

thepaper.media 1 SECTIONS, 5 PAGES

THE PAPER

TUESDAY, **OCTOBER 1, 2024**

Burke County News • Burke County Owned

VOLUME 2, NO. 36



AROUND BURKE

Storm recovery

Interstate 40 East and Westbound is now open up Old Fort Mountain for emergency and necessary travel. Travel will be slow so expect substantial delays still. The Burke County Relief Center

is open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Food, clothing, hygiene items, and more are available. The center is at the Foothills Higher Education Center, 2128 S. Sterling St., Morganton.

If you need volunteer assistance or would like to volunteer, call Burke County's volunteer hotline at 828-764-

West Union Art Studios will be serving a homemade veggie and meat chili/stew for the Burke community on Wednesday, Oct. 2, from noon until the hot meal runs out. If you want a free meal or charge your device, they will be happy to serve you at 113 W. Union. Attendees are welcome to bring a container for anyone who cannot come themselves.

Burke County's shelter at Oak Hill United Methodist Church remains open. The church is at 2239 N.C. 181, Morgan-

Phifer YMCA is opening its doors to anyone who needs a shower, to charge their cellphones, etc. There are no fees. No exercise or swimming activities are taking place.

Burke County Public Schools are closed through Oct. 4. Thursday, Oct. 3, and Fri day, Oct. 4, are optional teacher workdays. A decision on next week is expected Thursday.

The Burke County Courthouse will close early at noon on Wednesday, Oct. 2, and all District Court criminal sessions have been canceled all week. The Clerk's Office will be open for filings only. The City of Morganton garbage collection returned to its

normal schedule on Tuesday, Oct. 1, and will continue on track for the rest of the week. Crews are working to get to houses as soon as possible while some are blocked off.

Athletics through the schools and recreation centers are suspended.

New Dimensions Charter School is closed through Oct. 4. Thursday, Oct. 3, and Friday, Oct. 4, are optional teacher workdays. **Western Piedmont Community College** is closed through Oct. 4. The campus is being

See BURKE, Page 2A

INDEX

Airport | 2A Churches | 4A Internet | 4A Outages | 3A

Power | 2A Road Closures | 3A Sports Update | 4A

Welfare Checks | 3A

The Paper prohibits publishing Al-generated content unless the Al aspect is the focus of the story. The Paper also prohibits AI-edited text, as editing requires human judgment. Al-generated headlines or social media posts are permissible but must receive human approval.





ALLEN VANNOPPEN / THE PAPER

Morganton Limbwalkers Tree service clears a mammoth old Oak tree that fell on a residence in Morganton.

Hurricane Helene impacts, recovery efforts

By ALLEN VANNOPPEN Publisher

Everywhere you turn you see impressive progress in Burke County's painful recovery from the devastation from Hurricane Helene. Roads are being cleared, utilities are being restored, businesses are opening. River waters are receding. It is a process that will continue for weeks, perhaps months. begins what will be a slow recovery of its entire infrastructure as a result of the historic and catastrophic damage from Hurricane Helene.

And, everywhere you turn, you see increasing examples of neighbors helping neighbors, of volunteers in droves from near and far, providing invaluable assistance night and day to hundreds of hurricane victims.

Shelters and makeshift, roadside humanitarian aid stations are distributing water, food, and necessary supplies. Restaurants across the county are feeding utility workers and are supplying food to

Unbelievable statistics and stories are

USEFUL CONTACTS

- · For current weather conditions in Morganton, go to the NC School Science and Math — Morganton weather station.
- City of Morganton 828-438-5277 • Duke Energy — 1-800-POWERON (1-
- Rutherford Electric 1-800-228-9756
- Town of Drexel 828-430-1794 Blue Ridge Energy — 1-800-448-2383
- Mountain Electric 828-733-0159
- Burke County 911 Admin 828-437-

beginning to emerge as the recovery progresses. For example, at one point, water at Freedom High School's football field was up to the goal post cross bar. That's 10

feet above field level. The recovery will be long, but steps forward will be rapid. The Paper will be updating its website continuously with developments as they occur.

HERE IS WHAT WE KNOW

Duke Energy reports that 59% of its 22,830 customers in the county remain without power. Rutherford EMC reports that 40% of its 20,689 customers remain without power. Combined, 21,998 customers of the 43,519 customers served by both utilities are without power.

Burke County Schools report 11 campuses have power and water; 12 do not. Food replacement shipments are due Thursday to replace spoilage. Decisions about school opening next week are pend-

Morganton has begun lifting boil water advisories for areas served by the Kathy Road, Piney Road and Glen Alpine tanks. Other cleared-to-drink areas include Valdese Ave., Dale Circle, Astro Drive and the Salem water tanks.

See **HELENE**, Page 5A

BURKE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Reports: 11 campuses with water and power, 12 without

By CHARDA PEARSON Education and Business Reporter

The board of education met today at noon for a virtual emergency called board meeting to discuss BCPS updates and possible reopening strategies as the county attempts to regain footing from the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

Chairman Seth Hunt began the meeting by addressing what he described as an "unprecedented disaster" that prompted a local, state, and federal declaration of emergency.

"In decisions that are put before us, please be considerate that we have to use what is considered our best judgment and quite frankly, situational management," Hunt said.

Superintendent Dr. Mike Swan announced that 11 campuses with water, power, and internet while 12 remain without. BCPS has purged all food from campuses county-wide.





Swan

According to Swan, BCPS expects a food shipment to arrive Thursday, Oct. 3. Food will be stored at the 11 campuses with freezer storage and distributed to the remaining 12 campuses when power and water are restored.

In the event that schools open Monday, Swan said schools will do a simple lunch menu.

"Food preparation is paramount for us and the health department has not given us any indication as far as when the boil advisory will be lift-

See SCHOOLS, Page 5A



BILL POTEAT / THE PAPER

The interior of the American Red Cross shelter set up at Oak Hill United

Shelter from the storm

Red Cross provides safe haven in Burke

By BILL POTEAT Editor Emeritus

Christy Beckerman's face is a collage made up of equal parts fear, exhaustion, and frustration.

