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Ansonians donations provide relief to storm ravaged Western North Carolina

October 16, 2024 | Anson Record, The (Wadesboro, NC) Author: Lauren Monica Staff Writer | Section: news-main top-stories | 262 Words OpenURL Link

ANSON — Hit hard by Hurricane Helene, citizens in Western North Carolina continuestruggling to dig out and recover from the unprecedented storm's damage.

Recent donations made by Ansonians and collected by the Anson County Sheriff's Office and area fire departments are expected to help ease some of the burden for those hardest hit.

Last Thursday, the Anson County Sheriff's Office, as well as fire departments from Wadesboro and Ansonville took supplies to devastated areas across Yancy County, including West Deep Creek Church and Deep Creek Baptist Church, West Yancy Fire Department, Bald Creek School in Burnsville and Mountain Heritage High School in Burnsville.

"It is great to see the support others are giving to people they don't know. It truly is neighbors helping neighbors. I would like to thank all of the Ansonians that have donated supplies to the folks in need. We will still be taking up supplies at the sheriff's office," said Sheriff Scott Howell, who helped disperse the supplies to hundreds of awaiting hurricane victims.

Items needed are cleaning supplies, laundry detergent, coffee, and coffee condiments. Howell added that the storm damage was evident everywhere they went, saying he saw many trees down and where waters rose over creek and river banks.

The Anson County Sheriff's Office was a drop off spot following the storm for Ansonians to drop of donations and Chief and Commissioner Robert Mims, and Captain Josh Beam joined the Sheriff in making the trip. Representatives from the Wadesboro Fire Department were Department Chief Scott Martin, Cameron Sellers, Tim Kelly, and Johnny Williams. Justin McCall represented the Ansonville Fire Department.

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Lauren Monica Staff Writer, 'Ansonians donations provide relief to storm ravaged Western North Carolina', *Anson Record, The* (online), 16 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
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Many schools are still closed weeks after Hurricane Helene. Teachers worry about long-term impact

October 16, 2024 | Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC) Author: By JOCELYN GECKER, MORIAH BALINGIT and MICHAEL MELIA, AP Education Writers Section: Lifestyles | 1086 Words OpenURL Link

Tens of thousands of students in the Southeast are dealing with school disruptions after Hurricane Helene wreaked havoc so severe — on homes, campuses and municipal power and water systems — that some districts have no idea when they will reopen.

While virtual learning helped during the COVID-19 school closures, that has not been an option for this crisis because internet and cellphone service has remained spotty since the storm struck in late September. In hard-hit western North Carolina, some districts warn students will miss up to a month of school, and others say they can't yet determine a timeline for returning to classrooms.

"I feel like a month is a lot, but it's not something that can't be overcome," said Marissa Coleman, who has sent her four children to stay with grandparents in Texas because their home in North Carolina's Buncombe County has no running water. "But if we get further into Thanksgiving and Christmas, it's like, how are they actually going to make this up?"

In mountainous Buncombe County, Helene swept away homes, cut power and destroyed crucial parts of the water system for Asheville, a city of about 94,000 people. The storm decimated remote towns and killed at least 246 people throughout the Appalachians, where massive cleanup efforts have been complicated by washed-out bridges and roads. It was the deadliest hurricane to hit the U.S. mainland since Katrina in 2005.

The Buncombe County School system, which serves over 22,000 students, told families Tuesday on the district's Facebook page no decision has been made "with regards to start date or length of day" because of a need to repair buildings, restore phone and security systems and redraw bus routes.

Even when schools reopen, educators worry the disruption could have profound effects on students' learning and emotional well-being.

Children who experience natural disasters are more prone to acute illness and symptoms of depression and anxiety, research shows. The physical and mental health impacts put them at greater risk of learning loss: Absences can undermine achievement, as can the effects of trauma on brain function.

The challenges come amid growing concerns about the impacts of climate change on students. Wildfires have swept through communities, displacing families. Many school systems with inadequate heating or air conditioning have closed during extreme weather or forced students and educators to endure sweltering or frigid temperatures. According to the World Bank, 400 million children lost school days because of "climate-related closures" in 2022.

Days after Helene made landfall, Hurricane Milton roared ashore last week farther south along the same Florida coast as a Category 3 storm. While about half the state's districts were closed, all of them they were planning to reopen by the end of this week.

Schools affected by Helene are trying to provide stability. The Buncombe district has suggested parents trade books with neighbors and friends for their kids. "Have them write, maybe about something they're looking forward to when school starts again," the district told parents on social media. "Turn everyday experiences into math problems."

Cécile Wight, a mother of two in Asheville, said she has been grateful for concern shown by schools including

surveys checking on families' well-being and an elementary school bus driver who took his own car to visit each child on his route.

"That has been huge, just having the emotional support from the school system and from the people we know at the school," she said.

But uncertainty remains. Wight said her family is able to stay at their home because they have well water, but many other families have yet to return since evacuating. Most of Buncombe's 45 schools still lacked running water as of Tuesday, meaning they're unable to meet basic safety and hygiene standards.

Schools have have begun exploring whether it would be possible to open without running water, relying on portable bathroom trailers. In a letter to families, Asheville Superintendent Maggie Furman said the district is considering drilling wells at each school so they don't have to rely on city water.

Coleman said her kids are eager for some kind of normalcy.

"I understand the schools are going to have to take some time to find a way to open safely, and I support that 100%. But I definitely am not in the camp of 'We need to wait until we get water back, until everything's normal again to open.' I just think that's going to be too long," Coleman said.

The Tennessee Department of Education is still trying to determine how many schools remain closed since Hurricane Helene and how many took too much damage to reopen.

Echoing the COVID-19 pandemic, several schools in Tennessee have postponed traditions like homecoming games, parades and dances. Many colleges are also granting extensions on application deadlines, officials say, to reduce high school seniors' stress.

In storm-drenched areas elsewhere, some early education providers may never reopen.

Private child care and preschool centers are particularly vulnerable in the aftermath of a natural disaster, said Militza Mezquita, senior advisor for education in emergencies at Save the Children. Many already operate on thin margins, meaning a temporary closure can easily turn permanent. As for-profit companies, they are also ineligible for many types of disaster aid. A natural disaster can wipe out 10% to 20% of providers, Mezquita said.

"Child care recovery is very critical to the whole recovery ecosystem," Mezquita said, noting the people essential to recovery — road workers, cleanup crews, doctors and nurses — often have young children that need to be looked after. "If they are not able to adequately get their children in care, they can't go to work."

Despite the instability, educators like Heather Smith, who was named North Carolina's Teacher of the Year in the spring, encourage families to see the lessons storms can provide. Smith brought along her two children, ages 8 and 4, to serve meals at her church.

"Our kids are learning so much every day, whether it's about adversity, whether it's about helping a community," said Smith, who rode out the storm at her home in Waynesville.

Similarly, Wight has been taking her children to volunteer for relief efforts at a school. She said it has helped them feel active and involved in the community.

"If COVID taught us something, it's that we can make things work. The kids are resilient," Wight said. "They will eventually catch up on the academic side of things."

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Heroes of I-40 evacuate stranded drivers as the interstate crumbled

October 16, 2024 | Biltmore Beacon, The (Asheville, NC) Author: Becky Johnson bjohnson@themountaineer.com| Section: News | 414 Words OpenURL Link

It's nothing short of a miracle that no one plunged to their death when sections of Interstate 40 collapsed into the swollen and angry Pigeon River amid Helene's fury.

Luckily, a truck driver who was the first to encounter one such missing section saw it in time and slammed on his brakes, in turn saving the drivers behind him from going over the edge.

"He was very startled and very addled," recalled Highway Patrol Trooper Joe Henderson.

But averting that catastrophe was only the first part of the battle. Drivers were stranded with nowhere to go as the interstate continued to crumble around them.

"We got a call that part of the interstate had fallen off around 12:30 that afternoon," Henderson recounted of that fateful day on Friday, Sept. 27, now seared into Western North Carolina's collective memory.

Henderson made fast tracks for the gorge. Two Haywood County roadside assistance patrollers with the N.C. DOT IMAP team — Garrett McFalls and Chris Strader — had beat him there.

They quickly realized all drivers in the eastbound lanes had to be moved, and fast.

"The first thing we did was work everybody to the left lane as close to the median as possible," Henderson said.

This got drivers away from the edge. But they were still trapped between missing sections of I-40, unable to go forward or backward. And no one knew if or when more sections would give way.

"There were a couple of them that were scared for their life," Henderson said.

The only way out was to use the intact westbound lanes, but they were separated by a stout concrete median. Enter the zipper: removable sections built into the median for just this reason.

After busting out the zipper, a logistical operation ensued to shuffle all the vehicles through the opening.

"We turned the passenger vehicles around first and sent them back to the zipper to get them out of the way," Henderson said.

But tractor trailer trucks posed a bigger problem.

"There's not enough room for them to turn around," Henderson said.

So they would have to back up, threading the needle between the median on one side and the missing outermost lane on the other. Miscalculation could send them plummeting into the river.

"We just backed them up one at a time until we got them all out of there and sent them back to Tennessee," Henderson said.

Henderson, along with the IMAP team of McFalls and Strader, had assistance from two firefighters from Tennessee and a Tennessee DOT worker who happened to be coming through.

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Becky Johnson bjohnson@themountaineer.com, 'Heroes of I-40 evacuate stranded drivers as the interstate crumbled', *Biltmore Beacon, The* (online), 16 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
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Bear-Human Conflicts a Natural Result of Storm Recovery

October 16, 2024 | Biltmore Beacon, The (Asheville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Outdoor | 506 Words OpenURL Link

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission is receiving reports of an increase in human- black bear interactions in Asheville and Buncombe County as a result of the impact from Tropical Storm Helene.

