended, according to the press release.

#### FEMA also requires:

Written consent from all applicants as pertains to the shared privately-owned access route. A declarative statement affirming any assistance FEMA provides will be used to make repairs to the access route, and the applicant understands they are responsible for getting permits and complying with local codes and ordinances. The households are not part of a homeowner's association or covenant responsible for repair of the access route, or the established homeowner's association or covenant is unable to receive assistance from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) or private insurance to repair the access route.

Is there additional assistance available?

Possibly. Assistance for repairs to private roads and bridges damaged by Helene in North Carolina is being made available through FEMA's Public Assistance Program. The process for implementing this option is currently being finalized and will be shared as soon as it's available, according to the press release.

Individuals do not apply for public assistance. The Public Assistance Program provides supplemental grants to state, tribal, territorial and local governments, and certain types of private non-profits so communities can quickly respond to and recover from major disasters or emergencies, according to the press release.

The SBA may also be able to help. Homeowners who share private access roads and bridges with other homeowners may be eligible for low-interest disaster loans. Private roads used to access your residence and the personal contents of your home may be eligible under disaster home loan criteria. Call the SBA's Customer Service Center at 800-659-2955. If you are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability, please dial 7-1-1 to access telecommunications relay services, or email DisasterCustomerService@sba.gov.

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