The last five days have been a living, wakeful nightmare for Beckerman and her family — her husband, a 10-year-old

son, and a 16-year-old son. During the height of Tropical Storm Helene's assault on West Asheville, a tree fell on the Beckerman home, literally opening it to a deluge of

rain and to the lashing of a furious wind.

Terrified, the family loaded a few necessities into their car and set off for a relative's home in the small Tennessee town of Erwin, north across the Smoky Mountains from

Helene had other plans. The ferocious storm flooded some roads, felled gigantic trees across others, and forced the Beckermans into a long, circuitous, and seemingly unending journey that in the end deposited them at the Red Cross Emergency Shelter set

See **SHELTER**, Page 5A

THE WEEK AHEAD



WEDNESDAY

Humid HIGH: 83°

LOW: **66°**



THURSDAY

Partly sunny HIGH: 78° LOW: **64°**



FRIDAY Brief showers

HIGH: 78° LOW: **62°**



SATURDAY Sunny

HIGH: 79° LOW: **59°**



SUNDAY Sunny

HIGH: 75° LOW: 57°



MONDAY

Pleasant HIGH: 76° LOW: **47°**



TUESDAY

Sunny HIGH: **71°** LOW: 45°

BURKE

FROM PAGE 1A

used as a staging area for Duke Energy recovery crews.

Morganton City Hall will reopen to the public on Wednesday, Oct. 2. City of Morganton Recreation Centers will open 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. All City parks are closed until further notice.

Valdese Town Hall is open for regu-

The joint groundbreaking of the **EMS Base and Animal Shelter** for Burke County will not take place as originally planned on

Burke County Board of Commissioners' pre-agenda meeting scheduled for Oct. 1 is canceled. The commission will hold its regular meeting at 6 p.m. on Oct. 15. **Duke Energy** expects all Burke customers to have power by the end of the week.

Rutherford Electric Membership Corporation hopes to have the bulk of its customers reconnected to power by the end of the week, but it could take weeks before some customers can turn on the

The following convenience sites are open and operating during normal business hours, 6:30 a.m. to

- 6 p.m. • 3836 N.C.18 South, Morganton
- 3251 U.S. 64, Morganton
- 1679 N.C. 126, Morganton (Note: This location is currently without power and can only accept bagged trash at this time.)
- 2350 U.S. 70, Connelly Springs Burke County is beginning debris cleanup efforts following the recent storm. Do not bring debris to the landfill. To ensure the process is efficient and in line with federal guidelines, the County is adhering to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) standards for

debris removal. Important instructions for resi-

- · Do not bring debris to the landfill: To avoid disposal charges, residents should not transport storm debris to the landfill. The county has contracted with a hauler to manage debris collection directly from
- residential areas. • Debris collection process: Our contracted hauler will be tagging debris and coordinating pickups throughout the countv. You do not need to be present for pickup. They will make two to three passes through affected areas to ensure all debris is col-
- lected. • Debris separation: Residents are requested to move storm debris to the back of the curb at the right of way and separate it into three distinct piles:

1. Vegetation (tree limbs, branches, etc.)

2. White goods (appliances like refrigerators, washing machines)

3. Building materials (construction debris, wood, drywall) By keeping the debris sorted into these categories, we can ensure faster and more efficient pickup.

Please be patient as the County works to manage the cleanup. Due to the large volume of material, there may be some delays.

Crews from throughout region powering up Burke

By MARTY QUEEN Senior Reporter

Motorists traveling west into the mountains on Interstate 40 in recent days have seen them, spilling out of the Piedmont and points farther east, answering calls for help in the wake of Hurricane Helene's generational destructiveness.

Endless caravans of bucket trucks, trailers loaded with heavy equipment, work vehicles bearing the insignias of cities all over the state: Greenville, Wilson, New Bern, Maiden, Granite Falls, Garner.

They're headed for counties like

Still more have come here from out of state. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of workers from power companies, "folks from all over the state and nation," according to Burke 911 Assistant Director Chris White.

Burke and the counties west of here were hit much harder by Helene than their more easterly counterparts as the storm barreled north out of the Florida Panhandle.

As a result, resources in those counties are taxed to the hilt. At times like these, extra manpower is vital.

We'll take all we can get.

White, the county's public information officer for the Hurricane Helene event, isn't certain how many folks from elsewhere are working on restoring power across Burke County.

But four of them, along with two bucket trucks and a line truck, were situated on East Meeting Street near the intersection of White Street Tuesday after lunch, stringing copper power cables and replacing four shattered poles.

The crew came from the City of



FOR THE PAPER

Nick Kanipe of the City of Newton tightens a power line on East Meeting Street Tuesday afternoon. Kanipe is one of many out-oftowners who have come to Burke County to help local crews get power up and running

Newton, 30 miles from downtown Morganton.

Thirty feet up in the bucket, Nick Kanipe was working hard to tighten the line he and his teammates had just strung.

"We came up here with Maiden," said supervisor Andrew McKaraher. "We're just trying to help out the people. It's just getting the wires up and getting the poles in the ground. It's been a horrible thing

that's going on."

Their efforts are making a difference: Monday saw the number of customers without power drop from 64% to 53% countywide.

Cody Lawing said he's glad he and his crew could help.

"I know if I didn't have power, I'd want it back on just as bad as they do, so we're trying to work the hardest we can," Lawing said.

They would likely be working the rest of the day in the same spot, McKaraher said. Line work can be tedious and time-consuming.

The crew had already put in about 40 hours over the weekend, getting households hooked back up to power in their own city.

"We got all the people in Newton back on and decided to come up here and asked if they needed some help," McKaraher said. "We've seen a lot of lines down, trees and poles broken, and people without power. It's going to be a lot of work, so they'll just have to bear with us."

Monday, White said he had heard reports of line crews catching flack from residents when they closed off portions of roads and streets, but the families in houses along the cordoned-off block of East Meeting Street beamed smiles of gratitude as they watched the work from their front porches.

"We try to help out as much as we can as long as our stuff is good," Jacob Schellenberger said. "We'll always go out and try to help someone else.'