The agency reports that opportunities for bears to find food has increased due to the availability of trash, unattended donation drop-offs, and the attractiveness of rotting foods, particularly in damaged homes and businesses.

The following tips are aimed at mitigating human-bear conflicts:

Home Entry

Keep windows and doors closed and latched if bears are observed in your area. If you are unable to secure the potential point of entry (doors or windows) due to damage, consider putting out an unwelcome mat made of plywood and nails.

Outdoor Refrigerator/Freezer

If you have an outdoor refrigerator or freezer, consider installing a padlock on the door to keep bears from accessing the food. Some chest freezers come with pre-installed locks.

Secure Food, Garbage

and Recycling

Food and food odors attract bears, so don't reward them with easily available food, liquids or garbage.

Buncombe County and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission recommend making every effort to store garbage in a bear-resistant container, or inside a secure enclosure such as a shed, a garage, or a home until it can be picked up or brought to a collection site.

Make every effort not to place trash or trash bags outside in the open, such as a carport, on the lawn, or in an open garage. Bears will quickly find it and not only scatter garbage but be tempted to return.

If possible, don't leave out unattended food donations. Those food donations are critically needed, but if left outside unattended, will be scavenged by bears and other wildlife.

Bear-wise Basics

Never feed or approach bears. Intentionally feeding bears or allowing them to find anything that smells or tastes like food teaches bears to approach homes and people looking for more.

There are plenty of natural foods, such as acorns for bears right now. They do not need human help to find a meal.

Asheville and Buncombe County have ordinances that restrict the feeding of wildlife that imposes fines and can be escalated to a home lien or a criminal offense.

Remove bird feeders when bears are active. Birdseed and grains have lots of calories, so they're very attractive to bears. Removing feeders is the best way to avoid creating conflicts with bears.

Refrain from putting out bird seed or intentionally feeding wildlife. Birds have lots of natural foods available to them.

Never leave pet food outdoors. Feed pets indoors when possible. If pets must be fed outside, feed in single portions, and remove food and bowls after feeding. Store pet food where bears can't see or smell it.

Keep dogs leashed or leave them at home. Letting dogs chase or bark at bears is asking for trouble. Don't force a bear to defend itself.

To report concerning bear behavior and activity, contact the N.C. Wildlife Helpline at 866-318-2401 or online at HWI@ncwildlife.org . The Wildlife Helpline receives calls Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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A contest is on for the best ideas to fix I-40

October 16, 2024 | Biltmore Beacon, The (Asheville, NC) Author: Becky Johnson bjohnson@themountaineer.com| Section: News | 810 Words OpenURL Link

All options are on the table for the monumental task of fixing collapsed portions of Interstate 40 along a four-mile stretch through the Pigeon River Gorge.

The N.C. Department of Transportation will use a novel approach to expedite the job and attract the best and brightest civil engineering minds.

Design firms and contractors are invited to pitch their own ideas — akin to a contest. And all bets are off.

"It is a blank sheet of paper. It could be that putting it back the way it was is the right thing to do, but this is a unique opportunity to really think outside of the box," said Wanda Payne, head of the 10-county westernmost division of DOT.

I-40 through the gorge in Haywood County has been landslide prone since the day it opened in 1968, due to the problematic topography of a steep-walled gorge.

But fixing I-40 this time is a different ballgame. The river scoured away the slope so severely in places that there's nothing left to build the interstate back on. The interstate tumbled into the river, and the ledge it once clung to sloughed off as well.

There's been talk of a viaduct model, similar to the suspended segment of the Blue Ridge Parkway around Grandfather Mountain. There's been talk of moving the river. And there's been talk of finding a new route for I-40 altogether.

"We are looking at all options. So whatever those options are," Payne said. "Everything is fixable, it just depends on how you fix it."

The blank slate is a once-in-a-lifetime challenge that is sparking interest from engineers across the nation.

"That is what I'm hoping," Payne said. "We've already been contacted by folks saying, 'We've seen this in Colorado,' or 'We've seen this in Canada, and this is what they did there.'"

The process solicits a construction manager on the front end, working in tandem with the DOT and a design firm to develop the project specs and then execute it.

It's quicker than the traditional process — which entails months of design and engineering and then going out to bid once a plan is in hand.

The DOT has moved at lightning speed to get the process underway. Less than two weeks after Helene hit, the DOT put out a request for proposals.

"We are looking to be under contract with a contractor and design firm by mid-November," Payne said.

Halting the collapse

In the meantime, temporary repairs have been underway to prevent more of the interstate from sliding into the river.

Luckily, damage was contained to the eastbound lanes closest to the river — so westbound lanes can at least be used by emergency vehicles and construction crews.

But the slope below the interstate is so compromised in places that further collapse is possible, witnessed by long cracks along the edge of the remaining pavement.

"We were starting to notice the cracks were migrating into the westbound lanes," Payne said, noting data from crack monitors.

The worst-case scenario is that more sloughing could take westbound lanes with it. If that happened, it would be a disaster, as there would be nowhere for heavy equipment to work from once repairs begin.

"We have to save what we have," Payne said.

The DOT quickly contracted with Wright Brothers Construction for emergency stabilization to shore up four at-risk sections. The work entails soil nails to anchor the slope below the roadbed from more slipping. That work will be done by December, Payne said.

Crews performing the work are harnessed in while working close to the edge. A third-party safety team is on standby constantly — ready to perform a rescue if anyone goes over.

Lay of the land

The Pigeon River's bed sluices through a canyon of sorts, lying about 40-50 feet below the interstate. Given the steep walls, the river had nowhere to go but up when it flooded. At times, with much of the Pigeon's waters flowing through a tunnel from Walters Lake to the hydroelectric power plant at the state line, the only water flowing down that stretch of the gorge is that of Hurricane Creek. That was far from the case during Helene.

"The river was almost at pavement level in places," Payne said. "When you've got that much force, that's that deep, it just scoured away the slope."

Complicating matters, the river channel shifted closer to the toe of the slope — resulting in a near vertical drop in places.

"We are definitely going to have to do something with the river. It is not where it used to be," Payne said.

The DOT has also discovered the compromised stretch is more extensive than initially thought — not just the visible damage along the final four miles of I-40 before crossing into Tennessee.

"Surveys since then have shown the escarpment along the riverbank where it has sloughed off actually starts at milemarker 7," Payne said.

Also of note, a service road that skirted the twin tunnels on the river side is mostly gone, as well.

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Beaufort to the Rescue

October 16, 2024 | Carteret County News-Times, The (Morehead City, NC) Author: MACEO DONALD NEWS-TIMES | Section: News | 276 Words OpenURL Link

BEAUFORT — In response to the destruction in western North Carolina caused by Hurricane Helene on Sept. 27, the Beaufort Fire Department is donating a fire truck to assist fire departments affected by Hurricane Helene.

"Beaufort is no stranger to the devastation caused by hurricanes, and we have benefited from the generosity of communities beyond our borders in our times of need," said Beaufort Mayor Sharon Harker before the commissioners approved the resolution to donate the property. "I am pleased that the Board of Commissioners is considering passing a resolution tonight for the Town of Beaufort to donate surplus property and miscellaneous equipment, no longer used by our Fire Department or other departments, to the North Carolina State Firefighters Association."

Beaufort Fire Chief Tony Ray has been in communication with the North Carolina State Firefighters' Association and has decided that the Beaufort Fire Department will donate Fire Engine 4, a 2008 Rosenbauer, to the Association.

In addition to the fire truck, the North Carolina State Firefighters' Association, a non-profit organization incorporated in the State of North Carolina, will receive various other surplus items from the town to aid in recovery, rescue, and repair efforts in western North Carolina.

Among the items are a 1200-foot rubber hose, a Hurst hydraulic extrication portable pump and tool set, nozzles and adapters, smoke ejectors, cord reels, a gas PPV fan, assorted tools, scene lights, and a Kobalt Sawzall.

"This contribution will support fire departments affected by Hurricane Helena as they work to rebuild, just as others have supported us during our recovery efforts," said Harker. "It highlights the resilience and compassion that define our community and our ongoing commitment to helping those in need."

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More Helene relief expected to pass this month. How to tell NC lawmakers what you need

October 16, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan; Staff Writer | Section: News | 594 Words

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RALEIGH The first wave of Hurricane Helene relief funding for Western North Carolina is now law. Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper quickly signed a \$273 million disaster relief bill on Thursday, the day after the Republican-controlled General Assembly sent him the legislation. The bill passed the House and Senate unanimously.

Lawmakers are already planning for the next round of relief. Senate leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore announced Wednesday that the legislature would be back again soon - Oct. 24 - to pass another bill.

What will that look like?

They are still figuring it out. Here's what we know about where things stand and how you can contact the General Assembly about needs for Helene-devastated areas.

Apply to the NC General Assembly for relief

People in Western North Carolina can share their needs directly with the General Assembly. The legislative website has a form you can fill out at ncleg.gov/form/helenerelief that asks for what kinds of needs are being requested, what county you live in and which lawmaker represents you.

Billions in the state's rainy day fund

The rainy day fund, or Savings Reserve Fund, had \$4.75 billion in it before the Disaster Recovery Act became law on Thursday.

Republican Sen. Kevin Corbin of Macon County thanked God for the rainy day fund on Wednesday as the Senate was debating the relief bill.

"We have over \$4 billion in the rainy day fund, because in Western North Carolina, we had a rainy day. That's what it's for," Corbin said.

The Office of the State Controller releases a weekly Cash Watch that shows the state's money, including the balance of the Savings Reserve.

Moore told reporters after the House passed the first bill that the second bill is likely to be funded from the Savings Reserve, too. He noted that the state also has about \$700 million in a disaster response fund.

He said that in determining how much to fund, they want to make sure the state can get a match from FEMA so the state pays 10% to the federal government's 90% in relief.

What they're waiting for

Leaders didn't want to wait until an already scheduled November session to pass more relief.

"Whatever information we have, we have, and we'll act on it," Moore said.

"It's a new territory here," he said.

Berger said that between now and the Oct. 24 session, "we're going to be collecting suggestions from folks. There are some things that are out there that will not be reimbursed by FEMA. I think we're going to start getting some information about those sorts of things, and what we will need to do in terms of the state funding and state response."

Berger said after 2018's Hurricane Florence, lawmakers came in and quickly appropriated money, then came back a month later with the "main appropriation." He said he didn't think the legislature would be ready for that in October.

Berger said lawmakers will need more advance notice, so it would be more likely for a larger bill to pass during the session that beings Nov. 19.

"I've encouraged the members (of the Senate), and I would encourage - we're reaching out to the executive branch as well - to get us your list, so that we have time to scrub the list, to make sure that it's something that we can build support for," Berger said.

Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan: 919-829-4877, @dawnbvaughan

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How to help Western NC businesses after Helene

October 16, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: Melissa Oyler; Staff Writer | Section: Features | 2352 Words

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When it comes to birthday, holiday or "just because" gifts (one of my best friends calls them "happy presents"), we often want to support local shops, restaurants and other businesses.

And after Hurricane Helene hit and devastated so many of our mountain towns who rely on tourism, especially right near the peak of leaf-changing season, supporting these businesses feels more critical than ever.

Officials have asked us not to travel to Western North Carolina for fun right now, and many of these shops were absolutely devastated, so there would be no place for us to visit even if we could get there.

So, how can we help support from afar?

Local shops and restaurants that were affected by Hurricane Helene in North Carolina and are beginning to offer ways to support them online, including making purchases and supporting fundraising efforts. One business suggested including a note stating "Ship when the time is right" with your purchases, and that's probably a great idea for all of these places.

In addition to ordering material items from retailers, another idea is to book a rental or a session with a place that you don't plan on using, so the business is able to pocket the money. This may help hospitality folks who can't work during this time.

If your favorite mountain spot isn't on this list and you think our readers would like to know about it, please send us an email to charlottefive@charlottefive.com and we'll get it added. And keep checking in with your favorite spots - many of them are still trying to get their bearings after so much devastation. And so many of them need our help.

Here are a few to get you started - and if this isn't enough, refer to this list of Western North Carolina businesses started by an Asheville local and added to by the businesses themselves:

Ashe County Cheese

Location: 106 E Main St., West Jefferson, NC 28694

Ashe County Cheese is back open after Hurricane Helene: "We are okay, but our community has been devastated," the West Jefferson cheese shop posted on Facebook. Ashe County was hit especially hard by Helene and needs all the support it can get. "Please let people know about the Ashe County Cheese factory as an alternative," a reader emailed me on Tuesday, "when it comes to shipping cheese, wine and other regional treats such as jams, jellys, apple butter and more." I think that is a wonderful idea: With the holidays coming up, cheese is always a great gift.

Black Mountain Cider & Mead

Location: 104 Eastside Drive, #307, Black Mountain, NC 28711

Black Mountain Cider & Mead's building was flooded and damaged, and the cidery lost equipment, supplies and product. "The timing couldn't be worse. October is usually our busiest month, when tourists flock to the area for leaf-peeping season," the meadery posted on Instagram. Additionally, local apple and bee suppliers were also damaged. As it tries to figure out how to stay afloat, you can donate to this business via Venmo or its Go Fund Me.

"Without running water anywhere in Black Mountain/Asheville, our hands are tied," Black Mountain Cider stated.

"Running a fermentation business depends on clean, reliable water, and we've been told it could be months before it's restored."

Burnsville Candle Company

Location: 132 W Main St., Burnsville, NC 28714

Burnsville was devastated by Hurricane Helene, with many roads and businesses completely gone. Burnsville Candle Company's physical location is closed, but you can still order candles online. "In a time when, at least for those of us in WNC, things have gotten pretty dark, we all need a little love and light in our lives," wrote owner Kem Muller on Facebook.

Cedar Mountain small businesses

Location: Greenville Hwy, Cedar Mountain, NC 28718

Cedar Mountain is personal to me (family has a house near Caesar's Head State Park), so to see the businesses suffering that I've visited over the past couple of decades has been difficult. Many of the businesses here along Little River were flooded, some with up to four feet of water. In the meantime, residents were trapped for days on the mountain, as the roads were damaged leading into both Brevard and Greenville, S.C. The restaurants and stores pulled together resources and have been feeding hundreds of people a day, even with all the damage. A GoFundMe has been set up to help these businesses recover and the funds will be split among all of Cedar Mountain's businesses.

Chimney Rock Brewing Company

Location: 461 Main St., Chimney Rock, NC 28720

Mars Hill-based Mars Theatre Brew Co.'s sister brewery, Chimney Rock Brewing Company, is gone after Hurricane Helene. There is nothing left where the brewery once stood. Owner Scott Spruill has posted a Go Fund Me, with hopes of setting up a new model that could help save the company. Mars Theatre has reopened, but "without them (Chimney Rock Brewing) it will be difficult to continue without your help," he wrote.

Chimney Rock Gemstone Mine

Location: 397 Main St., Chimney Rock, NC 28720

Chimney Rock Gemstone Mine has been a fixture in Chimney Rock for the past 21 years. The damage from Hurricane Helene was catastrophic to the gemstone mining attraction and jewelry store. Owners Matt and Michelle Banz also own RiverWatch Grill, which was also damaged by the storm (details below). Contributions to a Go Fund Me set up by the family will go toward the extensive repairs and restoration needed, as well as helping the Mine's team members.

DT's Blue Ridge Java

Location: 169 Locust St., Spruce Pine, NC 28777

DT's Blue Ridge Java was completely ruined when Hurricane Helene made its way to Spruce Pine. The coffee shop was faced with 10 feet of rushing water, and the space for community gathering was destroyed in an instant. The coffee shop owner's daughter has launched a Go Fund Me to help rebuild the space. Any additional funds will be given to the local community, others on Lower Street and in downtown Spruce Pine.

Euda Wine

Location: 164 Commerce St., Suite 10, Old Fort, NC 28762

Euda Wine's winery and inventory suffered major damage when the hurricane came through Old Fort. A home washed up to the winery from across the street. Euda asks that your donations first go to help the town, region or wider area. "And after that if you still want to support Euda then you can buy wine online or join our wine club," the winery posted on Instagram. "We have been able to salvage some bottles and are continuing to examine the rest of our inventory. We don't know exactly when it will be shipped, but if you buy it, we will ship it to you once we are able." You can also purchase a gift card.

French Broad Chocolate Factory & Cafe

Location: 821 Riverside Drive, #199, Asheville, NC 28801

You can still purchase chocolate online at French Broad Chocolate Factory & Cafe. Inventory is constantly being updated, but the Asheville chocolatier has items like hot chocolate, bars, merch and more that were housed in its warehouse. The storm caused flooding outside of the shop during the storm and it was left without water and power. It could take weeks before the team can start making chocolate again. The store also has an online fund.

[WHAT'S NEXT? After Helene, can NC businesses and tourist sites restore 'the magic of Asheville'?]

Folkwear Patterns

Location: 1185 Charlotte Hwy, Fairview, NC 28730

Folkwear Patterns has a studio in Asheville's River Arts District that managed to stay dry and with power during Hurricane Helene. The staff is all safe, but many at home are without water, power or internet. The team is unable to get back to the studio to fulfill orders, but in the meantime, you can purchase digital pdf patterns from Folkwear's online store.

Headwaters Outfitters

Location: 25 Parkway Road, Rosman, NC 28772

Headwater Outfitters kept people in the Rosman area informed leading up to the storm, including regular monitoring of the Upper French Broad's water levels. Then the shop and Forks of the River Taproom were affected by flooding and damage to the retailer's compound. The store is closed, paddling trips have been canceled and its campground is closed for the rest of the year. Team members have pivoted to helping those in the community, including with free hot meals. In the meantime, you can shop the outdoor shop's online store (send a note saying "Ship when the time is right", Headwater recommends) or purchase a gift card for a future trip.

Live Oak Gastropub

Location: 69 Locust St., Spruce Pine, NC 28777

Live Oak Gastropub was flooded in the hurricane along with much of the rest of Spruce Pine. "We are trying to save any equipment we have so we can maybe someday get back to doing what we love providing a great place for fellowship, good times and amazing great and good looking food," co owner Deanna Buchanan, who is a native of the Western North Carolina mountains, wrote on Facebook. "Still in shock at what this area and surrounding counties are experiencing." A Go Fund Me has been started to help the restaurant recover.

Old Marshall Jail Hotel + Zadie's Restaurant

Location: 33 Baileys Branch Road, Marshall, NC 28753

Downtown Marshall was devastated during Hurricane Helene, and the Old Marshall Jail Hotel and Zadie's Restaurant were both affected. Zadie's was completely destroyed, owner Josh Copus wrote in a Go Fund Me for both places. "Both businesses will be closed for the months ahead while we rebuild. It will be a long and expensive road to recovery, but we feel it is worth doing and will be possible with your help," he wrote.

Papertown Coffee

Location: 119 Main St., Canton, NC 28716

Papertown Coffee's building was unharmed during the storm, and it was closed for a few days after the storm as it did not have power. Closing was tough on the business that was already having a tough year, so it has launched a Go Fund Me to help pay staff and order supplies. In the meantime, the shop has reopened with limited hours and is inviting community members in to "charge their phones, get a change of scenery or to just connect with another human for a while."