It wasn't the first time Newton and Maiden lent a helping hand. On July 10, a fierce, summer thunderstorm disrupted electrical service in Morganton, and both Newton and Maiden sent folks to

See **POWER**, Page 5A

Foothills Regional Airport central hub in hurricane rescue and relief efforts

By ALLEN VANNOPPEN Publisher

Using Foothills Regional Airport as a base of operations, U.S. Army National Guard aviation teams from five states rescued 39 people, 12 dogs, and one cat from hurricane ravaged western North Carolina during flights Monday and Tuesday.

UNC Health helicopters flew physicians into the airport on Tuesday so they could provide medical services in Banner Elk.

State Highway Patrol helicopters with crews from North Carolina and South Carolina joined the search and rescue efforts based at Foothills airport, which straddles the Burke and Caldwell county line.

Owners of small airplanes — Pipers, Super Cubs, and single-engine bush airplanes — congregated between flights at the airport to ferry emergency supplies to areas inaccessible by car.



ALLEN VANNOPPEN / THE PAPER

U.S. Army National Guard rescue helicopter refuels at Foothills Regional Airport during search and rescue operations

N.C. Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson landed at the airport Tuesday morning with pallets of bottled water and other supplies.

It's all part of the daily flurry of aviation activity to search, rescue, aid, supply, and survey areas and people hit hard by what is being called the one of the worst

hurricanes in history of the region.

Aircraft large and small fly in emergency supplies. The water, chain saws, food, and other staples are stored in one of the protected hangers in the field.

See AIRPORT, Page 5A





PUBLISHER Allen VanNoppen allen@thepaper.media 828-445-8595, ext. 2008



EDITOR EMERITUS Bill Poteat bill@thepaper.media 828-445-8595, ext. 2004



EDITOR Angela Copeland angela@thepaper.media 828-445-8595, ext. 2003

REPORTER

STAFF

Charda Pearson

charda@thepaper.media

828-445-8595, ext. 2012



DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Janina Linens nina@thepaper.media 828-445-8595, ext. 2005

110 S. Sterling St., Morganton, NC 28655 828-445-8595 • thepaper.media

> **PUBLISHED WEEKLY ON SATURDAY**

by Morganton Media Group LLC © 2024 All Rights Reserved ISSN 2836-1490

CONTACT US

Display ads: ads@thepaper.media or 828-445-8595 ext. 2005 Subscriptions: info@thepaper.media or 828-445-8595 ext. 2006

Obituaries: obits@thepaper.media News tips: news@thepaper.media General info: info@thepaper.media



SENIOR REPORTER Marty Queen marty@thepaper.media 828-445-8595,



ext. 2001 **ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR** Josh McKinney

josh@thepaper.media



A&E **EDITOR** Sandra Wilkerson Queen sandra@thepaper.media 828-445-8595. ext. 2002



SPORTS EDITOR Paul Schenkel paul@thepaper.media 828-445-8595



Saydie Bean saydie@thepaper.media 828-445-8595, ext. 2011

OFFICE AND

Lilly Brown

lilly@thepaper.media

828-445-8595, ext. 2006



PHOTOGRAPHER Lisa Price lisa@thepaper.media 828-445-8595



828-445-8595, ext. 2007



SUBSCRIPTION RATES To subscribe, visit thepaper. media/subscribe

> Member \$309/year for Print,

Digital, Special Events & Opportunities & More **Burke County All Access**

\$235.69/year for Print & Digital **Out of County All Access**

\$367.89/year for Print & Digital

Digital Only \$10.47/month or \$124.65/year



The City of Morganton's electric crews with the help of neighboring personnel restore power throughout the city.

Outages decline daily as **Burke County residents** await full restoration

By SAYDIE E. BEAN Municipal and Courts Reporter

The number of Burke County power outages decreases each day; however, thousands of residents wait for service to

As community members are powering through, various electric providers are working hard in the county to return power and inform their customers of their progress.

Public Information Officer Jonelle Sigmon reported that Morganton crews are working in the following locations:

- Old N.C. 18 Mount Home Church Road
- Dale Circle, off of Enola
- Road Willowbrook Drive Alexander Avenue

The City is aware that some power customers are still in the dark in downtown Morganton and assures that lights will be back on as soon as pos-

You can track where power crews are deployed on the City's social media and Hurri-

cane Helene alerts page. You can read more of what's being done at https://www.morgantonnc.gov/electric-services/ page/hurricane-helene-alerts-and-updates.

We will try to keep you updated with new locations when we are told. We understand that your neighbor may have power, but due to the nature of the circuits, you may still be without power. Please be patient as we continue to make repairs," Sigmon said.

As of 8:12 a.m. on Tuesday, there are 3,500 power outages in Morganton out of their 8,529 customers.

Duke Energy reports that 59% of its 22,830 customers in the county remain without power. Rutherford EMC reports that 40% of its 20,689 customers remain without power. Combined, 21,998 customers of the 43,519 customers served by both utilities are without pow

Saydie Bean may be reached at 828-445-8595, ext. 2011, or saydie@thepaper.media.

Public Safety leads welfare checks, outreach efforts in Helene's aftermath

By SAYDIE E. BEAN Municipal and Courts Reporter

Morganton Public Safety

has been an unstilled presence during the aftermath of Hurricane Helene through welfare checks, responding to disasters, and spreading important information to the public.

As their department is out in the field, Chief Jason Whisnant and Captain Josiah Brown provided updates on the behind-the-scenes of what they have been doing.

FINDING LOVED ONES

Phone services continue to be sparse which leaves residents concerned and unaware of what is happening with other family members and friends.

'We have completed numerous 'welfare checks' at private residences from families worried about their people who haven't been in touch with anyone. So far all have been accounted for. We do not have any reports of missing persons at this time," Whisnant said.

If you want to check in on a loved one, you can call N.C. 211 which is part of the State **Emergency Response Team** that can be used in natural/ public disasters. They can be reached at 2-1-1 or 888-892-1162.

HOMELESS POPULATION

Today was scheduled to be the clearing out of the homeless encampment behind the wooded area behind Morganton

Heights Shopping Center. This has been postponed, Whisnant and Brown confirmed.