Pisgah Coffee Roasters

Location: 6283 Asheville Hwy, Pisgah Forest, NC 28768

Pisgah Coffee Roasters was undamaged from Hurricane Helene, but it closed as it was unable to process transactions. It did have limited cell service in the parking lot, so it has invited community members to use it for any calls and texts they need to make. There may be some shipping delays, but you can purchase its coffee online.

The Purple Onion

Location: 16 E Main St., Saluda, NC 28773

The Purple Onion in Saluda is "closed until further notice" after Hurricane Helene. "Here in Saluda, we have many places that were hit hard by unforgiving water and we are still reeling from the disaster going on around us," the restaurant posted on Instagram. "In downtown, mudslides, flooding, and trees taking out our infrastructures have effected many of our businesses and by extension their employees and our community." The Saluda Downtown Foundation has launched a Saluda Disaster Recovery Grant for downtown Saluda businesses. Your donation will help the recovery of The Purple Onion and other places.

The Orange Peel + Rabbit Rabbit

Location: The Orange Peel: 101 Biltmore Ave., Asheville, NC 28801

Location: Rabbit Rabbit: 75 Coxe Ave., Asheville, NC 28801

Asheville's live music scene took a hit during the storm, and The Orange Peel and Rabbit Rabbit have needed to cancel shows as they will be closed for awhile. The Orange Peel, in the meantime, has set up portable toilets and rinse stations, including an ADA unit, for the community in its parking lot. The Orange Peel manager Lauren Davis is hosting a Go Fund Me for the two venues to help take care of the 100-person staff that is unable to work for the foreseeable future. Many of the team members have suffered personal losses. "These are the people who make the magic of live music and unforgettable nights possible, and now they need your help," Davis wrote.

RiverWatch Grill + Riverwatch Coffeehouse and Gift Shop

Location: 379 Main St., Chimney Rock, NC 28720 and 375 Main St., Chimney Rock, NC 28720

RiverWatch Grill has been a staple in downtown Chimney Rock since 1998. After Helene, the building is still standing as well as the next door coffee and gift shop, unlike so many others in the town, but it needs a lot of work.

"Hurricane Helene caused the Rocky Broad River to rise with a force we never imagined possible. Many buildings were swept away, and the flood waters surged through Main Street, leaving devastation in their wake. Though our beloved RiverWatch is still standing, it is deeply wounded and in desperate need of help to recover," wrote Shelly Banz of RiverWatch on its Go Fund Me. Donations will go to building repairs, equipment replacement and support of the RiverWatch family.

Star Diner

Location: 115 N Main St., Marshall, NC 28753

Star Diner in Marshall was completely submerged in floodwaters during Hurricane Helene, and its damage is extensive. Owner Kate Sonoskus doesn't know what's next for the restaurant. "In the meantime, I'm worried about our staff and how they're going to make their next rent & mortgage & car payments & buy groceries," she wrote in her Go Fund Me for the diner. "I cannot call this a 'rebuild' fund - I just don't know what's next," she wrote.

Switzerland Cafe and General Store

Location: 9440 NC-226A, Marion, NC 28752

Switzerland Cafe and General Store has been feeding its neighbors with any of its remaining inventory that was after the hurricane. Any donations made to the restaurant's owner's personal venmo (@Lora-Lanier-1) will go toward rebuilding the business and town.

Willow Hill Soap Company

Location: 429 N Main St., Hendersonville, NC 28792

Location: 80 Park St., Canton, NC 28716

Both of Willow Hill Soap Company locations (in Hendersonville and Canton) are closed after Hurricane Helene. "We will be able to check on orders whenever our internet is restored," the store wrote on Instagram. In the meantime, you can make online purchases of candles, soaps, bath bombs, beard care and more. Its products are made without harmful ingredients, so you can feel good about gifting them!

Melissa Oyler: @melissaoyler
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'You've got to fight for everything': Canton, NC, carries on after floods, mill closure

October 16, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Ryan Oehrli; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1025 Words Page: 4A OpenURL Link

CANTON When the Pisgah Black Bears returned to football practice Oct. 7, one of Jody Mathis' junior varsity players was a no-show.

The school had checked on its students the week before and kept a tally of how many lost their homes to Helene: 22. Mathis got a new tally and an explanation for his missing player the next day.

"I just found out they lost their house," the coach said in an interview with The Charlotte Observer that day. "That's why he wasn't here yesterday. It makes sense now."

Three football players lost their homes, Mathis said. Floodwater in Pisgah Memorial Stadium covered all the visitors' bleachers save for three rows. The football field is damaged and much of the fence around it is destroyed.

Seniors have likely played their last game on the field. Mathis hopes juniors will get to play there again.

The Pigeon River crested at nearly 26 feet - a new record.

People dragged wet trash to the curb: family furniture, clothes, toys that children couldn't play with anymore. Some older women slept in a storage shed. Others left town at night, coming back each morning to rebuild.

The town is used to struggle.

In September 2004, Hurricane Frances hit Haywood County. Nine days later, as the ground dried, Ivan paid a visit. Mathis thought he'd never see anything like it again.

But in 2021, he watched from a distance as Hurricane Fred filled his football stadium. At the same spot, he watched it when Helene hit.

"God dang, I've seen it twice - and twice in the last three years," the 21-year coach said.

On top of it all, Canton lost about 1,000 jobs last year when a company closed the doors to its historic paper mill.

'Fight for everything'

About 20 minutes from touristy Asheville, Canton is an old-school, blue-collar town.

For more than a century, it made paper. Smoke would billow out of the mill downtown. People across Western North Carolina remember the smell of wood chips pulping, sometimes even fondly.

More than being a major employer, the mill symbolized Canton. A mural, local businesses and even a bluegrass song by the North Carolina band Balsam Range pay homage to it.

Mathis, 51, is a fourth-generation mill worker. His great-grandfather worked at Sunburst, a logging community whose wood helped build the mill where his grandfather worked as a foreman and his father had a salaried job.

The youngest Mathis went in as a salaried employee, too. By 2023, he managed inventory, logistics and a

warehouse.

The running joke: In 1908, the mill opened on Tuesday. By Friday, it was shutting down. As soon as it opened, it was at risk of closing. Its workers were always struggling against something, like prior floods that filled its basements or environmental concerns, Mathis said.

"That's where you get this mentality. You've got to fight for everything," he said.

Pactiv Evergreen, the last company that ran the mill, shuttered it in May 2023. About 1,200 people worked there. Four thousand people live in Canton.

The company cited expenses, like upgrading the century-old mill, and an unfavorable market.

When the news of closure broke, Gov. Roy Cooper warned Pactiv Evergreen in a March 2023 letter that closing would violate a state incentives agreement and could cost the company \$12 million.

"The Canton mill has been in operation for more than a century and has been the lifeblood of that town and region," the governor wrote. "I am deeply concerned about the impact of the mill's closure, which will have a devastating effect on the livelihoods of thousands of people in Canton and western North Carolina, as well as the region's economy and social fabric."

Attorney General Josh Stein followed up with a lawsuit. Last week, a Wake County judge ruled the suit can move forward.

Speaking at Pisgah Memorial Stadium Oct. 4, Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers said Spiritas Worldwide, a potential buyer, is still interested in buying the property, to his knowledge. It's unclear what the company would do with it.

"But again, it's one of those things," Smathers said. "The world looks much different now than it did literally a week ago. If we were in this stadium a week ago, we'd all be underwater."

For now, the mill remains idle.

"Milltown Mentality" - the branding on Mathis' shirt Tuesday and a sort of slogan among townspeople - doesn't.

The Bears, for example, have been helping their neighbors. After COVID-19, two floods in three years and Canton's economic and cultural heart stalling, Mathis has seen his kids get their hands dirty.

Ten were asked to help clean up a house damaged by Helene. Twenty showed up, and that grew to 25.

Knee-deep in mud, they got to work. That's the way it's always been, Mathis said: People have each other's backs.

When the whistle blows

Waiting in a long line to get gas at a BP station in neighboring Clyde days after Helene tore through Western North Carolina, Bobby Thompson offered what was on his mind: Pisgah Memorial Stadium.

Some normalcy would be nice, but the field had been wrecked, he said.

"This town needs it," Mathis said of football.

It's unclear how long it will take to repair the field and host games there. It fared better after Helene than it did in 2021 when Fred hit. The turf stayed put this time.

"When we get on the field - win or lose - it's gonna be great," Mathis said. "Because at that point, we know we can

start moving forward."

Canton has survived adversity before, and Mathis looks forward to the eventual return. In the meantime, the Bears will play at a temporary home field.

On a typical home game night, the Bears line up and two rows of people numbering in the hundreds watch as they walk to the stadium. The dormant mill, still the heart of the town's identity, sits downhill.

The stadium's whistle from the old paper mill survived the storm.

Latched onto a scoreboard, it bellows when it's time for kickoff or when the Bears score a touchdown.

Whenever they play at home again and the whistle shrieks, Mathis said, Canton will go wild.

Ryan Oehrli: @oehrli

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Helene aftermath: Funerals - to be held instead of wedding

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In their imaginations, Knox Petrucci and Alison Wisely were at their wedding - dancing.

Perhaps cheek to cheek, to a cherished song of Knox's, like Langhorne Slim's "Changes" or JFDR's "White Sun." Or maybe to a tune Knox had penned for the self-produced folk-rock album he'd been recording. Or, more likely, to a party favorite they could both just let loose to; with laughter cascading out of their mouths; surrounded by Alison's sons Felix (9) and Lucas (7), friends from all over Western North Carolina's Yancey County, and relatives from all over the country.

In their imaginations, this dancing would have followed a show-stopping speech by the precocious Felix, who was planning to kick off his remarks to their 50 or so guests with: "Thank you, everyone, for joining us on this auspicious evening..."

Which would have followed a big Italian feast. Which would have been preceded by Knox - in a brand-new navy-blue suit and an ascot - and Alison - in an embroidered top and white pants - standing in the shadow of Mount Mitchell and professing their undying love for each other.

They had been daydreaming about these moments for more than a year.

And in some ways, it was more than just a wedding. More than just a joyful excuse to assemble the people they treasured most.

It would be a moment of triumph, a climb to the top of their own personal mountains after years of tribulations. For Knox, who in recent years had reestablished a close relationship with his older sister Briana Yarbrough after a long, sorrowful estrangement. For Alison, who in the wake of a painful divorce had formed a healthy co-parenting situation with their devoted father, Lance Wisely.

But on Sept. 27, just over six weeks before they were to be married, Hurricane Helene unleashed a deluge that caused the normally peaceful river in front of their Green Mountain home to become a ferocious - and deadly - ocean.

So ferocious and so deadly, in fact, that nobody can give a full accounting of what that day was like for them because nobody survived to offer one: At roughly noon on that Friday, Knox, Alison, Felix and Lucas were swept away as they sought safety from floodwaters.

The only thing certain now is that the very day Knox and Alison had planned to marry is instead being reserved for four funerals.

He was 41. She was 35.

"It definitely feels like a bad movie," says Knox's sister, Briana, calling from her home in Palo Alto, Calif., sounding both deeply exhausted and deeply shattered. "I don't -" she starts to say, then she stops. Then she sighs. Then she starts, softly, to cry. "It's like I'm not talking about real life right now."

'I just made this beautiful human my fiancée'

They originally bonded over - of all things - bees.

In 2019, Knox and Alison both found themselves employed at Honey & the Hive, a Weaverville beekeeping supply store that Knox had only applied to work for because he was looking for a job and they were hiring.

They started dating in short order, attracted by shared passions that included animals, and art, and camping, and creativity, and being members of the queer community in an area where it wasn't always easy to be a member of the queer community, among other things. (On top of that, Knox knew something of failed marriages, having been through one in his 20s.)

Before long, they were moving in together.

Their home was idyllic and idiosyncratic: a 1950s-era brick ranch with a fenced yard and a two-story barn, sprawling across a three-acre plot of land upon which also sat an older, larger, decommissioned outbuilding that long ago served as the little town's post office and general store. On the opposite side of their street were some railroad tracks, and on the other side of the tracks was the North Toe River.

As their relationship grew through the pandemic, their careers also seemed to snap into sharper focus.

Knox took to the whole bee thing with authority, becoming the store manager and eventually a teacher of beekeeping courses.

Meanwhile, although Alison likewise had an affinity for the winged insects, she also had a degree from Western Carolina in forensic anthropology - and felt called to pursue a vocation related not just to death, but also (ironically) to grief. So she went after and landed a job as operations manager at Carolina Memorial Sanctuary, a conservation and green cemetery built into the lush, green, rolling hills of Mills River.

By last year, they'd built a well-rounded life that they loved, so much so that on June 11, 2023, Knox slipped onto Alison's ring finger a piece of jewelry he'd blacksmithed himself using a small forge he'd bought.

Briana, the sister he'd been making up for lost time with, was the first person he told.

"I just made this beautiful human my fiancée," Knox wrote in a text to his sister, beneath a selfie of the bespectacled couple showing off the ring.

He knew, of course, that in proposing to Alison he also was proposing to be a stepdad to Felix and Lucas - and he knew, of course, that these weren't just any ordinary boys.

Baby swings, podcasts and misunderstandings

Lucas, 7, liked cows. A lot. He had at least nine stuffed ones, if not 10 or 11, and he would attempt to carry all of them with him. Everywhere. Even to the water park, while his dad Lance Wisely strenuously objected.

Lucas wanted to be pushed in a baby swing that still hung from a tree at Lance's house in Marshall, N.C., not because he liked being considered a baby but because his dad could strap Lucas in to the baby swing. Securely. Meaning his dad could then swing him as high as possible and then add in a good, hard, death-defying spin.

Lucas did gymnastics, had started taking aerial silks classes, could climb 20-foot-tall trees in rain boots, and - oh yeah, was bilingual, thanks to the Spanish immersion program at North Buncombe Elementary School.

Felix, 9, was stupefying his parents by the time he was just 3, when he was already expressing an interest in learning about obscure types of dinosaurs and (ironically) the most severe types of weather events, from tornadoes to hurricanes.

Felix was incredibly curious, perceptive, and articulate, a future star on the debate team.

Felix could hang with adults in a lot of respects, and proved it by discussing wild creatures, folklore and supernatural topics with his mom Alison - as co-host of a podcast called "Beyond Legends" that they launched together just this past April.

This, his parents would probably admit, is classic Felix: The week of Sept. 16, Felix confronted his dad and asked him if he wanted to marry his partner, Sarah Sheahan of Minneapolis, Minn.; Lance said yes. Felix then called Sarah and asked if she wanted to marry his dad; Sarah said yes. Not long after that, when Lance was on the phone with Alison about figuring out the holidays with the kids, Alison said to Lance, "So, Felix tells me you guys are engaged..."

"That," Lance exclaimed, "is not what we said!"

On the morning of Friday, Sept. 20, Lance dropped the boys off at school in Weaverville. It would be the last time he'd see his sons alive.

A surge of optimism, then worst fears realized

Briana called from the West Coast to check in on Knox late Wednesday evening, a day before Helene was expected to hit.

He'd done some basic stormproofing, he informed her, but he didn't seem worried about it. And she wasn't either. Her brother lived in the mountains, after all. Not on the beach.

Thursday passed with no contact. Friday the line was quiet, too. She still wasn't overly concerned. They had been in fairly frequent touch since reconciling 2-1/2 years earlier, but it's not like they talked every day. It wasn't until some people she knew who had extended family in North Carolina reached out on Saturday to ask if she had heard from Knox.

"No," Briana said. "Why?"

They told her about the storm. She looked at the news. It was the first she was seeing about Helene, and headlines were screaming with words like "brutal" and "devastation."

She immediately texted Knox. She would never get a reply.

From 2,500 miles away, as Briana's panic rapidly intensified, she started trying to exploit social media and the internet to glean whatever information she could that might provide clues to how things were looking back in Green Mountain.

From Minnesota, where he had been visiting Sarah, Lance was doing the same. There had even been talk of the two of them trying to drive back to North Carolina in Sarah's four-wheel-drive vehicle, so they could try to navigate through the wasteland Helene had created to get to Knox and Alison's house themselves. They ultimately were discouraged from doing so, and stayed put.

Monday, Sept. 30, was the day that brought a surge of optimism after more than 48 hours of agony.

At the family's request, someone in Yancey County with a good telephoto zoom lens had gotten as close to the house as they safely could before confronting a severely washed out part of the road, and snapped a picture. It showed the structure still standing, and the door open. The house hadn't been swept away, Lance thought. Maybe they're OK after all. Maybe that open door means they're airing out the house.

But on Tuesday, Oct. 1, the worst of Lance's worst fears was realized, times four.

Sarah had been able to reach a fire department dispatcher, who had talked to a Green Mountain resident, who had reported this: Around noon the previous Friday - as the river turned into a sea that surged high above its banks, across the tracks and the road and into Knox and Alison's front yard - two adults with children were observed along their road getting into a white vehicle. Alison owned a white Mazda CX-5.

The violently swirling flood kept rising. The vehicle began to float. The people scrambled back out of it.

According to the eyewitness, the four were struggling to make their way through the water back to the house when a giant wave lifted all of them up - and rushing water carried them away.

'I'm realizing how much more I wish I knew them'

It's been a blur of immense sadness ever since Lance called Briana and told her she should sit down.

A blur of crying. Of sobbing. Of excruciating phone calls. Of having, Briana says, "to give that message over and over," and of every reaction being "the most painful thing to experience: that deep grief, the wail of people that loved my brother."

Of trying and routinely failing to make sense of the nonsensical.

Yet they've been heartened by an overwhelming outpouring of support from the community. The locals who chased leads for clues to what happened. The rescuers who were eventually able to find all four bodies, which on one hand made it really real but on the other gave them some peace. The more than a thousand people who've donated more than \$65,000 to a GoFundMe in Knox, Alison, Felix and Lucas' memories. The sanctuary where Alison worked offering to cover the costs of their burial and funeral expenses.

The friends and neighbors who have found and cared for their cattle dog, Reishi, and their cat, Mowgli, and who remain on the lookout for Moonpie, their still-missing hound.

And the beekeeper-buddy of theirs, Melissa Mejia of Burnsville, who hiked through the mud to the house with her husband, Marc, and salvaged - in addition to a handful of mementos the family will want - the boys' lizard, Sheila, alive.

Melissa has been back to the house multiple times since, with multiple people, because Knox's and Alison's families haven't been able to get to Western North Carolina, but also because it's an arduous process to sift through all the damage. Basically, it's like a bomb went off inside. "Like someone picked up the house, and filled it with water, and shook it around, and then everything settled - but then they added a bunch of mud to it," says Charlie Oak Blakely, one of the couple's best friends, who's been joining Melissa on the salvage missions.

"Everybody who goes in their house," Melissa adds, "gets stuck in the mud. There's always, for everybody, been a moment where you can't turn around. It's like quicksand. You're stuck, and then you're losing your balance, and it's like a moment of despair. But ..."

She pauses, then finishes the thought:

"... It feels wrong to be upset inside of their house. Because they were so kind and loving and joyful and positive."

Hanging onto the happiest feelings they can

In a weird way, in Lance's imagination, it almost seems as if the boys, Alison, and Knox are still there - in or around that house - together.