"The cleanup crew at Morganton Heights was out doing an assessment this morning to determine when they could

start the clean up," Brown said. On the subject of the City's homeless population, known individuals are being checked on by MPS officers during this troubling time.

We are sending PSOs into our known homeless camps to check the welfare of those people as we are worried about them from this weather disaster," Whisnant said.

Responding to their needs, Burke County United Ministries are there to help as they accept donations.

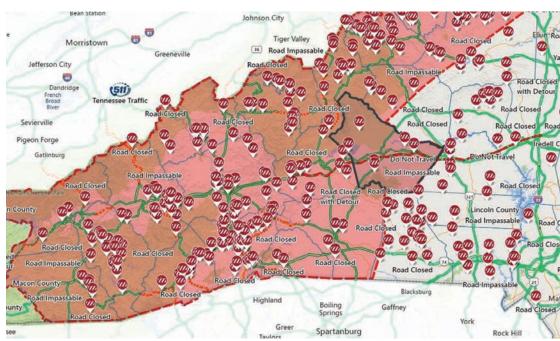
Their soup kitchen will be open from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and their food pantry will be open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. They will make modifications based on what individuals can accept.

BUCM is accepting donations of the following items:

- Small-sized pants
- · Tents and tarps
- Water Non-perishable food items, preferably ready-to-eat foods
- with pop-top cans

Monetary donations You can monetarily donate to BUCM at https://www. bucm.net/donate-now or visit them at 305-B W. Union St. in Morganton.

Saydie Bean may be reached at 828-445-8595, ext. 2011, or saydie@thepaper.media.



The map shows the road closures throughout Burke County, outlined in grey. The red area represents the dangerous conditions in western North Carolina.

Road closures in Burke County

By SAYDIE E. BEAN Municipal and Courts Reporter

The impact of Helene is forcing some Burke County residents to use their GPS to find new routes to get around. Some roads in the

county remain closed, four

days after the storm. The N.C. Department of Transportation has declared that western N.C. is experiencing shortages of gas, power, food, water, and poor communications. Local roads remain closed at this time and nonessential travel is prohibited. All access points from the state to Tennessee via interstates 40 or further notice 26 are closed.

NCDOT's DriveNC.gov website has a listing of known closures. The list, however, is far from comprehensive. Communication outages have left some communities unable to provide updates.

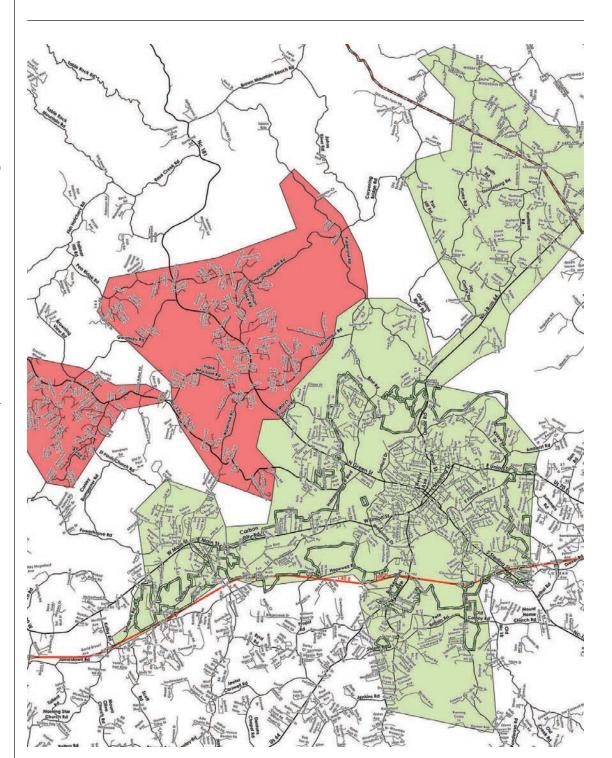
Here is a list of road closures and reported end timeframes in Burke County:

- East Union near Kirksey Drive and near Meeting Street — until further notice
- · Amherst Road, multiple trees and poles blocking a road — until further notice • 300 block of Walton Road,

blocked off by a tree — until

- · Oakland Avenue near Enon Drive, trees in the roadway — Oct. 10
- Clark Loop near Morris Loop, due to pipe failure -Nov. 30
- · Rose Carswell near U.S. 64, due to bridge failure -Nov. 30
- N.C.126 near Benfield Landing, due to structural damage - Nov. 30
- · Fish Hatchery Road near Kayga Road, the road is impassible — Oct. 10

Saydie Bean may be reached at 828-445-8595, ext. 2011, or saydie@thepaper.media.



CITY OF MORGANTON

Morganton lifts most water boil advisories. Green areas indicate safe water. Red areas still have boil-beforedrinking advisories.

Burke areas starting to lift boil advisory

By SAYDIE E. BEAN

Municipal and Courts Reporter

The boil advisory has been lifted in some parts of Burke County, but not all of the county is in the clear.

The City of Morganton announced that the following areas that are served by these tanks have been lifted:

- Glen Alpine
- · Kathy Road
- · Piney Road · Astro Drive
- Salem
- Dale Circle Valdese Avenue

If you are near one of these areas and unsure of your water status, the City still advises residents to boil vour water.

Residents can view a boil advisory map on their Hurricane Helene alerts page at https:// www.morgantonnc.gov/electric-services/page/hurricane-helene-alerts-and-updates.

Due to damage from Hurricane Helene, Public Information Officer Jonelle Sigmon said that a sanitary sewer overflow occurred at the Lost Corner Pump Station on Monday, Sept. 30. The sewer spill began at 3:30 p.m. and ended at 5:30 p.m.

Around 2,400 gallons was discharged into the Wilson's

The neighboring Town of Valdese is still under a boil advisory until water samples pass testing standards, Mayor Charlie Watts reported.

"The water samples pulled must stay in the incubator until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning," Watts said on Tuesday afternoon. "As soon as we have results that pass testing, we will be sure to send alerts out.'

The water plant had a booster pump that had trouble building pressure, but after a quick turnout using a towable air compressor at 9:30 p.m. on Monday night, the water plant employees brought the bump back to standards.