Lance still hasn't returned to North Carolina from Minnesota, and so in his imagination, "it feels, in some ways, like

my children are just with their mother. Which, in a grim sense is true. But not in the sense that like, Oh, I'm gonna get them back next week. Which, sometimes, it still feels that way."

He's as shattered as any father can be. He'd give anything to push Lucas on the baby swing one more time, or to shake his head and smile in disbelief at something Felix did or said that made the boy seem twice his age.

But he also already is trying to imagine a future in which he's as happy as he was when they were alive.

"I mean, what can you do? Right?" Lance says. "I've known some parents who have lost their children, and ... a lot of them turn into shells of people - like, they're just hollowed out by it - and I don't want to do that. ...

"It's heartbreaking that they won't be here for me to share those things with anymore, to experience the joy of their silliness and their childlike perspective. They were such amazing, magical, ridiculous, curious, energetic, joyful children. And I want to keep the vitality that I was showing my children - you know, showing them how to just drink from life.

"I still want to do that."

In Knox's sister Briana's imagination, meanwhile, she and her 14-year-old daughter, Dahlia, are transported back to the week this past summer when they visited Green Mountain and Knox, Alison, Felix and Lucas.

They're catching fireflies around a bonfire. They're standing in front of that old post office and general store on Knox and Alison's property and listening to Knox talk about how he'd like to turn the building into an art center. They're out playing with the boys next to the river. Felix is trying to find watersnakes. Lucas is splashing in the ankle-deep water.

The river is being kind, being gentle, being a friend.

Briana can also envision an alternate current reality in which Knox and Alison are still alive, and they're bringing the kids along as they get up to their elbows in the various grassroots hurricane relief efforts all over Western North Carolina.

Finally, for a few fleeting moments here and there - in her imagination - it's November 9th, and Briana is attending not a somber private funeral but the joyful wedding that her brother and her would-be-sister-in-law had planned for that day. And when she can imagine that, she imagines this:

Knox and Alison, dancing.

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Free meals after hurricane are a lifeline, but not everyone can eat them

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When Patricia Sprinkle and her family lost power in the Buncombe County neighborhood of Enka-Candler due to Hurricane Helene, she faced an extra challenge when it came to getting food.

As someone with celiac disease, an autoimmune disorder in which eating gluten damages the lining of the small intestine, Sprinkle's diet centers on meats, fruits and gluten-free products. (She's not a fan of vegetables.) But all of the meat and gluten-free goods were gone from her local store's shelves.

"We finally found some bacon at the farmers market. So I've kind of been living off of bacon," she said. And even though her power returned a few days later, there's still no water, making cooking and baking a challenge.

"I honestly feel like I've lost about 10 pounds in the last 10 days," Sprinkle said. A friend in Virginia also just sent her two boxes of gluten-free food from Wegmans. But she is still on the lookout for a nice hot meal that she can trust won't make her sick.

According to the latest Duke Energy outage map on Tuesday, Oct. 8, over 100,000 people still lack power in the Carolinas following Hurricane Helene. As of last Thursday, 136,000 people in the Southeast didn't have access to clean water, with 1.8 million under a boil advisory.

As a result, many people are still relying primarily on nonperishable items and donated meals. And for people like Sprinkle with dietary restrictions like celiac disease or diabetes, or even people who are vegan or keto for health or ethical reasons, many of those items are off limits.

For instance, a member of the Asheville Foodies Facebook group posted asking where a friend could find vegan and gluten-free options so that she could focus on helping with recovery efforts.

Commenters quickly suggested vegan and vegetarian restaurant Rosetta's Kitchen in downtown Asheville, currently serving free meals from 12-4 p.m. daily. The Ayurvedic Institute and Plant have also teamed up to provide vegan meals this week, alternating sites.

In times like these, bakers like Hendersonville's Diana Casteel, owner of Pies by Di who specializes in gluten free goods, are a lifeline. Casteel has severe celiac disease, her husband is diabetic and her daughter does not eat dairy. So she understands the importance of having food that doesn't make you sick.

Since the storm, a number of Casteel's customers have reached out for assistance. One woman wanted gluten-free goods for her daughter, a police officer.

"Her daughter's been having headaches and, you know, stomach upset, and she just can't really focus on the job," Casteel said. "Everybody's offering food, but when you have celiac disease, that's a tough one."

Casteel provided bread, as well as cornbread French toast and some apple cider donuts.

Other customers are in need of pantry staples like gluten-free pasta and soups, which Casteel has in stock because she buys in bulk. Getting supplies like almond, sunflower seed and chickpea flour is not a problem, she said, though she had to meet her assistant, who lives in Georgia, in Greenville to pick them up. She also helped out India Aroma Bistro in Hendersonville, whose lunch buffet is primarily gluten free. After donating meals in the first week of the disaster, they have reopened for customers at new lower prices with free meals for first responders and people without power. But they had no to-go containers, so Casteel bought some for them from a restaurant depot in Charlotte.

Casteel's next step is to search for a new kitchen, since the one she was using in Hendersonville has minor damage and no power.

Casteel needs a pristine kitchen to prevent cross-contamination, because people like her with severe celiac disease will react to even the smallest amount of grains and wheat. "You can't just vacuum out the flour from the air," she said. She has a potential lead in Bryson City, a kitchen that has not been in use for a while.

As for Sprinkle, she plans to take it day by day. She's grateful for the Western North Carolina Farmers Market. "They've got everything down there," she said.

In the meantime, her focus is on helping a family member who lost everything find housing, clothing and - yes - food. Food has such power. A hot meal made with love can nourish both our physical and emotional needs, while a dingy cup of broth or sad, saggy Jell-O can sink our spirits.

Earlier this week, another Asheville Foodie member posted asking where they could find a good burger and support a small business. People chimed in with recommendations, from Blue Sky Cafe in Fletcher, Waynesville's Church Street Depot and Main Street Grill in Weaverville.

In normal times, satisfying such a simple craving isn't so hard. But for people like Sprinkle and Casteel with dietary needs, the search for nourishing and safe comfort food can be far more challenging.

Especially as in the case of Casteel's neighbor, when your birthday falls on the day a hurricane arrives. When Casteel heard about it, she knew she had to help. So she plugged her toaster oven in the generator and baked a birthday cake: three layers - two chocolate, one vanilla - with chocolate ganache. The neighbor was over the moon.

"Just to be able to have some bit of normalcy, you know, with everything going on, is a big thing," Casteel said.

Sara Murphy: @saramurphyphd

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Here's every step in NC's absentee process, from requesting your ballot to counting votes

October 16, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Kyle Ingram; Staff Writer | Section: News | 955 Words

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RALEIGH

Absentee voting has been a feature of North Carolina elections for decades. This year, however, it may be even more important as voters displaced or otherwise affected by Hurricane Helene seek to cast their ballot amid the destruction.

In recent years (and especially in the last few weeks since Helene hit), misinformation has spread about the safety and integrity of absentee voting.

To get a closer look at the process, The News & Observer watched the absentee ballot mailing and receipt process at the Wake County Board of Elections office on Oct. 8.

While processes can vary slightly between counties, state law broadly requires that all absentee ballots be dealt with the same way throughout the state.

Here's every step of the absentee process, from requesting the ballot, to having your vote counted on Election Day.

1. Voter requests an absentee ballot

Absentee ballots are only sent to registered voters in North Carolina who request them.

Some states, like California, automatically send absentee ballots in the mail to all registered voters. Here, however, voters must request an absentee ballot through the state's online request form or by filling out an official paper request form.

Voters requesting an absentee ballot must sign their request and include their date of birth and either a driver's license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number.

Election workers will check and validate a voter's registration before mailing them an absentee ballot.

A voter's near relative or legal guardian may also submit the request on the voter's behalf.

2. Poll workers pack and mail envelope

Poll workers pack envelopes to send to voters containing their ballot and instructions on how to fill it out.

Using a voter's address, poll workers determine which of the over 2,300 ballot styles they will use to vote.

Each packet includes a container envelope which voters will use to include their ballot and a photocopy of their ID. If voters don't have an ID, they can fill out an ID exception form, which is also included in the packet.

The completed packets are then mailed to voters across the state.

3. Voter fills out absentee ballot

Once they receive their absentee ballot in the mail, a voter marks their preferences just as they would if they were voting in-person.

However, state law requires absentee voters to have two witnesses or a notary present when they fill out their ballot. Those witnesses will also need to sign the envelope.

As mentioned earlier, voters will also need to include a photocopy of an acceptable form of voter ID in their ballot envelope or fill out an ID exception form.

4. Voter delivers absentee ballot to county elections board

Voters using an absentee ballot can either deliver it by mail or in-person at their county board of elections office.

All absentee ballots must be received by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 5. State election officials recommend sending absentee ballots at least a week before the deadline to ensure the postal service delivers them in time.

Voters from the 25 counties in the federally declared disaster area from Hurricane Helene can deliver their absentee ballots to any county board of election office in the state - not just the one in their home county.

All voters who vote absentee can track their ballot using an online service called BallotTrax.

5. Election workers conduct initial audit of absentee ballots

Once ballots are received, election workers check for any immediate deficiencies in the envelope. If there are any rips, signs of tampering or loose or unsealed ballots in the envelope, staff can present the packet to the county board for inspection.

Correctly returned envelopes are then checked for ID documentation. If none is provided, staff will reach out to the voter to request more information.

Staff also check that voters have signed their container envelope and included two witnesses or a notary. If any of that information is missing or filled out in the wrong section, it would be presented to the board.

If the voter's signature is the only thing missing, staff can send a cure certification letter to the voter and present that ballot to the board once they receive the completed letter.

6. Bipartisan county board members check and approve absentee ballots

After the staff audit, bipartisan county board of election members check and approve absentee ballots at weekly public meetings.

County boards of elections are currently structured to have three Democrats and two Republicans.