Saydie Bean may be reached at 828-445-8595, ext. 2011, or saydie@thepaper.media.

High school, middle school sports' resumption still largely up in the air

EBHS football game will be played Saturday

By PAUL SCHENKEL

Sports Editor

The timeline for high school and middle school sports' fall seasons to resume is unclear after Tropical Storm Helene caused significant flooding and wind damage across Burke County and all of western North Carolina on Sept. 27.

Burke County Public Schools announced over the weekend that schools would be closed the first three days of this week, then on Monday announced the closure would extend to Thursday and Friday as well, postponing all local high school and middle school events for the entire week.

The East Burke and Draughn high school football teams were set to host homecoming games last Friday which were pushed back a day to Saturday, Sept. 28. EBHS then postponed its contest to Monday before it was postponed again, this time indefi-

Homecoming festivities had already been pushed back to Oct. 4 in Valdese and Oct. 18 in Icard, but Draughn has also announced that its homecoming game will not be played this week, with no homecoming date yet re-established.

Both of those football teams, plus Freedom, were scheduled to have games this Friday, Oct. 4, as well, and those games will all be postponed. However, EBHS on Tuesday announced that its varsity football game scheduled for last week at Newton-Conover would be played this Saturday, Oct. 5, at 3 p.m., with the schools' JV matchup set for Monday night,

EBHS athletic director Chip Watts said that both the Newton-Conover at Lincolnton and West Lincoln at Maiden football games postponed on Sept. 27 would be played Wednesday night, Oct. 2.

The Cavaliers are members of the eight-team Catawba Val-



SOCIAL MEDIA / FOR THE PAPER

Freedom High School's football field and field house flooded as a result of Hurricane Helene aftermath.

ley 2A Conference, which based on its geography, figures to be far less impacted than the other three conferences of which county schools are members. The league spans Gamewell and Icard to Catawba and Lincoln counties to the south and east.

"Us and West Caldwell were affected worst in the conference," Watts said, "and probably West Caldwell a bit worse than us. But we're reaching out to other schools (outside the conference), and it's awful. Avery County is a mess with mudslides and roads out. We've reached out to Pisgah and Tuscola (in Haywood County) to offer them whatever we can as neighbors, host a game here if they want to later in the season or whatever it

... It's so sad. We're talking about people who have lost their homes, their businesses, people who have died. The mountain schools were so horribly affected."

The other three local leagues — the Mountain Foothills 7 1A/2A (Brevard, Hendersonville), Northwestern 3A/4A (Ashe County, Watauga), and particularly the Western Highlands 1A/2A (Avery, Madison, Mitchell, Mountain Heritage, Owen, Rosman) each feature schools in higher elevations that suffered greater impacts from the storm.

There was no information available from Draughn on Tuesday as to how and when the WHC plans to resume fall sports; DHS athletic director Eric Shehan could not be reached for comment.

The NWC issued a statement Tuesday saying that there would be no athletic events all week, until at least after Saturday, Oct. 5.

"How this affects the remaining conference schedules will depend on decisions from the NCHSAA (Board of Directors) and local school systems," the statement read.

The MF7 — which also contains three schools in Rutherford County, which was affected by flooding from Lake Lure and along the Broad River also has not announced when sports might resume.

Patton athletic director Lee Crawford said early discussions have not centered around sports resuming.

"I've talked to some of our ADs in the conference but nothing about rescheduling yet," he said. "Our conference is all in the biggest impact zone so right now our biggest concern is recovery for those communities."

Crawford and Watts said they hoped to have more information Wednesday and as the week progresses, and Freedom AD Rob Scott was scheduled to talk with The Paper on Tuesday afternoon.

The NCHSAA on Monday announced that its board of directors would convene via video conference on Wednesday to discuss potential changes to its fall sports' championship schedules to accommodate the areas affected in the western part of the state.

"We know this storm has brought significant challenges and hardships," said NCHSAA commissioner Que Tucker. "While we know everyone (across the state) was not impacted, it is difficult to plan without at least having our western board members at the table to give personal perspectives. Until such time, the NCHSAA staff cannot answer the questions being posed relative to finishing regular seasons as well as the impact on all playoffs.

To any of our 'impacted' colleagues who can access this email, please remember that you are not alone during this difficult time. We stand with you and are here to support you in any way we can. As you assess needs, whether it's assistance, resources, or simply someone to talk to, please do not hesitate to reach out to us."

Also locally, North Carolina School for the Deaf has announced that its 80th annual

homecoming festivities planned for this Saturday, Oct. 4, were canceled.

At the middle school level, all five of Burke County's schools and both McDowell County schools make up the Foothills Athletic Conference. FAC 2024-25 president Mitchell McGuire, who is AD at East Burke Middle, said that as of Tuesday morning he had only spoken with ADs at Heritage and West McDowell and not the other four schools (East McDowell, Liberty, Table Rock, Walter Johnson).

"I think everyone would like to try to reschedule (the games postponed last week and last week) and get back to normalcy as soon as possible," Mc-Guire said. "The issues are we're already halfway through seasons with not tons of wiggle room to add playing dates at the end, and if we reschedule contests between now and then with more games per week than normal, finding officials may be tough especially for soccer.

"Doug (Webb, AD at Heritage) and I talked about maybe playing some football games on Saturdays. We do have the option to play two football games per week in extreme circumstances, and I would certainly say this falls under that. This is unprecedented. I've never seen anything like this.'

McGuire said Heritage and EBMS received minimal storm damage. However, the Walter Johnson baseball, football, and softball fields sustained flooding from the Catawba River, and McGuire said that West McDowell's practice football field and baseball field experienced some flood damage as well, noting that "McDowell and parts of Burke are far worse than what we've got" in the eastern end of the county.

McGuire said one possible plan moving forward might be canceling all FAC fall postseason tournaments and simply getting in as much of teams' regular-season schedules as possible.

Paul Schenkel may be reached at 828-445-8595 or paul@ thepaper.media.

Cable, internet, cell service restored in some areas but spotty

By CHARDA PEARSON

Education and Business Reporter

Cellphone and internet service have slowly started to pick up after several dead zones throughout the county. Severe flooding broken power lines had left thousands of residents with no access to contact families to report their safety.

It has been reported that cellphone, cable and internet providers are currently working vigorously to restore services. Burke county's top cellphone providers are Verizon, AT&T, and T-Mobile.

A report from T-Mobile was released yesterday that stated North Carolina and South Carolina crews had limited site access to restore 132 sites and position 149 portable generators in the last 24 hours. According to the company, yesterday, trucks were headed to Asheville and Cherokee.

Verizon wireless has issued a statement that they will waive domestic call, text, and data usage for postpaid consumers (customer who pays for their mobile services after they have used them, rather than paying in advance) impacted by the storm in Burke from Sept. 28 to Oct. 5.

According to Verizon, customers do not have to take any action to take advantage of the offer. Any overages for those whose billing cycles have already closed will be automatically credited back.

For prepaid customers using Straight Talk, Tracfone, Wireless, Simple Mobile, Walmart Family Mobile, Net10, GoSmart, and Page Plus, Verizon will extend service end dates to Oct. 5.

CoMPAS Cable released a statement regarding cable outages:

'Currently we are working to restore all services as quickly and safely as possible. We do not have

Did You Know?

Hotspots provide internet service directly from a device (cellphone or portable hotspot) allowing users to connect to Wi-Fi using cellular data if coverage is available.

Hotpots can be used to connect computers, phones, and other devices. Portable hotspots can be purchased at department and office stores.

On smartphones, the mobile hotspots are located under the settings tab, under the personal hotspot or connections tab. Check with your mobile provider to see if a personal hotspot is included in your cell phone service.

To access personal hotspot on your mobile device:

- · Go to Settings tab
- Click Personal Hotspot
- Find the available network on the desired device
- · Connect to the network

any estimated times for repair at this time. As power is restored, we then are able to start our repairs and will do so as quickly as possible.

"If power has been restored and you still do not have service it could be equipment between your house and our head-end facility, which still does not have power. If you have questions, you can reach our office at 828-438-5353 and press 0 to speak with someone. We appreciate your patience as we work diligently to restore your services."

Churches extend love, aid in wake of Hurricane Helene

By SANDRA WILKERSON QUEEN Arts & Entertainment Editor

In Christian theology, charity (a translation of the Greek word agapa, also meaning "love") is most eloquently shown in the life, teachings, and death of Jesus Christ.

And in this time of dire need, in the fallout wrought by Hurricane Helene, many Burke County churches are living out their faith by extending the hands of love to others.

Some local churches are serving as collection and distribution centers for water and other supplies. Others are coordinating shipments from their respective denominations, as parishioners across the nation open their hands and hearts to render aid to Burke County and western North Carolina.

Offers of help from local churches run the gamut from free meals for anyone in need to necessities such as water, diapers, and baby formula. Some Burke churches are also opening their doors, allowing the public access to free Wi-Fi and providing outlets for charging electronics.

The Morganton First Church of God is offering free meals for those without power, every day (at least through Thursday, possibly longer). Breakfast begins at 9 each morning and they are also providing an evening meal at 5 p.m. The church is at 675 Summers Road.

Regan Pompeo, pastoral assistant at Morganton's Mission Church, said the 221 Herron St. location is providing a place to act as a charging station, water (when they can), and lunch. The church is open from 9 a.m. to noon and from 3-6 p.m.

"A huge thank you to ... the whole community at Mission Church for providing hot coffee (my first cup in days), lunch, water, games, and lots of love and light in a time when it is desperately needed," Bi-

anca Moses wrote on Facebook. "The

church is open 9-12 all week. They'll be providing a place to charge phones, lunch, hot coffee, and water.

"Thank you for making my mama so happy! She loved her meal," Moses wrote. Abernethy Memorial United Methodist Church will be serving free sandwich lunches on Wednesday, Oct. 2, from

11 a.m. to 2 p.m., at their 960 Malcolm

will also have places available for

charging devices. Grace Episcopal Church Interim Rector Rich Biega said the King Street Church has power, water, and internet capability.

Blvd. location in Rutherford College. They

"There is good news," Biega reported on Facebook. "If you need to use the internet, charge your electronic appliances, or just hang out in a lighted environment, don't hesitate to come here.

"If no one is in the parish hall, come to the rectory, because Betsy and I are both on site," he added. "Please believe methis is not an inconvenience for either of

Burkemont Baptist Church, located at 4668 Burkemont Road, Morganton, has emergency kits available, along with toilet paper, hygiene items, diapers, and nonperishable foods.

Thrive Church, 215 Pete Brittain Road in Morganton, served a free community meal on Oct. 1, from 4-8 p.m. The meal included soup, grilled cheese, and a drink, and will be available to anyone in Morganton who needs a warm meal, while supplies last.

The Rock Church at 4806 U.S. 64 in Morganton, is serving free meals from 3-5 p.m. this week. Ashly Brooke Benton wrote on Facebook, "I just want to brag on The Rock Church-Morganton for a minute.

"Today they prepared a hot meal to serve to anyone who was able to make it out to their diner (FOR FREE). Afterward, they delivered the leftovers around town to those who needed it along with bottles of water," Benton added.

HELENE

FROM PAGE 1A

Morganton's electric crews are focusing on Old N.C. 18, Mount Home Church Road, Dale Circle, Alexander Avenue, and Willowbrook Drive.

Electric power has been restored to 60% to 65% of homes and businesses in Morganton. Crews from Greenville, Wilson, and other towns are assisting in the recovery. However, some businesses and residents could remain without power until the end of the week.

Morganton's municipal water and sewer plants are operational and water quality testing will begin soon. Meantime, any water from any water source should be boiled before drinking, according to health experts.

Morganton's CoMPAS Cable internet, telephone, and television service continues to be restored.

The Morganton campus of the N.C. School of Science and Mathematics remains without power and water. The campus is closed for the remainder of the week. School officials are reconfiguring schedules to adjust for the closures.

Western Piedmont Community College remains closed for the week. Duke Energy is using WPCC's grounds for staging supplies and staff.

The Paper will resume home delivery this Saturday in the Valdese, Morganton, and Drexel areas. High water damage around the lakes and rivers may prevent home delivery until it is safe.