Individual board members check once again that each ballot includes an ID, signature and witnesses. Any special cases must be considered by the full board before they're approved.

For example, any voter who completed an ID exception form will have their ballot considered by the full board. Those ballots can only be rejected if the board unanimously decides that the voter provided false information on the form.

7. Election workers open envelopes and prepare ballots for processing

The approved ballots are taken to election workers, who unseal the container envelopes and straighten the ballots so they can be

entered into the counting machine.

8. Bipartisan board members deliver ballots to counting machine

Board members from each party then deliver the ballots to a high-speed counter, where they are scanned.

However, votes are not actually tabulated until Election Day.

9. Ballots are sealed in boxes

The voted ballots are sealed in boxes, with seals signed by each board member. Those boxes are then stored in a ballot cage, which is under 24-hour video surveillance and requires employee badge access and an alarm code.

10. Reports are tabulated and reported on Election Day

The county board will meet at 5 p.m. on Election Day, where it will tabulate the absentee votes. Those results will then be uploaded at 7:30 p.m. on the State Board of Elections' website.

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Don't tell me we can't - build better in western NC

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As soon as roads allowed last week, I arrived at my property in Bat Cave, North Carolina with a car full of water, food and supplies for neighbors. There was only one thing I had that was of interest to people - gasoline and diesel fuel. For days, military helicopters and good Samaritans had been airdropping supplies up and down Highway 9 near my house. Pallets of pre-made military meals, water and other supplies were already piling up in garages. What people wanted was energy to drive the machinery needed to dig out, power the wells that pump water and generate electrons that keep the lights and communications devices operating.

This is also what I find every day in my work in Africa and South Asia on energy poverty. People are willing to spend enormous shares of their income on energy. It is the essential backbone to modern life. Billions of dollars are siphoned off annually to pay for expensive fuel. Badly needed investment flows elsewhere because businesses don't set-up operations where power supplies are unreliable. People remain stuck in poverty.

Western North Carolina already had a major power reliability problem. People who can, including my family, own generators to compensate for an extremely weak grid in the region. But everyone should be able to access reliable power. Building back smarter right now means building to new specifications. Bury power lines where necessary. Build redundancies into the grid. Update flood maps to reflect a world that is changing because of climate change. These are exactly the types of policies that recent legislation - the bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act in particular - are helping enable.

These measures represent hard work that will take time, but people in the region are hurting now. Unfortunately, the Trump campaign is driving an exploitative misinformation campaign that pins suffering on immigration policy, preying on people's vulnerability and anger while providing no relief.

These lies are spreading across North Carolina mountain country like wildfire right now. They are part of a new climate change denial messaging playbook that we do not have time for.

Leaders should be focusing on how the southeast must prepare for storm devastation it's never seen before and what that means - building more resilient power grids, avoiding building in vulnerable locations, providing better risk information to people so they can buy insurance. Virtually nobody in western North Carolina owns flood insurance so they will not get benefits from the policies they've paid into for decades. Instead, the misinformation specialists blame, dodge, and stoke anger. All of this is to avoid talking about the fact that the Gulf of Mexico was an abnormally warm 85 degrees as Helene gathered strength, and those waters are fueling bigger and more devastating storms, according to scientists.

Where is the call (eh-hum, North Carolina Senate delegation) for Congress to pass emergency response funding, which will certainly be needed once members return to Washington in November?

My property is buried two feet deep in toxic sludge, and I have a new creek running through my yard. I'll have no grid power or water for months. Don't tell me that I live in an area that doesn't flood. Don't tell me we can't build homes to higher resilience standards. Don't tell me we can't climate-proof power systems. Don't tell me cowardly lies like recovery money is going to illegal immigrants. We live in a new, harsher environment here in the Southeast. Tell me how we as Americans are going to rise to the challenge of surviving and thriving in it.

It is disappointing that someone running for the highest office in the land has chosen to exploit this natural disaster for political purposes. Efforts such as the bipartisan infrastructure act and new regulations that will help FEMA

develop better flood maps backed by the current White House are only the beginning of the real work needed to harden our infrastructure and ready our communities for what is to come.

Jonathan Phillips, writing in a personal capacity, is Director of Energy Access at Duke University's Nicholas energy institute. He was an advisor to Congress and Obama's administration on climate and foreign policy.

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Here's the answer to every question you have about the 2024 NC State Fair

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Author: N&O Service Journalism Team; Staff Writer | Section: News | 2567 Words

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Welcome to North Carolina State Fair season. Learn the basics and get familiar with the new stuff before heading to the fairgrounds this year.

You can get additional info about the fair at ncagr.gov/divisions/ncstatefair/2024.

When is the NC State Fair? What are the hours?

The fair begins Thursday, Oct. 17 and ends Sunday, Oct. 27.

Hours:

Thursday, Oct. 17: noon-11 p.m.

Friday, Oct. 18 - Saturday, Oct. 19: 9 a.m.-midnight

Sunday, Oct. 20 - Thursday, Oct. 24: 9 a.m.-11 p.m.

Friday, Oct. 25 - Saturday, Oct. 26: 9 a.m.-midnight

Sunday, Oct. 27: 9 a.m.-11 p.m.

How much do NC State Fair tickets cost?

Tickets can be purchased online at a discount until Thursday, Oct. 17, and there are walk-up locations available from until Oct. 17 to purchase tickets at this rate. Gate prices are a bit higher, beginning Friday, Oct. 18.

Adult (ages 13 to 64): \$10 through Oct. 18, or \$13 at the gate beginning Oct. 18.

Military adult (ages 13 to 64): \$8, but they can only be bought at the gate after Oct. 18.

Youth (ages 6 to 12): \$5 through Oct. 18, \$7 at the gate after that.

Child (ages 0 to 5): Free.

Senior adult (ages 65+): \$5 anytime.

Groups can buy discounted tickets. Group adult tickets are \$8 each when bought in groups of 40 or more, while group youth tickets are \$4 each when bought in groups of 40 or more.

Are there any NC State Fair ticket discounts?

Adult or youth groups of 40 or more can get ticket discounts (see above).

These passes must be purchased online by Thursday, Oct. 17:

Dizzy Pass: \$38 includes a FastTrack gate admission ticket and an unlimited ride wristband, only valid for one day during the 2024 State Fair.

Kegs & Corks Pass: \$17 includes a gate admissions ticket and an NC Public House Beer + Wine ticket, which provides your choice of a 16 oz. craft beer or a 6 oz. wine.

State Fair Flyer Package: \$17 includes one gate admission ticket and one round-trip State Fair flyer ticket, which is not valid for carnival rides.

State Fair SkyGazer: \$14 includes one FastTrack gate admission ticket and a SkyGazer (Ferris wheel) ticket, which is not valid for carnival rides.

And there are a couple of days when some folks can get into the fair for free:

Senior Citizens' Day (Tuesday, Oct. 22): Seniors aged 65+ get free admission. Bojangles biscuits and coffee will be served at 9 a.m. on the Dorton Arena Patio near the Waterfall.

Smithfield Foods Hunger Relief Day (Thursday, Oct. 24): Bring six cans of food and get in free. Since Hunger Relief Day began at the State Fair in 1993, fairgoers have donated more than 6 million pounds of food to the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina.

Are rides or games included with my NC State Fair ticket?

Rides and games require separate purchases.

Games are cash-only, and you purchase tickets for the rides.

You can also purchase wristbands for rides (except for the SkyGazer Ferris wheel and Flyer). Wristbands can be bought online for \$30 in advance or for \$40 during the fair (online or in person).

* For ride tickets: Visit the ticket plazas (neon green tents with stars on top) near Gates 7, 8 and 9 or in front of Dorton Arena.

Ticket plazas are open daily 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. (minus Thursday Oct 17, when hours of operation differ slightly). Carnival ticket plazas, located in each Midway, will be open during Carnival operating hours.

How can I buy ride tickets for the NC State Fair?

You can purchase these tickets online (and at a discount) before the fair, or you can buy them in-person when you arrive for the fun.

* Ride ticket cards, which rolled out last year, take the place of the ride ticket sheets the fair has used for years.

Tickets will be placed on a chipped card, which needs to be presented at each ride and automatically debited the ticket count for that ride. These cards will now carry over from year to year, letting you use last year's unused tickets and even save some for next year.

Ride ticket cards are \$10 for 18 ride tickets bought online through Thursday, Oct. 17, then they're \$1 per ticket at Ride Ticket Plazas (or \$18 for 18 bought online) during the fair.

When the fair begins, ride ticket cards will be available online and in person at Ride Ticket Plazas. (More on those below.)

* Ride wristbands are \$30 per wristband when bought online by Oct. 17, then they're \$40 per wristband Oct. 18 and

beyond, whether purchasing online or at carnival booths in person. Wristbands are valid only for one day during the Fair.

What's the NC State Fair lunch pass?

Here's how the Weekday Lunch Pass Program will work in 2024:

Enter through Gate 9 off Trinity Road or Gate 1 off Hillsborough Street between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on a weekday.

Purchase a lunch card at the gate for \$20. Lunch cards are cash only (and previously \$10).

Visit the food vendors for lunch (there are dozens of new offerings).

Return the lunch card by 1:30 p.m. to the same gate used for entry on the same day it was purchased.

Get a full \$20 refund for the lunch card.

Important reminders:

If you leave after 1:30 p.m., you forfeit your \$20.

No food is included in the program. The cost only covers admission to the fair.

Which new foods are coming to the NC State Fair this year?

This year's list is studded with collisions from two great eating forces - fair food tradition and TikTok. You can thank those forces as you stroll through the fair sipping on pickle-flavored Dr. Pepper.

Other trends seem to include breaded bologna fries, pickles in just about every kind of situation and new plates of nachos. Somehow, this year's roster of fair foods even includes deep fried spaghetti.