President Biden has granted Gov. Roy Cooper's request for a Federal Major Disaster Declaration for Tropical Storm Helene providing immediate federal help for Burke County.

The declaration means that FEMA will be able to speed additional help to the county, and provide Individual Assistance to people living in Burke, as well as Public Assistance to reimburse local governments, state agencies, and non-profits or other eligible organizations for funds spent repairing facilities and infrastructure.

A Burke County Relief Center has opened in the Foothills Higher Education Center on South Sterling Street near Interstate 40 in Morganton and offers water, canned foods, children's necessities, cleaning supplies, hygiene, and other needed items.

UNC Health Blue Ridge established an Incident Command at its Morganton campus. In the midst of the storm the hospital lost power at both its Morganton and Valdese campuses. Its generators immediately took over, and power has since been restored. Like most of the area, the hospital experienced a temporary water outage at Morganton, and a contractual agreement enabled transferring potable water from Catawba County. Importantly, this has not affected patient care.

SAFETY TIPS FOR RESIDENTS

To prepare for the Hurricane Helene storm and remain safe, here are some tips for residents:

- · Stock your home with non-perishable food and a gallon of water for each person per day
- · Check your power generators or invest in one during this hurricane season
- · Stay off the roads if possible, motorists are killed in rising flood waters every year
- · Do not touch or move fallen power lines, instead call your electric services provider
- · Call 911 for lifethreatening emergencies to keep the emergency lines open

Cooperative crews from less-impacted regions of the state have joined forces with Rutherford EMC's local crews to navigate hard-hit communities and tackle outages. Restoration points are inaccessible in many areas due to flooding or damaged roadways, and damage to power poles and lines is severe across the system.

Grocery stores continue to replenishment food stocks.

Aviation traffic at the Morganton-Lenoir Airport is busy. As of mid-afternoon Monday, there were 10 helicopters in operation, including several Black Hawks and a couple of National Guard choppers. These were delivering food and other emergency supplies for Burke and Caldwell counties. State Rep. Hugh Blackwell, Speaker of the House Tim Moore, and Burke Sheriff Banks Hinceman were aboard another helicopter taking aerial tours of the area.

The Town of Valdese cleared a landing pad for a federal/ military fire and rescue helicopter on Old Rock School grounds to be used as a landing zone in case needed. The town's pre-agenda meeting is postponed until Oct. 7.

The Valdese Community Center will open on a regular schedule Wednesday, Oct. 2. At this time, only Children's Park is open. Please remain off of the Greenway and out of Valdese Lakeside Park and Mc-Galliard Falls Park.

Water service is restored in Valdese, and customers are advised to boil water. Extensive power outages remain and are being restored. Additional information forthcoming. Public works and cleaning crews from Maiden, Duke Energy, and locally have been working throughout the town to collect debris and fallen trees.

Mimosa Golf Course is closed for the week.

SHELTER

FROM PAGE 1A

up in the fellowship hall of Oak Hill United Methodist Church.

'We just kept getting turned around, turned back. sent on different routes," Beckerman said. "It was actually a hospital in Catawba County that recommended we come to this shelter."

In that church building, they were freed from the prison of their cramped family car and were given warm food, hot coffee, a comfortable place to sleep, and take a hot shower.

When Beckerman talks about how much that respite, that place of calmness, meant to her and her family, her composure finally breaks, and the tears flow unashamedly down her cheeks.

"Everyone here has treated us so well," she said. "It's amazing. There's no other word I can use. It was a lifesaver for us, and we are so grateful.

As the Beckermans loaded their car with water and prepared to drive home on Tuesday afternoon — "I know we're going home to an awful mess" — a couple of dozen other temporary residents of the shelter remained behind.

THE RED CROSS IN ACTION

One end of the large open room which constitutes the bulk of the shelter is set up as a temporary dining area. The bulk of the interior is filled with simple cots on top of which rests clean bedding.

More than 30 people, ranging from very young children to older adults slept at the shelter Monday night. Most of the adults have health issues of some sort which make it dangerous for them to be in a place without electricity for very long

"Lots of these folks are oxygen-dependent," said Heather Frazee, who serves as executive director of the Piedmont Triad Chapter of the American Red Cross. "This shelter truly is a lifeline for them.'

The Red Cross, she explained, had an agreement in place with the Oak Hill church to serve as a shelter long before Hurricane Helene came swirling out of the Gulf.

"Our primary mission," she said, "when we first set up a shelter, is to shelter and feed. Give people a safe place to stay and food to eat."

The shelter is also serving as a pick-up location for emergency food supplies and drinking water. Those are available to anyone in the community, even if they don't need shelter.

A couple of fully loaded National Guard helicopters landed in an open field behind the building yesterday afternoon, each heavily loaded with food, water, and other emergency supplies.

"We work with community business partners to help



BILL POTEAT / THE PAPER

Shown above are Red Cross staff and volunteers helping at the emergency shelter at Oak Hill United Methodist Church. From left are, Ellen Gorham, Mike Whitehead, Anita Ruggles, Mark Carter, and Heather Frazee.

meet needs," Frazee explained, WHY IT MATTERS noting that the Morganton Cracker Barrel has been supplying most of the hot meals for the shelter.

Frazee said the shelter will remain open until it is no longer needed but emphasized that the shelter is but the first phase of the Red Cross commitment to contributing to the rebuilding of the community.

"We have caseworkers who will be active in the community," she said, "walking people through the recovery process and even providing small amounts of financial assistance to get people back on their feet.

"Hurricane Ian struck Florida more than two years ago,' she continued, "and we still have people in place in that area helping in the rebuilding effort."

A VOLUNTEER'S STORY

Frazee explained that Red Cross workers from across the region have deployed to Western North Carolina to help in relief efforts, but she also said a large share of that burden is shouldered by volunteers from around the nation.

Pam Pickle, a resident of Livermore, Colo., is one of those volunteers. She was at home on Saturday when the request came for her to pack a bag and catch a flight to Charlotte — her services were need-

"I know this sounds like a cliche, but I really do enjoy working with people and helping people," Pickle said. She must. She served as a middle school science teacher in the public schools for 34 years before retiring four years ago.