For our run-down of new fair foods for 2024, visit newsobserver.com/living/food-drink.

Can you pay for food at the NC State Fair with a card, or is it cash only?

Many vendors take credit cards, but some only take cash. There are ATMs on the fairgrounds.

If you only brought a card, or if you only brought cash, there would be plenty of food options.

A tip: Having some cash on hand is always smart, because when the fair gets busy, the wireless network tends to slow down. ATM lines can get long too.

Can I park for free at the NC State Fair?

Yes. There are a number of parking lots that let you park for free, and some have a shuttle that will take you to the fairgrounds, so you won't have to walk.

Here are the free parking lots:

Dogwood Lot

Cardinal Lot

Carter-Finley Stadium

Lenovo Center

Note: There may be exceptions if events are scheduled at Carter-Finley (no NC State home football games are on the schedule) or Lenovo Center (there are concerts scheduled for Oct. 18, 19, 25 and 26).

Can I take free shuttles to the NC State Fair?

Yes. The fair will offer several park-and-ride shuttle options from off-site parking lots to entry gates at the fair.

Shuttles will be offered to and from these lots, which will also have accessible shuttles available.

Dogwood Lot: The shuttle drops visitors off at Gate 8 of the fair. The address is 4501 Reedy Creek Rd. in Raleigh.

Cardinal Lot: The shuttle drops visitors off at Gate 7 of the fair. The address is 5766 Chapel Hill Road Rd. in Raleigh.

Both lot hours are from 9 a.m. until one hour after gates close each day. (Hours slightly differ on Thursday, Oct. 17.)

Shuttles will not be offered at Carter-Finley Stadium or the Lenovo Center. Remember, there may be exceptions to daily free parking at these lots if there are events scheduled at these two sporting arenas.

Can I pay for parking to be closer to the fairgrounds?

Yes. There are some privately operated options near the fairgrounds that charge for parking.

During the fair, residents near the fairgrounds often convert parts of their private property into small parking lots. These lots provide additional parking options, but you will have to pay.

Can I take a GoRaleigh bus to the State Fair?

Yes. GoRaleigh shuttles will carry passengers to the state fairgrounds from the Triangle Town Center Shopping Mall, 5959 Triangle Town Blvd. in Raleigh, near the Dillard's parking lot. The shuttles will run every 30 minutes daily from 8:30 a.m until the fair closes.

Here are the prices for the shuttle:

Round trip: \$5

One way: \$4

Seniors 65 and older and passengers with disabilities: \$2.50 round trip or \$2 one way

Children under 40 inches tall: Free

You can pay with cash or by using the UMO app. The GoPass is not valid on State Fair routes.

Advanced sale passes are available through the UMO App or in-person and can be purchased at the GoRaleigh operations facility, 4104 Poole Rd. in Raleigh, or at GoRaleigh Station in downtown Raleigh.

When are the fireworks at the NC State Fair?

Nightly. Attendees can enjoy a firework show every evening at 9:45 p.m. over the Heritage Circle Pond.

What kinds of rides are at the NC State Fair?

The fair will have nearly 100 rides ranging from thrill rides for adults to slow, small rides for children.

There will be two new rides this year:

State Fair Slide: A 210-foot slide

Candyland Adventure: A 130-foot long funhouse

What is the Village of Yesteryear?

The Village of Yesteryear is an area set aside for artisans who preserve skills and crafts from past generations. Their slogan: "Preserving art of the past for generations of the future."

Crafters include glass blowers, jewelers, painters, basket weavers, potters and sculptors, wood carvers and much more.

More than 75 artists and crafters are featured. This year, seven crafters will be celebrated who have been in the Village for 35 years or more.

The majority of the crafters in the Village of Yesteryear are from North Carolina, and many are from the mountains. (See below on how you can support them after Hurricane Helene's devastation.)

The Village of Yesteryear is located near the Heritage Church and Folk Festival, close to the Midway. It's most easily accessible by Gates 6, 7 or 8.

(Note: On the other side of the fairgrounds - on the Hillsborough Street side behind Dorton Arena - the North Carolina Pottery Tent features pottery for sale made only by potters from the state.)

How can I support Western NC after Helene at the fair?

Donations can be contributed online for those buying tickets on the State Fair's website with the option to give to the fundraiser link before you check out with the option to give \$5-\$25.

The donation drive isn't the only way to support those affected by the storm at the state fair this year.

Of the more than 75 artisans coming out for fairgoers to see them in action, many are from Western North Carolina, and the State Fair has confirmed that they will still be able to attend.

Here's a list of some of the member crafters you can support as the cleanup continues in their communities:

The Village of Yesteryear will be open at the N.C. State Fair from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day. On opening day, Thursday Oct. 17, it'll be open at noon. You can find more information online at nostatefair.org.

Are dogs/pets allowed at the NC State Fair?

Pets are not allowed at the fair, but service dogs are welcome.

Can I buy alcohol at the NC State Fair?

Yes. North Carolina craft beer and wine are sold at the NC Public House, located on the south side of Dorton Arena.

There's a limit of one Beer+Wine ticket per person per visit to the Public House. One Beer+Wine ticket, which costs

\$10, provides you with a choice of two servings of wine (3 oz. each), beer or cider (both 8 oz. each).

A Kegs & Corks Pass, which can be bought for \$17 online ahead of the fair, provides one Beer+Wine ticket and one gate admission ticket.

Note: You may bring your own food into the State Fair, but alcohol is prohibited.

Can I rent wheelchairs and strollers at the NC State Fair?

Yes. You can rent scooters, wheelchairs and strollers at the fair, but they cannot be reserved in advance.

Prices and details from Raleigh's Mobility Concepts LLC:

Electric scooters are \$60.

Wheelchairs are \$20 and available in medium and large sizes.

Children's transport devices are \$20. Strollers are available in single and double capacity. CuddleCars are only available in single capacity.

Reservations will not be accepted in advance. Instead, patrons can visit tents located around the fairground to pick up and/or drop off equipment. Devices will be issued in a first come, first served capacity.

These will be located inside ticket booths at Gates 1, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

(Note: The accessible parking lot is located near Gate 10.)

Patrons must give another item as collateral - such as car keys, a photo ID or a cash security deposit - when reserving an item. The collateral will be returned to the customer upon rental drop-off.

Attendees may also bring their own wheelchair, scooter, stroller or child's wagon. Golf carts are prohibited.

How accessible is the NC State Fair?

Buildings: All modern buildings at the Fairgrounds have been modified to standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act. There are some historical buildings in Heritage Circle that are not up to ADA standards.

Bathrooms: There are changing tables in all bathrooms.

Universal changing tables are in the Scott Building and the Agri Supply Exposition Center.

Family restrooms are in the Martin Building and Agri Supply Exposition Center.

Mothers' rooms are in the Scott and Martin buildings and the Agri Supply Exposition Center.

Parking: Accessible parking is available near Gate 10.

Visitors with handicap permits should park in the paved parking lot at the corner of Blue Ridge Road and Trinity Road, near Gate 10 of the Fairgrounds. There are more than 100 parking spaces designated for use by visitors with disabilities in this lot, but a valid handicap permit is required. Visitors can access the Fair through Gates 9 and 10.

AccessABILITY Day will be held on Sunday, Oct. 20.

From 9 .m. to 1 p.m. this special event will include:

Rides and games will operate with no lights or music playing.
Vendors will operate with no lights or music at their booths.
Music stages will only play acoustic sets with light amplification.
The public address system will only be used for lost visitor announcements.
Throughout the whole day:
An indoor "Chill Out Zone" in the Graham Building will have tables and chairs, low lighting and soft music.
Noise canceling headphones will be available for checkout in the "Chill Out Zone."
Inclusive and/or adaptive "on the spot" competitions will be held.
What is the NC State Fair's bag policy?
Clear bags are strongly encouraged. Here's what the fair's website says:
A modified clear bag policy will be in place in 2024. This policy is only in effect for the N.C. State Fair in October and does not extend to additional events held at the N.C. State Fairgrounds.
The N.C. State Fair will operate two security checkpoints at each gate. Those fairgoers who bring a clear bag will go through a much quicker inspection, while those with an opaque bag will go through our bag search line. In an effort to get you into the fun as quickly as possible, please bring your items in a clear bag. There is no size limit to the clear bag being accepted.
What are you allowed/not allowed to bring to the NC State Fair?
Allowed:
Food and drink
Water bottles
Diaper bags with baby/toddler supplies
Your own wheelchair, scooter, stroller or child's wagon
Medications
Not allowed:
Alcoholic beverages
Drugs
Firearms knives, brass knuckles, batons and/or weapons of any type
Golf carts
Pets (minus service dogs)

Can I bring my own food to the NC State Fair?

Yes, outside food and drink are allowed, with the exception of alcohol. All bags are subject to a search policy, the fair says.

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Helene wrecked their Western NC towns and homes. Then came the bees and fire ants

October 16, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Catherine Muccigrosso, The Charlotte Observer | Section: north_carolina | 623 Words 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.

Yellow jackets ground nests have been disturbed by Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina.

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.

Reported insect stings from electricians and other outdoor workers during Hurricane Helene recovery efforts have been reported, according to the Associated Press.

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.

Sarah Stellwagen, assistant professor of biological sciences at UNC Charlotte with a background in entomology, said as people are out there moving debris around and getting their property back in order in western North Carolina following Hurricane Helene's destruction, it's likely they're coming in contact with more stinging and biting insects than they normally would.

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."

RAL_HOTSPRINGS-NE-100424-RTW.JPGReports of insect bites and stings have increased during hurricane recovery efforts in western North Carolina as people clear debris and nests have been disturbed by flooding and landslides.

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