Pickle said she expects to be in western North Carolina for at least two weeks, but said she will extend the deployment if she is asked to.

"We're supposed to work in 12-hour shifts," she said laughing, "but it's been more like 15 to 20 hours so far. We try to keep the shelter calm and peaceful and as homelike as possible. And around 10 p.m., it's lights out."

The work that Pickle is doing springs from the goodness of her heart. She receives no payment from the American Red Cross, not even a small stipend. She sleeps on a cot and eats the same food the shelter residents eat.

Red Cross policy forbids reporters from speaking to people housed at the shelter within its walls, so a reporter for The Paper wanders outside where some folks are enjoying the afternoon sunshine of the first day of October.

A young woman sits alone against a supporting column, her eyes gazing peacefully across the autumnal landscape.

Hayley is one of Morganton's fluctuating population of homeless people. She spent Thursday night and Friday morning — when the storm was at its peak — in the safest place she knew, the confines of the Burke County Jail.

"I got myself arrested for trespassing on Thursday," she said. "I knew I did not want to be outside in that storm.'

When the storm had subsided and she had been released from custody, someone recommended she come to the Oak Hill shelter.

"I am very blessed to be here," she said with dark eyes that reveal both a quiet intelligence and an acquired sense of stoicism. "Food, snacks, water, a place to stay, and friends.'

'Friends?" the reporter

"Yes, I've met some very good people here," Hayley responds. "They have been helpful and kind. I appreciate

And how long will she stay at the shelter?

"As long as they're open," she responds quietly.

Christopher Atkins was not homeless, at least not until his Morganton apartment caught fire just before Helene arrived.

The fire's damage left him with no place to stay. Until he found the shelter.

"This place has been a lifeline," said Atkins. "I was just about ready to give up. But they've given me food and a place to sleep, and they cared for me. I appreciate that."

HOW TO HELP

The American Red Cross can accept donations at its website, www.redcross.org, or you may call 1-800-RED-CROSS.

Bill Poteat may be reached at 828-445-8595 or bill@thepaper. media.

SCHOOLS

FROM PAGE 1A

ed," Swan said.

Campuses without power, water, and internet are Forest Hill Elementary, W.A. Young Elementary, Drexel Elementary, Hillcrest Elementary, Mull Elementary, Salem Elementary, Oak Hill Elementary, Valdese Elementary, Table Rock Middle, Heritage, Walter Johnson Middle School, and Patton High School.

The campuses in the district with power, internet, and water are Ray Childers Elementary, Hildebran Elementary, Icard Elementary, Glen Alpine Elementary, Mountain View Elementary, George Hildebrand Elementary, East Burke Middle, Liberty Middle, East Burke High, Draughn High, Freedom High, Hallyburton Academy, and North Liberty.

Burke Middle College, located on WPCC's campus, is closed as WPCC is currently being used as a site for Duke power vehicles.

"Our threshold is to get at least 85% of our campuses with power food services and with 85% we feel we could possibly isolate the other campuses or offer meal services for those affected communities

but still have school for at least 85% of our campuses or greater," Swan said.

According to Swan, the Department of Transportation has not confirmed whether buses are safe to travel their usual routes.

Swan said Financial officer Keith Lawson has created a FEMA account and is working on forms to financially recover losses.

In athletics, due to damage, all athletic practices are canceled, and athletic games have been rescheduled.

As previously reported, schools will remain closed through Friday, Oct. 4, with Thursday and Friday being optional workdays for teachers.

BCPS's leadership team will meet on Thursday, Oct. 3, at 11 a.m. to discuss plans for next week. An administrators meeting will be held at 10 a.m. on Oct. 4.

The board will still conduct its regularly scheduled board meeting on Monday, Oct. 7, at 6 p.m. as the Olive Hill Resource Center is equipped with power, water, and inter-

Charda Pearson may be reached at 828-445-8595, ext. 2012, or charda@thepaper. media.

POWER

FROM PAGE 2A

help.

The Morganton City Council recognized their efforts with proclamations at its regular monthly meeting in August.

McKaraher said all the municipalities in the area do a good job helping one another in times of trouble, and Lawing agreed. "We're trying to get this

back on and work with the City of Morganton to get the customers back on as quickly as possible," Lawing added.

In the midst of this flurry of labor in the humid September air, Schellenberger paused for a moment and reflected on the scope of the tragedy that virtually destroyed neighboring towns like Old Fort, Swannanoa, and Chimney Rock.

"I have friends all over, in Florida, in Old Fort, they're doing whatever they can to help out," Schellenberger said. "I've been seeing some of the pictures, and it is just devastating."

Marty Queen may be reached at 828-445-8595 or marty@thepaper. media.

AIRPORT

FROM PAGE 2A

Other aircraft, Alaskan Tundra craft with their balloon tires, small Cessnas and Pipers, and powerful helicopters, take the supplies to areas in dire need of them.

On Tuesday, 13 helicopters stopped at Foothills to refuel and conduct search and rescue efforts in areas west. So far, 400 people have been rescued from western North Carolina, said Foothills Airport Manager Brent Brin-

kley. U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer Kevin Dehero, of Durham, is one of the National Guard pilots using Foothills as a base for helicopter flights. He said Guard flight teams from Ohio, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and North Carolina have been conducting hoist rescue operations for sev-

"Today?" he said when asked how the efforts were progressing. "I rescued 12 dogs and one cat. And 12 people. Yesterday we rescued 27 people."

Foothills Airport, like most areas north of Morganton, remains without power as of Tuesday afternoon. The City of Lenoir delivered a portable battery back and a Wi-Fi internet

hotspot connection enabling vital radio communications and credit card transactions.

Brinkley said the ability to transact with credit cards was an important element. Foothills is one of the few small rural airports in the area that still has aviation gasoline. Airports in Statesville and Rutherford County, for example, have run out of airplane fuel, he said.

Helicopters need a lot of gas. 'You hear on the radio a helicopter coming in, you might as well start the fuel truck," he

Allen VanNoppen may be reached at 828-445-8595 or allen@thepaper.media.